

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

22, 23 and 24 March 2011

(Extract from book 4)

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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, 22 March 2011

Water: Murray-Darling Basin plan

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 9 February 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 9 February 2011 in relation to bipartisan support for Victoria's response to the Murray-Darling Basin plan.

On 8 February 2011, the Victorian government released its submission in response to the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan. This submission is now publicly available on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority website — <http://www.mdba.gov.au>. In the submission, I emphasised the need to move quickly to rebuild community and business confidence through a new process.

I note that my office has facilitated a briefing for Mr Lenders with the Department of Primary Industries, which was held on Monday, 28 February 2011, prior to the last parliamentary sitting.

With specific reference to the Victorian government's efforts to achieve a better outcome from the Murray-Darling Basin plan, I would be pleased to offer a personal briefing, minister to shadow minister, in my office during the next sitting week.

Fruit fly: Goulburn Valley

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 9 February 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 9 February 2011 regarding Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) outbreaks. As you are aware, Victoria is facing an unprecedented level of QFF outbreaks and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is working closely with fruit industries, interstate plant health regulators and the commonwealth government, in particular with Biosecurity Australia (BA) and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), to help maintain and re-establish trading and market access arrangements for these important industries.

The horticulture industry in Australia is valued at \$3.5 billion and in Victoria is worth \$1.3 billion per annum. With the value of the horticulture industry in mind, DPI has for many years managed a comprehensive QFF management program. In more recent years industries have also taken greater responsibility for managing and investing in QFF management and, with DPI, BA and AQIS, worked hard to establish the Greater Sunraysia Pest Free Area.

Notwithstanding these considerable efforts, QFF populations in northern Victoria have risen to unprecedented levels and currently DPI is managing or responding directly to more than 60 outbreaks including more than

20 carryover outbreaks from previous seasons. As at the end of February 2011, Sunraysia had reported 15 outbreaks and eight in the Goulburn Valley. The reasons for this increased incidence of QFF are being assessed, but a major factor is the unseasonal wet and humid conditions in Victoria and NSW, which have created ideal conditions for a rapid increase and spread in QFF populations.

In order to combat these outbreaks, DPI has established a State Control Centre in Melbourne (Knoxfield) and Incident Control Centres at Tatura and Irymple and deployed field staff to key areas along the Murray Valley. Given the sensitivity of key export and interstate markets to QFF, outbreaks in the Sunraysia district and the Goulburn Valley are being eradicated as a priority and outbreaks in other areas of the state are being treated to suppress QFF populations.

At the moment more than 40 DPI staff are committed to the response and more than 70 contractors have been engaged to assist with baiting, fruit stripping from trees and searching for QFF larvae. This number is likely to grow if, as expected, the number of outbreaks increases.

While the eradication program is an important part of this campaign, DPI Biosecurity officers are also establishing accreditation and permit arrangements with producers, processors and packers to help them continue to access important markets and minimise the risk of further outbreaks. I am pleased to say that industry has been very cooperative in this regard and recognises the importance of complying with various treatment and transport requirements. Of course, DPI Biosecurity staff will be monitoring and auditing certification systems to minimise the likelihood of non-compliance.

Another key component of this response is communication and this includes press releases and regular advertisements in regional newspapers, plus paid radio advertising which has been provided to targeted regions. This communication strategy is designed to discourage people from moving fruit and QFF into these production regions and to remind residents to dispose of unwanted fruit properly. This is especially important at times when the travelling public is moving into those key fruit production areas, which are tourist destinations. At targeted times and locations, DPI will also be running random road blocks, which serve to remind the travelling public that moving fruit into key regions is illegal and fines do apply.

DPI is also meeting with local councils to help them use their communication networks to provide information to their constituents and visitors.

Further information about the QFF, information for residents and the current status of outbreaks is available at: <http://new.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/pest-insects/queensland-fruit-fly>.

Once again, thank you for your interest in this issue and I look forward to a collaborative approach in tackling yet another challenge for our farming and regional communities.

