

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

28 and 30 June 2011

(Extract from book 10)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Cabinet Secretary	Mr D. J. Hodgett, MP

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Darveniza, Mr D. M. Davis, Mr P. R. Davis, Mr Hall, Ms Lovell, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Scheffer.

Procedures Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr D. M. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney

Legislative Council standing committees

Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

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

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Elsbury, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Petrovich, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, *Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

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

Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Legal and Social Issues References Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

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

Participating member

Joint committees

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Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Leane, Mr Ramsay and Mr Scheffer. (*Assembly*): Mr Battin and Mr McCurdy.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Peulich. (*Assembly*): Mr Burgess, Mr Foley, Mr Noonan and Mr Shaw.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmr and Ms Tierney. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Ms Miller and Mr Southwick.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Somyurek and Mr Tarlamis. (*Assembly*): Ms Ryall and Mrs Victoria.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): Mr Koch. (*Assembly*): Mr Bull, Ms Duncan, Mr Pandazopoulos and Ms Wreford.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Coote and Ms Crozier. (*Assembly*): Mrs Bauer, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McGuire and Mr Wakeling.

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Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich. (*Assembly*): Mr Carbines, Ms Garrett, Mr Newton-Brown and Mr Northe.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg and Mr Ondarchie. (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Ms Hutchins and Ms McLeish.

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Rural and Regional Committee — (*Council*): Mr Drum. (*Assembly*): Mr Howard, Mr Katos, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr O'Brien and Mr O'Donohue. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mr Gidley, Mr Nardella and Mr Watt.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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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, 28 June 2011

Consumer affairs: off-the-plan housing

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mr Tee

Raised on: 3 May 2011

REPLY:

The *Sale of Land Act 1962* recognises that consumers may wish to purchase a property “off-the-plan”, that is, to purchase a lot in a plan of subdivision before the plan has been registered. Buying off-the-plan can provide significant benefits to consumers (including lower prices, longer settlement periods and a reduction in stamp duty), but also carries a degree of risk that the sale may not proceed, depending on the circumstances.

The act contains a number of provisions to ensure that buyers are protected if the sale does not proceed for any reason. Under the act, the deposit must be no more than 10 per cent of the purchase price, and must be held either on trust by an estate agent, legal practitioner or conveyancer, or jointly by the buyer and seller in a special purpose account, at least until the plan of subdivision is registered.

The buyer can choose to rescind the contract and receive their deposit money back if:

- the seller does not notify the buyer of works affecting the land in the lot;
- amendments are made to the plan of subdivision that materially affect the lot; or
- the plan of subdivision is not registered within 18 months (or within an alternative period specified in the contract).

In such circumstances, the protections in the act work to ensure that the buyer receives their money back.

As you would recall, the previous Labor government attempted to reduce protection for homebuyers considering off-the-plan property by increasing the maximum allowable deposit to 20 per cent of the purchase price. The Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition successfully forced the then government to remove this provision, as it would have increased housing unaffordability and caused consumer detriment.

Unlike Labor, the coalition will continue to stand up for the interests of consumers in relation to off-the-plan property purchases.

Office of Public Prosecutions: review

Raised with: Attorney-General

Raised by: Hon. M. P. Pakula

Raised on: 4 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the matter regarding the Inquiry into Victoria's public prosecutions service that you raised during the adjournment debate on 4 May 2011.

As you have noted, on 11 January 2011 the government appointed former Supreme Court Justice Frank Vincent, QC to inquire into the public prosecutions service in Victoria. Mr Vincent provided me with his report on 28 March 2011.

Mr Vincent's report found that there had been an error of judgement by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Jeremy Rapke, QC, in relation to the appointment of associate crown prosecutors. The report did not find any conscious wrongdoing on the part of Mr Rapke. Mr Rapke wrote to me on 13 May 2011, resigning as Director of Public Prosecutions effective 30 June 2011.

The government has concluded that it would not be appropriate to release the report in the circumstances, given the nature of the issues involved and the wide range of personal information contained in the report about a number of individuals, much of which information was provided to Mr Vincent in confidence.

As a consequence of the inquiry, the government will be making appropriate amendments to the *Public Prosecutions Act 1994* to correct deficiencies in the existing arrangements, including the role relationships between the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Solicitor of Public Prosecutions and the Chief Crown Prosecutor, to ensure the effective conduct of their important responsibilities.

