

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

14, 15 and 16 June 2011

(Extract from book 9)

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Economy and Infrastructure References Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

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Environment and Planning References Committee — Mr Elsbury, Mrs Kronberg, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

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WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers.

Tuesday, 14 June 2011

Coles: marketing strategy

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mr Ramsay

Raised on: 5 April 2011

REPLY:

I refer to your request in the adjournment debate of 5 April 2011 that I liaise with the commonwealth government about actions that might be complementary to those being undertaken at the national level to 'protect Victorian producers, particularly food producers, who are at risk due to the pricing mechanisms of the two supermarkets'. I note that the preamble to your request specifically refers to milk price discounting.

Competition policy is the realm of the commonwealth government via the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). The ACCC has significant powers to address any behaviour by a supermarket that is not in the interests of consumers and producers, such as price collusion or anticompetitive predatory pricing. Furthermore, the federal Senate Economics Committee reported in May 2010 on competition and pricing in the Australian dairy industry and will again report in October 2011. This is indicative of the level of scrutiny of the adequacy of powers to support fair competition in the dairy industry.

Additionally, because around 90 per cent of Victoria's milk production is used in manufacturing dairy products for export, buyers of milk for domestic supermarkets will be unable to procure supplies at prices below those offered by buyers of milk for use in dairy product manufacturing. This is further outlined in an article titled 'Supermarket price discounting for home brand milk', in Australian Commodities — March quarter 2011, volume 18 (1), published by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), which is a professionally independent commonwealth government research agency.

I will continue monitoring impacts on Victoria's food production sector, and on consumers, of pricing behaviour of supermarkets.

Thank you for raising this important issue with me.

Autism: eastern suburbs school

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 3 May 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has discussed with parents at student support group meetings the process through which Wantirna Heights School would progress in 2011 with student

enrolment and transitions as in previous years, with current year 6 students moving to a secondary mainstream or specialist school, as determined by parents.

Parents are advised when enrolling their children at the school that the children must move to a secondary school at the completion of the year in which they turn 12 years of age. At the first meeting of the student support group at the beginning of that year the process of re-classification of students is begun. Depending on their capabilities, the students will move to a special school or special developmental school. This process is currently well under way and all parents have been part of the process.

In 2012 Wantirna Heights School will remain a P-6 school while building is undertaken at the Ferntree Gully site. The school envisages that the new site will be completed and ready for occupation at the beginning of the 2013 school year, in which case the 2012 year 6 students will become the first year 7 students. The school will then grow annually to accommodate year 12 students.

The parent community has been kept informed continually through the school council, parent newsletters, plans displayed in the foyer, parent meetings and individual discussions with parents.

Essendon Keilor College: funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 4 May 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The government has made a commitment to focus on upgrading government primary and secondary schools across the state. Priority projects to be included in the building program for the first term of government were identified in the *Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition Plan for Education*. Further schools were identified for capital funding in the Victorian state budget 2011-12, released on 3 May 2011.

I am pleased to confirm that the recent 2011-12 state budget delivered the first tranche of funding for schools nominated in the plan and funding for additional school projects.

The government is aware that other schools would like to be involved in building projects within the government's capital program. The government will consider the needs of these schools when determining future priorities for the capital works program.

Bushfires: powerlines

Raised with: Minister for Bushfire Response

Raised by: Ms Pulford

Raised on: 5 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate raised in the Legislative Council regarding the options available to reduce the risks of catastrophic bushfires from electricity infrastructure.

This government has accepted all 67 recommendations of the royal commission.

The Powerline Bushfire Safety Taskforce was established to provide guidance to the government on a range of options available to reduce the risks of catastrophic bushfires from electricity infrastructure and to quantify the benefits and cost.

This government has committed \$50 million through the Safer Electricity Assets Fund to commence the process of replacing the most dangerous electricity assets to reduce the bushfire risk.

Amongst other issues the task force is required to advise the government on how the \$50 million Safer Electricity Assets fund could best be invested.

The task force has released a community consultation paper. The task force is seeking submissions by Friday, 24 June 2011 and I encourage every member of Parliament interested in this issue to read the paper which can be downloaded from the Energy Safe Victoria website www.esv.vic.gov.au.

