

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

22 and 23 November 2011

(Extract from book 18)

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* *Inquiry into Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011*

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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 November 2011

Planning: activity centres

Raised with: Minister for Planning

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 1 June 2011

REPLY:

Structure plans for activities areas can establish a framework for the future development and revitalisation of many of our best loved places; where shops, services, employment, entertainment and higher density housing come together, centred around public transport.

Through its Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), state government provides guidance and support to councils in their preparation of structure plans for activities areas and community and stakeholder engagement is an important part of any structure planning process.

There are several activities areas in metropolitan Melbourne that straddle municipal boundaries.

Guidelines prepared by DPCD encourage councils to undertake meaningful and effective engagement in a range of forms with their communities and key stakeholders, including with adjoining councils. These guidelines provide clear direction for councils.

DPCD is also available to assist councils in their translation of structure plans into appropriate statutory controls and provisions within their municipal planning schemes. Adjoining councils are required to be given formal notice of such planning scheme amendments; where these would be of interest to them.

Fire blight: New Zealand imports

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 18 August 2011

REPLY:

Thank you for your adjournment debate question of 18 August 2011, in which you express concern about the import of apples from New Zealand (NZ) under standard commercial production practices and request an explanation of what the state is doing to push these concerns onto the federal government.

I share your concerns about the potentially heightened risk of fire blight and other pests of quarantine concern resulting from the import of NZ apples and the potential impact on Victorian industries and rural communities. In particular I recognise the significant impact fire blight would have on the pome fruit industry and especially the pear industry. The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Victoria has already provided a submission to Biosecurity Australia (BA) and expressed concern about the threat from pests and diseases that may arise as a result of adopting standard commercial practices. Specifically, DPI has sought assurances from BA that the Integrated Fruit Production (IFP) program which forms the basis of commercial apple production in NZ will be subject to

ongoing audit by Australian and New Zealand quarantine authorities, to minimise the risk of importing diseases such as fire blight.

I also called for stronger action when I raised the issue of NZ apple imports at the recent Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) meeting held in Perth on 14 July 2011. PIMC representatives discussed a number of issues, including the consequences of fire blight on local pome fruit industries, the need for detection and management of late-season trauma blight in NZ orchards and the particular risk posed by imports of organic apples. As a result of these discussions, the council has sought urgent advice to confirm that streptomycin and other antibiotics are made available for emergency use in the event that fire blight was detected in Australia.

It is not possible to restore the measures imposed by the commonwealth since 2007 because they have been ruled invalid by the World Trade Organisation. However, I have requested DPI to evaluate the options for protecting certain defined fruit production regions from introduction of outside apples if there is a risk of fire blight. I will give consideration to the advice received from DPI in the context of risk to industry within Australia's international obligations. The government's first obligation remains to do all that is appropriate to protect the industry from an outbreak.

Crime: Colac

Raised with: Attorney-General

Raised by: Ms Pulford

Raised on: 30 August 2011

REPLY:

Pursuant to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is responsible for public education with respect to the elimination of discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, including raising community awareness of Victoria's strong antidiscrimination laws. The purposes of the act are promoted through direct engagement, educational programs, partnerships with community organisations and sporting bodies, a comprehensive website, targeted advertising campaigns and regional initiatives. The commissioner visited Colac in 2010 to raise awareness of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws within the Colac community.

The work of the commission is supported by Victoria Police in the investigation of criminal offences where discrimination is a factor. In July this year, Victoria Police launched its prejudice-motivated crime strategy, which aims to reduce prejudice motivated crime in communities across Victoria, as well as building community confidence to report prejudice motivated crime to police. Police in Colac have committed to continue to engage with local youth on the issue of prejudice motivated crime and discrimination generally.