Ambulance services: Horsham

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Ramsay

Raised on: 10 February 2011

REPLY:

Horsham is an important hub for health services in western Victoria.

The new Horsham ambulance station will provide upgraded facilities for the two 24-hour ambulance teams, including a training facility, offices for the group and team managers, bedrooms and full locker and bathroom amenities. The station will also have a drive-through garage and amenities to enhance infectious controls.

While \$2.5 million was allocated to the development of the new Horsham ambulance station, more detailed work has estimated the cost at \$2.6 million. The major drivers of the increased cost are:

- Contribution to a new roadway that is needed for access to the station and will largely be used by AV vehicles.
- Additional requirements to meet council regulations as the new building will be located in a flood zone.
- Improved disability access.

Given the importance of this project to the local community, the government has committed an additional \$100 000 to the project to ensure it proceeds and delivers a good outcome to the community.

Health: election commitments

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Elsbury

Raised on: 10 February 2011

REPLY:

I am pleased to reaffirm that the Baillieu government has committed \$34.4 million over four years to strengthen palliative care services for people with a life-threatening illness.

The government will take the following actions to implement this commitment:

- Provide growth funding of \$4.2m per annum to palliative care services, particularly community and consultancy services. This funding will be allocated using a resource allocation model that prioritises services experiencing high levels of population growth, including those in outer metropolitan and rural areas.
- Assist carers with the costs of caring (eg medications and equipment) by expanding the flexible funds provided by community palliative care services.
- Improve access to information about palliative care for clients and carers.
- Increase funding for the provision of palliative care advice and support after hours across Victoria.
- Provide additional access to respite, case management and equipment for children with a life-threatening condition.
- Increase the number of specialist bereavement counsellors, particularly in rural areas.
- Improve access to palliative care services for people from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds.
- Undertake specific workforce initiatives to strengthen the links between palliative care and the aged care, paediatrics and disability sectors.
- Recruit and train more volunteers to support people with a life-threatening illness and their carers.

Floods: government assistance

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 10 February 2011

REPLY:

The current flood assistance available, in the form of Damage Assistance Loans and Clean-up and Restoration Grants, is consistent with arrangements under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) Guidelines, which were established and agreed between the commonwealth and state governments.

The eligibility to access Damage Assistance Loans includes the criterion that primary producers will need to demonstrate that the majority of their time and capital are devoted to the farming operation and in normal circumstances the major portion of their income is derived from farming.

The eligibility to access Clean-up and Restoration Grants includes that the applicant:

- has a right or interest in land for the purpose of primary production
- contributes a significant part of his/her labour and capital to the farming enterprise, and
- derives more than 51 per cent of his/her individual income from the farming enterprise.

While the Victorian government understands that many small land-holders are impacted by the floods, the Damage Assistance Loans and Clean-up and Restoration Grants provided by the government are targeted to primary producers affected by floods for whom the farm is their primary source of income. Government assistance of this nature is provided to ensure that land-holders who derive the majority of their income from the farm can return to normal production as quickly as possible so as not to prolong the period for which they will be without an income.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) assists land-holders with a range of issues. DPI's Dairy, Meat and Wool, Grains and Horticulture Services branches are developing commodity-specific recovery plans to assist food and fibre producers. DPI field staff are working with farmers on animal health needs, developing feed plans for livestock, pasture recovery, erosion control and more. Livestock producers, with urgent animal requirements, who haven't been contacted by DPI staff already should call their local DPI office or the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

There is also a range of assistance related to health, well-being and financial matters available to individuals. Further information can be found on the Department of Human Services web page [www.dhs.vic.gov.au].

Thank you for raising these matters with me.

Rail: Caroline Springs station

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 1 March 2011

REPLY:

The Victorian government is currently reviewing the time frame for construction of the new Caroline Springs station.

Development work including land acquisition, construction of an access road and environmental protection activities are continuing.

Detailed service planning and timetabling will be finalised with the rail operator closer to the completion of the project.

Planning: community consultation

Raised with: Minister for Planning

Raised by: Mr Tee

Raised on: 2 March 2011

REPLY:

I thank the member for Eastern Metropolitan for his question.