Liquor licensing: City of Casey

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 4 May 2011

REPLY:

Under the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (the Act), liquor licence applications are determined by the director of liquor licensing (the director). The director is an independent statutory authority and is responsible for the administration of the act. As a statutory officer, the director is empowered to make decisions on liquor licence applications that are independent of government.

I am advised that the City of Casey has made an objection to a packaged liquor licence application at 945s Thompson Road, Lyndhurst, under section 40 of the act. This section provides that a council may object to the granting of a licence on the grounds that the licensed premises would detract from or be detrimental to the amenity of the area in which it is situated. In the case of a packaged liquor licence, a council may also object on the grounds that the licensed premises would be conducive to or encourage the misuse or abuse of alcohol.

Where an objection to a liquor licence application is submitted, the director refers the application to the liquor licensing panel (the panel) to consider the objection and provide a recommendation as to whether the application should be granted or refused.

It is at the discretion of the director to accept or reject the panel's recommendation when making this final decision. Following the director's final decision on a contested application, the applicant and any objectors have the right to appeal the decision by applying to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Additionally, the government has implemented an election commitment to amend the Victorian planning scheme to enhance local communities' role in deciding the location of packaged liquor outlets. Since 8 April 2011, new packaged liquor outlets have been required to obtain a planning permit.

As a result of this amendment, applicants for packaged liquor licences must obtain planning approval from the relevant local council prior to lodging any application for a new licence, or an application to vary or relocate an existing licence.

Further, the amendment now means local councils are required to consider cumulative impact when assessing planning permit applications for packaged liquor outlets at the planning stage. Cumulative impact refers to effects arising from the concentration of licensed premises in an area, including positive effects (such as economic benefits and consumer choice) and negative effects (such as alcohol-related violence and loss of amenity).

Vocational education and training: enrolments

Raised with: Minister for Higher Education and Skills

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 24 May 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

I thank the member for acknowledging the importance of my decision to reintroduce tuition concession fee places for health care card holders aged 15–24 years undertaking diploma and advanced diploma courses at a TAFE institute. The re-establishment of tuition concession fee places will help to remove financial barriers to vocational education and training (VET) for many young Victorians.

Improving access to Victoria's high quality vocational education and training system is a key priority for this government.

- The Victorian system is underpinned by a student entitlement to vocational and training education. Since 1 January 2011, Victorians have been provided with an entitlement to government-subsidised training at any level in any area they wish to study: Victorians aged under 20 can access training at any level, regardless of qualifications already held.
- Those aged 20 and over can gain access to training in any qualification higher than one already held.
- Access to foundation level skills is unlimited to all Victorians, regardless of age or qualifications already held.
- Access to training in any apprenticeship qualification is similarly unlimited, regardless of age or previous qualifications.

Under these arrangements more providers are being contracted by the Victorian government to deliver an increasing number of government subsidised training places. This is giving students more choice in finding a provider that best suits their needs.

The government recognises that in some cases, people falling outside the eligibility criteria for a government subsidised place who have an essential need for training to gain or maintain employment may have difficulty meeting the full tuition fees.

In this regard, I note that from July this year the government will be providing additional funding of \$10 million per annum over the next four years to increase the number of exemptions available for people aged over 20 years to gain a government subsidised training place. This funding will increase access to fee exemptions for many people who are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market or undertaking training in critical skills areas.

The government also funds programs to increase participation in training by people in other disadvantaged groups:

- Under the indigenous completions initiative, indigenous students are eligible for concession tuition fees places in any government subsidised training place.

- During 2011, government subsidised training places have been made available under the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) for asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking.
- Concession tuition fee places are available for students of all ages who hold a health care card and are undertaking study in the course categories of foundation skills, skills creation, apprenticeships, traineeships and skills building.

The government has recently announced funding of \$1.8 million for the *Skilling the Bay* training package to ensure workers affected by job losses at Ford Australia have access to a government subsidised training place, including an additional 100 government-subsidised training places in Geelong and 140 places in Broadmeadows. It will also seek to build the Geelong region's skills base through work with the Gordon and Deakin University.

Similarly, the \$10 million *Skilling the Valley* package will play a key role in supporting growth in the Latrobe Valley through work with local training providers, government and employers on a range of projects. This program is a significant step towards re-training and re-skilling retrenched workers or those who had been out of the workforce for a period of time.