Blade Electric Vehicles: ministerial visit

Raised with: Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 13 October 2011

REPLY:

Castlemaine-based Blade Electric Vehicles produced the initial Blade 'Electron' vehicle in 2008 and has recently developed a prototype for a new model of battery electric vehicle. On 15 September 2011 the company announced a joint venture with Chinese-based lithium battery manufacturer, DLG Battery Limited. This joint venture is expected to bring 100 new jobs to Castlemaine with targets of producing up to 800 new electric vehicle units in

2012. The joint venture will also work with energy systems company IRES Asia Pacific Pty Ltd, to create a renewable energy service and distribution network with the potential to create 250 jobs throughout Australia.

Blade Electric Vehicles is an innovative regional manufacturing company. The company's establishment in Castlemaine has developed a supply chain of businesses to support the production of these vehicles and has created significant employment.

The Department of Business and Innovation recently met with Blade Electric Vehicles to discuss new investment and expansion plans for Castlemaine, and also facilitated discussions with the Mount Alexander Shire Council regarding site options and planning issues.

I also met with Blade Electric Vehicles on 4 November 2011 and hear about Blade's future business aspiration which includes the manufacture of energy storage systems for households. I was encouraged to hear that a regional company is diversifying its business into areas that offers great opportunities to service a growing market.

Discussions with Blade Electric Vehicles are ongoing, as the Victorian government seeks to work closely with innovative regional businesses.

Local government: funding

Raised with: Minister for Local Government

Raised by: Mr Ramsay

Raised on: 13 October 2011

REPLY:

There has, in fact, been no increase in funding in real per capita terms in 2011–12 in the general purpose grants for Victorian councils provided by the commonwealth government.

Over the past 15 years, financial assistance grants to local government have fallen from 1.02 per cent of total commonwealth taxation revenue in 1996–97 to just 0.62 per cent in 2009–10.

Had financial assistance grants to Victorian councils been maintained at 1.02 per cent of commonwealth taxation revenue there would have been \$292 million more available to Victorian councils in 2009–10 than was actually provided.

This is a significant decline in the commonwealth's level of commitment to local government.

The coalition government is aware of the significant cost pressures many local councils in Victoria face. I will continue to raise the issue of the level of funds provided to local government with the commonwealth government to ensure that local communities in Victoria are adequately supported.

For its part, the Victorian coalition government has committed to support local government and Victorian communities through initiatives including a \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund to build strong regional cities and country communities and \$160 million in funding for upgrading roads and bridges across 40 rural councils.

Wine industry: smoke taint

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 26 October 2011

REPLY:

As noted by the honourable member, the coalition government has allocated \$4 million over four years to establish a 'centre of expertise' in Victoria to undertake cutting edge research to address the impact of smoke taint in wine.

The government understands the concerns of the grape and wine industries about the potential tainting of grapes and wine from fuel reduction burning on public land, but is also obligated to protect Victorians from the devastating impact of wildfire.

The government is committed to fully implementing the recommendations made by the 2009 bushfire royal commission to significantly increase the amount of fuel reduction burning in Victoria to protect life and property.

Public land management agencies such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) continue to liaise closely with regional industry and community groups to ensure that, wherever possible, timing and conduct of burns are carefully managed to avoid adverse impacts on other parties.

I am advised that DSE intends to trial improved advance notification arrangements in the coming planned burning season to better address stakeholder concerns.

In the longer term, a key expectation of the 'centre for expertise' is that it will develop a user friendly risk assessment tool to enable both wine grape growers and public land managers such as DSE to make better informed decisions about their respective activities and thereby minimise the risk of smoke taint occurring.

I thank the honourable member for his question.

Bushfires: Dandenong Ranges

Raised with: Minister for Bushfire Response

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 26 October 2011

REPLY:

The Dandenong Ranges bushfire landscape plan pilot program is a Victorian-first bushfire planning program designed to improve bushfire preparedness in the local Dandenong Ranges. As a result of the pilot program, a bushfire operational plan that is connected to all local fire safety treatments will be developed and exercised annually by the community.

The bushfire operational plan will be used by the agencies and the community during a bushfire event. The fire services commissioner will champion the pilot project, working closely with fire agencies, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, local and state government and key community stakeholders.

A project management team made up of fire agencies and participating councils will facilitate local meetings across four municipalities: Yarra Ranges, Knox, Casey and Cardinia.