I welcome the opportunity to again affirm our commitment to working with the community and local Councils regarding the planning of Melbourne, including local areas.

I previously advised that the government will work with local councils and communities on the planning decisions that affect them. In particular, I refer the member for Eastern Metropolitan to the response provided in February 2011, which noted that councils and local communities, along with industry and other experts, will play an important role in the planning of Melbourne and the implementation of the strategic framework.

As I outlined in my previous response, the planning for strategic sites of state significance, including Richmond station, E-gate, Fishermans Bend and any other sites which are identified, will proceed in a genuine and transparent manner involving the community and local council.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Wednesday, 23 March 2011

Alpine parks: cattle grazing

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Jennings

Raised on: 9 February 2011

REPLY:

The community has expressed concerns over the management of fuel load and bushfire risks within our parks. Effective fuel and fire management is required to protect lives, property and our parks from fire.

The government's investigation of the use of strategic cattle grazing as a tool to manage fuel loads and reduce fire risk in Victoria's high country, including the Alpine National Park, will help address those concerns.

It is important that measures taken to reduce the risk of bushfire to Victorian communities — be it grazing, fuel reduction burning or a combination of the two — is informed by good science.

Following a review of the current scientific evidence, the Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment has determined that the available evidence does not allow for an opinion to be formed on the effectiveness of strategic cattle grazing for fuel and fire management purposes. Important knowledge gaps include the coverage (geographic area and vegetation type) and quality of current scientific evidence.

In recognition of these knowledge gaps, the secretary has set up a targeted scientific research program, which will allow the secretary to form an opinion on the use of strategic cattle grazing to effectively manage fuel and the risk of fire as a component of the responsible management of the Alpine National Park.

The trial will also consider the non-fuel impacts of strategic cattle grazing. Any non-fuel impacts of grazing will be compared to the impacts of other management tools. The trial allows this to happen in a scientifically robust manner.

A key question that will be answered by the research trial is whether strategic grazing can be used to reduce the risk of fire in Victoria's high country and whether the impact on the environment is balanced by the results.

Natural values, which include species listed under both state and federal legislation are being protected through the implementation of an environmental management framework. The framework has two components.

1. A comprehensive process to select the sites for the research trial. This process included the identification and mapping of natural values listed under both State and federal legislation and assessment using the Australian government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities' significant impact guidelines for matters of national environmental significance.
2. During operation, the trial will be governed by an adaptive management approach. To effect the approach, the risk of significant impact on listed values will also be managed through:
 - Monitoring by field staff, both targeted and ad hoc
 - Application of an adaptive management decision framework to consider issues of concern
 - Risk management planning and response as appropriate.

National Jockeys Trust: funding**Raised with: Minister for Racing****Raised by: Hon. M. P. Pakula****Raised on: 1 March 2011****REPLY:**

I refer to your adjournment debate question on 1 March 2011 regarding government support for the National Jockeys' Trust. Specifically, you have asked for my commitment to work with other state racing ministers in securing funding for the future of the National Jockeys' Trust.

I am familiar with the excellent work done by the National Jockeys' Trust in providing assistance to seriously injured jockeys and the families of jockeys who have been tragically killed in racing accidents.

As you may be aware, the Victorian racing industry has lead the way in terms of support for jockeys, both during their riding careers and beyond. As the Victorian Minister for Racing I am committed to taking a strong stand amongst my colleagues in other state jurisdictions to make sure Jockeys, nation-wide, are afforded the welfare they deserve.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Thursday, 24 March 2011

Ballarat base hospital: helipad

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Ms Pulford

Raised on: 10 February 2011

REPLY:

I am pleased to confirm that the Baillieu government is committed to the provision of health services to the people of Ballarat and the surrounding districts.

The Baillieu government, as a pre-election policy announcement, made a commitment to allocate \$2 million to build a helipad at Ballarat base hospital.

Construction will begin as the technical specification and construction issues are progressed.