The review of VET fees and funding arrangements, which I announced on 4 May 2011, will examine the extent to which the design of current government funding mechanisms and fee structures are meeting the objectives of the Victorian training system. This will also include a review of concession tuition fees and eligibility exemptions criteria in supporting engagement in training.

The Essential Services Commission is conducting the first stage of the review and recently released an issues paper to assist interested parties prepare submissions and contribute to the review. The issues paper and processes for input into the review are available on the Essential Services Commission's website on www.esc.vic.gov.au

Following the release of a report by the commission in August 2011, a consultation process will be undertaken to seek public feedback on the commission's findings and recommendations. Final review findings and recommendations will be considered by government in late 2011.

In closing I note that for the first quarter of 2011, enrolments across the vocational education and training system by students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was a third higher than for the same quarter in 2010, and that first quarter 2011 enrolments were at almost three-quarters of the full year 2009 enrolment levels. Similarly, enrolments by students with a disability was a third higher than 2010 levels. Overall, there has been growth of 31 per cent for the first quarter of 2011 in government-subsidised enrolments for students aged 15–64 years.

Higher education: multicultural communities

Raised with: Minister for Higher Education and Skills

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Maintaining access to Victoria's high quality vocational education and training (VET) system is a key priority for the Victorian government.

The government has already demonstrated this through the reintroduction of concession fee places for diploma and advanced diploma courses for students aged 15–24 enrolling to study at a TAFE institute. In addition, from 1 July 2011, we have increased the eligibility exemption pool for accessing government-subsidised training by \$10 million per annum for four years.

In line with our announcement on 4 May 2011, the comprehensive review of the VET fee and funding arrangements is well under way. This review will examine exactly such matters as the member has raised. It will give consideration to whether the current fee structure poses an unreasonable barrier to further education and training, obviously including those from emerging and multicultural communities.

The Essential Services Commission, who are undertaking the first stage of this work, released an issues paper on VET fees and funding on 25 May 2011. The issues paper has been prepared to assist interested individuals and organisations to prepare submissions and contribute to the review. Submissions will be received until the 24 June 2011. I understand that key multicultural education service providers are being consulted by the commission and I would encourage submissions from any other organisations or individuals with an interest in emerging or multicultural communities.

Victorians will also have the opportunity to have a say on the commission's findings when their report is released in August 2011. Forums will be held across the state to seek public feedback on the commission's findings and recommendations.

In closing it is important to note that for the first quarter of 2011, enrolments across the vocational education and training system by students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was a third higher than for the same quarter in 2010. Whilst the member has correctly identified the fact that enrolment levels have fallen for some individual providers, it is heartening to note that overall enrolment performance across the system is strong, with growth of 31 per cent for the first quarter of 2011 in government-subsidised enrolments for all students aged 15–64.

Agriculture: young farmers

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 25 May 2011, requesting that I write to the Australian government to recommend an Australian Young Farmer Competition, as a national competition similar to the current initiative run by the New Zealand Young Farmers group.

In 2010 the Kondinin Group and ABC Rural hosted the inaugural Australian Farmer of the Year Awards which included a Young Farmer of the Year category. I am advised that these awards are being run again this year and that the Young Farmer of the Year category is again being sponsored by the Australian government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Consequently, I do not feel it is necessary to write to the Australian government seeking support for another award program.

Thank you for your interest in the matter.

Reach Out for Kids Foundation: funding

Raised with: Minister for Gaming

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate you raised on 25 May 2011 for the Attorney-General. As this matter falls within the responsibilities of the Minister for Gaming, I am responding on behalf of the Attorney-General.

Reach Out for Kids Foundation (ROK) located in the Eastern Metropolitan Region is a small organisation that has been providing the generalist financial counselling service in the Whitehorse local government area.

ROK have identified that the small size of the organisation and its limited financial and human resources have led to challenges. These challenges have been predominantly related to sustainability and enhancement of services. In consideration of these challenges ROK has entered into an agreement to merge with Anglicare Victoria. This merger is planned to take place from 1 July 2011.

ROK is currently funded \$68 000 (excluding GST) to provide the generalist financial counselling service in the Whitehorse LGA.

As ROK have entered into a merger arrangement with Anglicare, I have approved the transfer of ROK's allocation to Anglicare Victoria. This will ensure that there is no disruption to generalist financial counselling services in Whitehorse.