The commissioner will also liaise with community advisory groups and engage experts such as research and fire scientists and demographers to ensure that any discussion is based upon fact and scientific research.

The pilot will also facilitate discussions about neighbourhood safer places and community fire refuges (i.e. does the community need an NSP or refuge? Where should they be located?). However, we want to ensure these discussions are based on evidence.

The fire services commissioner aims to empower community leaders and local fire agency leaders to lead the discussions. We want to expand upon the level of community involvement that has already been achieved.

As the results of the many activities that form part of the pilot program are analysed and acted upon, they will be made available so as to better inform bushfire planning in other areas of the state.

I trust this information is of assistance and thank you for raising this matter with me.

Information and communications technology: national broadband network

Raised with: Minister for Technology

Raised by: Mr Somyurek

Raised on: 27 October 2011

REPLY:

This government is engaging constructively with the commonwealth government and National Broadband Network Company (NBN Co) to ensure that Victorian industry and broadband users get the best possible outcomes from the initiative.

The Baillieu government is working with NBN Co and the commonwealth government across a range of issues, including:

- attracting and securing NBN related investment into Victoria;
- engaging on planning, infrastructure access and transition arrangements of existing telecommunication services used by the state and government agencies to the NBN platform;
- engaging on workforce development issues;
- facilitating the development of Victoria's digital economy by demonstrating the productivity benefits of broadband through the Broadband Enabled Innovation Program (BEIP);
- advocating to the commonwealth government for better policy settings, processes for development and implementation of the NBN.

The Victorian government is applying a balanced and practical approach to the NBN. Any requests from NBN Co or the commonwealth government for practical assistance with the rollout of the NBN are being considered on merit and in the interests of the Victorian community.

Courage to Care: exhibition

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Ms Crozier

Raised on: 27 October 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has provided funding to support the Courage to Care exhibition and educational program since 2000 through annual service agreements.

In 2000–01 the department (then known as the Department of Education, Employment and Training) funded the development of the educational component of the program and has continued funding the program since that time.

- More than 26,000 Victorian senior secondary students have participated in the program since 2001.
- The department funding covers four exhibitions annually, usually two in metropolitan Melbourne and two in regional Victoria.
- In 2010 the program was delivered in Mornington, Ballarat, North Melbourne and Kew and in 2011 in Warrnambool, Echuca, Kerang and Broadmeadows.
- The program is particularly well received in regional areas.

In 2011 the department contracted a review of the Courage to Care program and has recently received the final report. In line with the report recommendations, meetings will be held with Courage to Care about how they can further develop the curriculum component of the educational program to broaden the scope of the program to increase its relevance to 21st century learners.

The current service agreement with Courage to Care concludes in April 2012. The department will continue to support the program through a new service agreement.

Victorian certificate of applied learning: funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 27 October 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

VCAL was first introduced in 2003, and at that time funding was provided to support co-ordination to establish the program. After eight years, VCAL is a well-established senior secondary certificate.

This year more than 18 700 Victorian students are expected to undertake VCAL with 429 providers across Victoria. VCAL is an alternative year 12 qualification to the Victorian certificate of education (VCE). VCAL provides pathways for students into employment, further education and training through applied learning.

There has been no reduction to the funding for the delivery of VCAL. Along with other programs offered in Victorian government schools, VCAL continues to be funded through the student resource package (SRP). The SRP is based on the number of students enrolled, and schools have flexibility within that budget provision to deliver the programs and support that are designed to improve educational outcomes. This year SRP funding supported an 8.5 per cent increase in the number of students undertaking the VCAL from 2010.

The change brings VCAL in line with the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) and VCE programs, which do not receive additional funding for coordination and have their coordination role funded within the SRP.

Schools and other education providers have access to a number of support services for VCAL students. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), the Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA), the local learning and employment networks (LENs), and the workplace learning coordinators program provide support to VCAL providers. They assist in developing curriculum resources and coordinating structured workplace learning placements to satisfy the requirements of VCAL.