Floods: Yarrawonga

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 1 March 2011

REPLY:

Upon receiving a telephone call from Mr Pilkington, I requested that a representative from the Department of Health contact Mr Pilkington to discuss his concerns. I am informed that Mr Pilkington was advised by the department, where possible, to avoid contact with flood waters. The department also sent Mr Pilkington information relating to possible grants for financial assistance.

I am further advised that representatives of Moira shire have met with Mr Pilkington and corresponded on numerous occasions to reassure Mr Pilkington, who was present at the site inspection, that a sewage spill had not occurred.

Furthermore, the department corresponded with North East Water to follow up the sewage issues raised by Mr Pilkington. It was confirmed that although Dunlop Street of Yarrawonga was affected by floodwaters, at no stage was Dunlop Street or the town of Yarrawonga affected by sewage overflows. The sewage system was able to cope with stormwater infiltration and these additional flows were adequately managed.

The Department of Health sought on a number of occasions to assist Mr Pilkington and I trust every effort has been made by the department to respond accordingly to the issues raised.

Further my office has spoken with Mr Pilkington directly and subsequently to the local council and to North East Water.

Floods: northern Victoria**Raised with: Premier****Raised by: Ms Broad****Raised on: 2 March 2011****REPLY:**

Ms Broad raised the issue of ensuring that Benjeroop and like communities in northern Victoria, that have been affected by the January floods, are provided with the support and resources necessary for flood recovery. As you have acknowledged, I am acutely aware that towns such as Benjeroop are still facing a number of challenges and are prevented from recovering fully.

On my recent trip to Benjeroop on Saturday 5 March, I was able to witness first hand the severe impact of recent flooding events on the community. I have also seen the challenges facing the nearby communities of Swan Hill, Pyramid Hill, Cohuna and Kerang. Stagnant water is a significant issue for farms and farmhouses that are isolated or damaged. It is also increasing mosquito levels across the north-west and is raising concern in regard to mosquito borne diseases. It is imperative that the water levels which remain in these areas are reduced and I am committed to ensuring these communities are given the necessary material and emotional support they require in a timely manner. The government is undertaking a number of initiatives in this regard.

All financial assistance measures in the government's flood package are available to those areas where flood waters remain. This includes: emergency grants, temporary living and re-establishment grants, low-interest loans and clean up grants for small businesses and primary producers. Furthermore Gannawarra Shire Council has received \$100,000 under the Local Government Clean-up Fund and an initial \$40,000 under the Community Recovery Fund. Community groups in the council area are also eligible for Community Small Grants of up to \$5,000.

In addition to financial support, the government is committed to working with local councils. Community recovery meetings have been established to provide information and support to those affected and to ensure that affected communities are engaged in the recovery process. Gannawarra shire and other flood affected councils have been provided with flood recovery officers and rural recovery officers. I recognise that both the flood and the prolonged recovery have taken an emotional toll on the community. The Red Cross and the Department of Human Services in the Loddon Mallee region is working with Gannawarra shire to undertake a psychological outreach process to assess needs, and provide information and referrals for isolated or vulnerable individuals and families affected by the floods. The Kerang Recovery Centre is also open Monday to Thursday and provides flood affected people with psychological first aid and information related to psychological support.

A task force led by Victoria Police has been established to coordinate action to alleviate the impact of stagnant flood waters, particularly around Benjeroop. All available resources and agencies are committed to this task and are working closely with local government and communities. Some levees have already been repaired and breaches sealed. Water pumping is taking place to remove the water and additional pumps have been sourced from other areas. The enormous challenge of pumping water out of areas around Benjeroop should not be underestimated. As at 16 March, approximately 4000 megalitres of water still remains on the area downstream of Benjeroop Community Hall, with approximately 2000 megalitres upstream of this. Where authorised pumps are used, the cost of diesel for these pumps will be covered by the Victorian government.

Finally, the Comrie review, led by Neil Comrie, former Victorian Police Chief Commissioner, will examine the recent floods through a series of community consultations in affected areas. There will also be a separate parliamentary inquiry under the Environment and Natural Resources Committee into flood mitigation infrastructure.