A number of alternative approaches are explored in the paper. Options discussed include the use of protective technology that will detect electrical faults and switch off power before a fire can start; replacing some bare wire powerlines with underground or insulated cables; or providing remote electricity customers with stand-alone power supplies allowing some rural powerlines to be removed.

The discussion paper also sets out some preliminary financial analysis to show how much of each measure could be implemented for different costs.

Each of the options proposed will have some impact on the environment, reliability of supply and the cost of providing power, so it is important everyone has the opportunity to have their say.

The task force is currently examining the costs of each of these measures in more detail, including the costs that will be avoided by replacing the powerlines at a point in time prior to their normal 'whole of life' function being exhausted.

The chairman of the task force has indicated that the optimum solution will most likely be a combination of these options.

This government has instituted a requirement for a monthly update from the task force to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Michael O'Brien, MLA, to ensure that we are kept more closely updated on the progress of the task force.

We have also extended the date for the task force to provide its final report to both Minister O'Brien and myself to 30 September 2011 to ensure it has time to conduct more robust analysis of the options to mitigate the risk of fire starts from electricity assets.

The government will then consider its position, including how to best invest the \$50 million Safer Electricity Assets Fund announced in the 2011–12 budget.

I trust this information is of assistance and thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers.

Wednesday, 15 June 2011

Aboriginals: traditional owner acknowledgement

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Mr Scheffer

Raised on: 26 May 2011

REPLY:

Our government has a deep and enduring respect for Aboriginal peoples.

We recognise the first peoples of this nation through a variety of mechanisms including, where appropriate, acknowledging traditional owners past and present.

Acknowledgement of country has never been mandated, and nor should it be. The government does not wish to see such acknowledgements diminished or tokenistic.

We will continue to encourage acknowledgement of first peoples by way of representative speakers at an event making a suitable and heartfelt acknowledgement in words of their own choosing. No announcement otherwise has been made.

By way of example, my speech at the Closing the Gap event in Queen's Hall on 24 March 2011 commenced with the following words:

I would like to start today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land past and present. In so doing, I want to make it clear that our government acknowledges the special place indigenous Victorians occupy as the original inhabitants and custodians of this state.

I was particularly proud that a new parliamentary tradition started with the opening of Parliament in December last year with the formal welcome to country by representatives of the Wurrundjeri and Boonwurrung people, Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin and Caroline Briggs.

This real and genuine acknowledgement was heartfelt by the speaker and the audience, not a mandated set of words.

This government has begun a new tradition with a welcome to country at the opening of Parliament, and most recently, I joined with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal elders to invite nominations for the first Indigenous Honour Roll to recognise the contribution of Aboriginal Victorians to this great state.

This initiative was implemented following strong consultation with Aboriginal leaders, and is a further demonstration of our clear commitment to engage with Aboriginal Victorians in a very real and practical way.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers.

Thursday, 16 June 2011

Anglesea River: water quality

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 1 March 2011

REPLY:

The general causes of fish deaths in the Anglesea estuary have been the subject of intense review since September 2010. The cause of the fish deaths is well understood, and the EPA has concluded that fish death event can be considered to be a natural event. It was caused by the drying of soils in the upper catchment tributaries during the drought, and subsequent flushing by heavy rains, causing acidic water to enter the system.

DSE, in conjunction with Department of Primary Industries, are currently monitoring the recovery of fish populations in the Anglesea estuary, while Corangamite CMA and Surf Coast shire are monitoring the water quality weekly.

Longer term management actions currently under way include the Surf Coast shire and Corangamite CMA developing an Anglesea River estuary fish death local response plan and a review of the current Anglesea estuary management plan. This will be undertaken in consultation with industry experts, Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries Victoria), Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), EPA and the local community.

In response to the recent concerns raised by yourself and the community about the future of the Anglesea estuary, DSE have appointed University of Canberra Professor William Maher to lead an independent investigation of the incident that will:

- a) review the history of acid events in the Anglesea estuary
- b) identify sources of acidic water and metals to the estuary
- c) investigate the role of specific factors that are of concern to the community, such as the role of catchment land use, licensed discharges to the river and water extraction
- d) review options for remediation of poor quality water originating from the catchment.