Senior staff from the Department of Justice regional office are liaising with Anglicare and ROK to ensure that the service previously provided by ROK will be in place by 1 July 2011.

Manufacturing: job losses

Raised with: Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade

Raised by: Mr Somyurek

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

With manufacturing activity contributing more than \$30 billion in gross state product and employing over 300 000 people, the Baillieu government is committed to revitalising this key sector of the Victorian economy.

Since being appointed as Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, I have met with the owners and visited the operations of a wide range of manufacturing businesses, from multinational companies to small innovative start-ups, in order to gain an understanding of their capabilities and the issues they face. I have also undertaken a series of business roundtables across the state.

I continue to be impressed by the resilience of these businesses as they confront the real challenges posed by an appreciating exchange rate, import competition and technological change. Regrettably, in some instances such as those raised by Mr Somyurek, efforts by businesses to strengthen their long-term competitiveness have an adverse jobs impact. In these cases, government agencies are working together to support affected employees and assist the businesses to transition.

However, I am encouraged by the opportunities for future growth that many manufacturing businesses pursue, both in local and international markets. I recently had the pleasure of celebrating manufacturing excellence with the induction of 10 leading Victorian businesses into the Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame.

The government's strategic approach to manufacturing is about getting the basics right, backing local innovation and improving international competitiveness. To ensure that the government has the right policy settings in place, it has commissioned the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission to undertake a six-month inquiry that will inform the strategic direction of manufacturing.

Other assistance available to support the manufacturing sector includes:

- the 2011–12 state budget providing an additional \$5.8m over 4 years to the Industry Capability Network to develop opportunities for local industry to supply products and services and the allocation of \$12.4m over 4 years to the Export Victoria initiative to boost exports into new and emerging markets;

- supporting businesses that seek to enhance their competitiveness and capitalise on emerging global opportunities through the Competitive Business Fund; and
- providing \$1m per annum to the Victorian Centre for Advanced Materials Manufacturing to support small and medium sized manufacturers to undertake research and development and commercialise new technologies.

Floods: donation distribution

Raised with: Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr O'Brien

Raised on: 26 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the issue you raised in the Legislative Council regarding the distribution of donated funds to flood-affected Victorian communities and particularly in the Western Victoria Region.

The coalition government acknowledges the generous donation of \$1.17 million to the floods appeal which was raised through a major auction hosted by the German Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and presented by its chairman, Mr Lindsay Fox.

The government, local councils, community organisations and peak bodies have all been working together to obtain a clear picture of flood damage sustained and how best to address local needs. As part of this work, the Victorian Floods Appeal Fund is working closely with a number of government departments to identify potential suitable projects that the donation can support including opportunities in Victoria's western region.

Local councils in the Western Victoria region have so far shared \$1.3 million in funding provided across 26 flood-affected municipalities under the joint State/Commonwealth Floods Community Recovery Fund (Floods CRF). These councils include Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack. These councils are working with local community organisations and sports clubs to identify ways in which this funding can be used to restore damage to community facilities.

In addition, some sports organisations have also received support from the government. For example, through the Floods CRF, the Avoca Sporting and Recreation Committee of Management has received \$5000 to assist with rebuilding fences around the Avoca Recreation Reserve oval and perimeter.

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

Yan Yean Road: traffic management

Raised with: Minister for Planning

Raised by: Mr Ondarchie

Raised on: 26 May 2011

REPLY:

On 13 May 2011, I authorised the Hon. Terry Mulder MP, Minister for Roads to prepare Amendment C67 to the Nillumbik Planning Scheme to facilitate the Yan Yean Road duplication between Diamond Creek Road and Kurrak Road, Plenty, with conditions.

The duplication of the road will be an important link to serve the transport needs of the rapidly developing Plenty Valley growth area.

A planning scheme amendment is required to facilitate the road improvements by applying a public acquisition overlay to areas of the road alignment to ensure sufficient land is reserved for the proposed duplication. The effect of the amendment is to enable VicRoads to acquire land for the project and for project related works to not require planning permission if they are consistent with delivering the project.

I have requested VicRoads and Nillumbik Shire Council to work together to engage with the local community and resolve any outstanding issues.

Australian Paper: environmental accreditation

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 31 May 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised regarding Australian Paper's certification status during the adjournment debate of 31 May 2011.

As shadow minister, Mr Lenders should be ashamed to raise this matter because of the appalling way the former Labor government undermined the native forestry sector.