The Victorian coalition government provided a significant boost for education in the 2011–12 state budget, allocating more than \$1 billion in new funding to early childhood development, school education, and higher education and training services. This funding includes:

- \$156 million over four years to meet increased demand in the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD);
- \$32 million over four years for VETiS. This funding was scheduled to lapse this year, however, the Victorian coalition government has committed to continued funding to reflect the importance of this option for students; and
- \$1 million over three years to pilot and support new research-based educational approaches to re-engage young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from schooling.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will continue to work with schools to make certain that student outcomes remain at the centre of school provision.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Wednesday, 23 November 2011

School buses: Girton Grammar School

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 16 June 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) provides conveyance allowances for eligible students to assist with the cost of travel to school throughout rural and regional Victoria under a set of guidelines to ensure a fair and equitable service is available.

An audit of the conveyance allowance claim for Girton Grammar, Bendigo in December 2010 undertaken by the student transport unit of DEECD revealed that a number of students were claiming conveyance allowance that were ineligible to do so. A student attending a non-government school may be entitled to a conveyance allowance provided that the student attends the nearest school of the appropriate denomination at which enrolment is available and they reside at least 4.8 kilometres from that school. Girton Grammar and Castlemaine Steiner School are both registered as non-denominational schools. As such, students who reside closer to Castlemaine Steiner School and who are eligible to enrol in that school are not entitled to claim a conveyance allowance for attending Girton Grammar.

When contacted in July by DEECD, the principal of Girton Grammar indicated that an agreement had previously been negotiated with the department, but the school was unable to provide any documentation that supported the existence of this agreement.

A transitional period was granted to allow the school time to ensure compliance with conveyance allowance eligibility policy. A temporary exemption was granted to give the school the opportunity to advise prospective and new enrolments of their eligibility under department policy. There has been no undue impact to the students attending the school when the non-compliance was identified.

As such, it is expected that Girton Grammar applies existing policy when assessing applications for conveyance allowance and there will be no further exemption granted beyond 2012. This was stated in my correspondence to the principal of Girton Grammar dated 15 February 2011.

Autism: program funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Finn

Raised on: 16 August 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Moomba Park Primary School is one of six schools that are establishing Autism Inclusion Support Programs in 2011.

As part of this, the school has been provided with a range of targeted supports and funding including:

- A \$50 000 implementation grant (February 2011) to assist with the establishment of its inclusion support program in the school.
- A significant capital works building program based on plans developed by the school, due to be completed by 2012.
- Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) is providing expert consultancy services to the school including school based staff development, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) coordinator mentor support, specific learning and development courses and ASD resources.
- Monash University Graduate School of Education is providing support for a school based action research project as part of the overall evaluation of the Autism Inclusion Support Program.
- A targeted ASD scholarship for a Moomba Park Primary School teacher to undertake graduate diploma studies at the Autism Teaching Institute is available for 2012.

All schools have full flexibility and the responsibility to determine the individual programs they use, taking into consideration the needs of their school community and their budget.

The department agreed to provide additional funding to meet budget pressures for 2011. Funding has been approved and the principal notified.

Autism: program funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 30 August 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Moomba Park Primary School is one of six schools that are establishing Autism Inclusion Support Programs in 2011.

As part of this, the school has been provided with a range of targeted supports and funding including:

- A \$50 000 implementation grant (February 2011) to assist with the establishment of its inclusion support program in the school.
- A significant capital works building program based on plans developed by the school, due to be completed by 2012.
- Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) is providing expert consultancy services to the school including school based staff development, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) coordinator mentor support, specific learning and development courses and ASD resources.
- Monash University Graduate School of Education is providing support for a school based action research project as part of the overall evaluation of the Autism Inclusion Support Program.

- A targeted ASD scholarship for a Moomba Park Primary School teacher to undertake graduate diploma studies at the Autism Teaching Institute is available for 2012.

All schools have full flexibility and the responsibility to determine the individual programs they use, taking into consideration the needs of their school community and their budget.