The findings of the independent review along with the results of the continuing water quality and fish monitoring programs will help provide vital information to update the current Anglesea estuary management plan. This revised plan will help guide the future management of the estuary.

Water: savings

Raised with: Minister for Water

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 6 April 2011

REPLY:

The coalition government's new initiative, *Living Melbourne, Living Victoria*, seeks to establish Victoria as a world leader in livable cities and integrated water cycle management. This will support integrated water projects in Melbourne and regional cities for the use of stormwater, rainwater and recycled water.

New technologies will obviously be important in achieving this objective.

I appointed the independent *Living Melbourne, Living Victoria* ministerial advisory council to provide a road map of recommendations on strategic priorities for urban water reform. The council delivered its road map to me on 11 March 2011, outlining recommended directions for change in the way we manage and use water in Melbourne, including a paradigm shift to integrated water cycle management.

The road map includes consideration of innovation and recommended that further work be done to understand the drivers of innovation in the provision of services to customers and the frameworks required to support greater choice and innovation.

I have asked the ministerial advisory council to prepare an implementation plan for the road map which is to be presented to the government in the coming months. The coalition government will respond in due course to the recommendations of the council.

As the work of the ministerial advisory council progresses, the water corporations will continue to work with industry in investigating and employing new technologies to enhance delivery of services that meet diverse needs of consumers.

The coalition government, together with City West Water, South East Water, Yarra Valley Water and Melbourne Water, presently provide funding to the Smart Water Fund to encourage and support innovative development of water, biosolids and water savings projects within the community. Expressions of interest for the most recent round of funding under the Smart Water Fund closed on 8 April 2011.

With regard to your comments about the Target 155 campaign, I believe Melburnians should be congratulated for their efforts to reduce water use. People made difficult decisions during the drought — many allowing their gardens to die — because the previous government failed to plan for the long-term water needs of the city. The coalition government has placed a strong focus on water efficiency, with \$40 million set aside over the next four years for water efficient rebates for home and small businesses. The ministerial advisory council process also provides an opportunity to examine the usefulness of targets and other water efficiency measures in future urban water reforms. The coalition government and water corporations will continue to encourage the efficient use of water in households and businesses.

The coalition government also continues to support innovative small companies through the Department of Business and Innovation and INNOVIC. For example, INNOVIC provides a range of professional services for innovators who are ready to take their ideas to the next stage.

Kangaroos: control

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Barber

Raised on: 4 May 2011

REPLY:

In Victoria, all native wildlife is protected under the *Wildlife Act 1975* and must not be harmed or interfered with without authority from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). There are significant penalties for illegally destroying wildlife, including fines up to approximately \$29 000 and/or up to 24 months imprisonment.

The government advocates the non-lethal management of problems or conflict with wildlife. However, it recognises that in certain circumstances, overabundant and problem wildlife can cause economic loss, damage to property, social disruption and pose safety risks to members of the community. Under these circumstances, DSE may issue an authority to control wildlife (ATCW) to destroy wildlife in ways that are humane and sustainable.

The ATCW system is designed to strike a balance between the conservation of wildlife and the landowner's ability to protect their assets. ATCWs are assessed on a case-by-case basis and are only issued where there is a demonstrable need to control numbers or impacts following consideration of:

- the conservation status of the species;
- the severity of the problem;
- other measures available to control the problem;
- past management efforts; and
- the local and broader environmental context.

Many properties are visited by DSE officers and landowners may be required to develop a management plan to ensure a holistic approach to managing wildlife problems, including adopting appropriate land management practices. It is never a goal to eradicate wildlife from a property but, rather, reduce any impacts to an acceptable, sustainable level.

Authorised wildlife officers operate throughout the state to ensure that authority holders abide by the conditions imposed. Failure to comply with the conditions of an ATCW can incur a fine of up to approximately \$6000. Victoria Police is responsible for ensuring that people act legally when possessing or using firearms.

I consider that the current ATCW system protects the needs of landowners and managers, while ensuring the conservation status of wildlife is not compromised.

Platypuses: net traps

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 24 May 2011

REPLY:

The use of opera house nets is regulated under the Fisheries Act 1995, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security.