The department agreed to provide additional funding to meet budget pressures for 2011. Funding has been approved and the principal notified.

Fertility control clinics: protests

Raised with: Attorney-General

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 13 September 2011

REPLY:

The government is concerned to secure the safety and wellbeing of all Victorians, including persons using health-care services as well as staff and service providers. The government is also concerned to maintain rights such as freedom of movement, expression and association.

Bubble zone legislation, also referred to as buffer zone, access zone or moving-on legislation, would establish a physical zone which protesters may not enter or where their speech or action is restricted.

Existing law provides a range of remedies if it is alleged that persons are acting improperly in taking part in a protest. These remedies include injunctions, criminal charges and on-the-spot notices for breaches of by-laws relating to obstruction or public nuisance.

I understand that it is not in order for a member to seek legislative amendment pursuant to an adjournment debate matter.

Torquay: secondary college

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 13 October 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The government is committed to providing a secondary school in Torquay and planning for secondary education provision in Torquay is progressing well. A new school is due to open on 1 January 2012 with the school commencing in existing buildings at Torquay P-9 College. The new school has the interim name of Surf Coast secondary college.

Detailed planning has now been completed for permanent facilities for the new school in Torquay and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has been investigating a number of options to acquire land in Torquay for the establishment of a new secondary college.

The department has been unable to secure the preferred site despite providing an offer to the land-holder consistent with the valuer-general's assessment of the site. The government and department have an obligation to account for taxpayers money responsibly.

Once land is purchased, tenders will be called for the construction of the new school and construction will commence.

While we envisage that construction during 2012 will enable the school to be occupied from the start of the school year, should the new secondary college facilities not be open for the beginning of the 2013 school year, the department will ensure alternative arrangements are made for students to continue their studies in Torquay.

Albion Football Club: defibrillators

Raised with: Minister for Sport and Recreation

Raised by: Mr Finn

Raised on: 25 October 2011

REPLY:

The Baillieu government provides \$3 million in funding each year to Ambulance Victoria's Pre-Ambulance Basic Life Support Strategy (PABLS). The program is focused on early recognition of an emergency and calling triple zero (000), early cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and early defibrillation.

I am advised that Ambulance Victoria has placed 88 automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in key public areas where large numbers of people gather such as airports, zoos, recreation centres and railway stations.

Ambulance Victoria also encourages all organisations to register their AEDs at www.registermyaed.com.au ensuring that, in the event of a triple zero call in the vicinity, the Ambulance Victoria communications room can guide the caller to the nearest AED.

In addition, I understand that sports clubs may now apply for up to \$500 towards the purchase of an AED under the recently announced VicHealth 2012 Active Club Grants program.

The acquisition of an AED does not remove the need for improved medical emergency responses by sports clubs, including the delivery of first aid and CPR.

The issue of support for sports injury prevention and management, including emergency responses involving the use of AEDs and CPR by sports clubs, will be examined by the newly established sports injury prevention task force, which will hold its first meeting in November 2011.

Autism: program funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Ms Mikakos

Raised on: 8 November 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Moomba Park Primary School is one of six schools that are establishing Autism Inclusion Support Programs in 2011.

As part of this, the school has been provided with a range of targeted supports and funding including:

- A \$50 000 implementation grant (February 2011) to assist with the establishment of its inclusion support program in the school.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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- A significant capital works building program based on plans developed by the school, due to be completed by 2012.
- Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) is providing expert consultancy services to the school including school based staff development, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) coordinator mentor support, specific learning and development courses and ASD resources.
- Monash University Graduate School of Education is providing support for a school based action research project as part of the overall evaluation of the Autism Inclusion Support Program.
- A targeted ASD scholarship for a Moomba Park Primary School teacher to undertake graduate diploma studies at the Autism Teaching Institute is available for 2012.

All schools have full flexibility and the responsibility to determine the individual programs they use, taking into consideration the needs of their school community and their budget.

The department agreed to provide additional funding to meet budget pressures for 2011. Funding has been approved and the principal notified.