In particular I note the failure of the former Labor government to rehabilitate and regenerate an estimated 12 000 hectares of pre-2004 timber harvesting coupes. These were 12 000 hectares of forest coupes that were harvested seven years or longer ago, were the responsibility of the Department of Sustainability and Environment under the oversight of Labor Party ministers in the Bracks and Brumby governments and they have never been rehabilitated as they should have been.

The Labor government were the problem and now it falls on the Baillieu government and industry to pick up the pieces and fix the problem.

The Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and VicForests have worked closely with Australian Paper and the auditors assessing Australian Paper's compliance to the Forest Stewardship Council standard for controlled wood.

It is Victorian government policy to equally recognise third-party certification offered by the Australian Forestry Standard and the Forest Stewardship Council. VicForests currently supplies resources to Australian Paper under the Australian Forestry Standard, which is endorsed by the Program for Endorsement of Forest Certification, the world's largest forest certification scheme.

In continuing to work closely with Australian Paper, VicForests is committed to gaining Forest Stewardship Council certification and is working with the Forest Stewardship Council to achieve this goal.

Rail: North Shore station

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 31 May 2011

REPLY:

As part of the *Train Stations as Creative Community Hubs* pilot program, the government will deliver capital improvements and beautification works at North Shore railway station at an estimated cost of \$160 000. The

proposed works include landscaping, new bicycle parking, seating, re-surfacing of the car park and an art installation.

The government does not have any further plans to upgrade North Shore railway station at this time.

The Department of Transport (DOT), in conjunction with V/Line, monitors all station infrastructure on the network on a regular basis. Improvements are identified through a planning process and put forward on a prioritised basis for consideration in the normal funding cycles of government.

Rail: Shepparton service

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 31 May 2011

REPLY:

The government is aware of the significant interest from Shepparton residents and the wider Goulburn Valley community in the provision of additional V/Line passenger trains between Shepparton and Melbourne. Demand for rail travel is increasing along Victoria's other long-distance corridors (Warrnambool, Albury, Maryborough, Swan Hill, Ararat, Echuca and Bairnsdale) with record levels of patronage across the V/Line network.

There are currently three trains in each direction between Shepparton and Melbourne each weekday, and two each on Saturday and Sunday. This is comparable to the number of trips on the Albury, Ararat, Bairnsdale and Warrnambool lines.

I have requested that the Department of Transport (DOT), in association with V/Line, investigate how passenger trips may be increased in both the short and long term.

DOT and V/Line will need to consider the availability of suitable rolling stock, impacts on existing rail infrastructure, especially between Seymour and Shepparton, and the availability of train crews and other operational requirements.

The government will need to review the costs of any infrastructure requirements or changes, as well as the ongoing operating cost to deliver any extra trips. DOT will also provide me with advice on connecting road coaches to ensure that any proposals for increased trips benefit the wider region.

Regional and rural Victoria: electricity prices

Raised with: Minister for Bushfire Response

Raised by: Ms Broad

Raised on: 15 June 2011

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate you raised in relation to electricity prices.

Of the 67 recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, eight relate to electricity supply infrastructure (recommendations 27–34).

Electricity distribution businesses typically have regulated standard tariffs that recover costs evenly across small customers. No distribution business provides services to exclusively rural customers. Consequently the costs of distribution services are spread across a mix of metro and rural consumers.

In order to implement the recommendations of the commission, the previous government amended the Electricity (Bushfire Mitigation) Regulations to require increased inspection cycles for distribution assets in high bushfire risk areas, and ensure that only staff who have completed approved training courses undertake these inspections. Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) also directed distribution businesses to develop and implement a plan to fit line spreaders and vibration dampers to ensure all lines are compliant with the commission's recommendations by 2015.

On 24 February 2011 Powercor made an application for the pass through of additional costs to comply with these requirements, estimated at \$200 million over the remaining 4 years of the 5-year regulatory period. The pass through regime enables distribution network services providers to pass through costs to customers which occur during a regulatory control period. These costs were not anticipated or able to be estimated at the time the distribution determination relating to that regulatory control period was made.

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) decided not to approve Powercor's cost pass through application, finding that the new requirements could not be considered until after ESV has approved Powercor's plans to meet the requirements. The AER noted that it was open to Powercor to resubmit its application once the relevant plans are approved by ESV.

The AER has not yet made a determination as to whether the costs can be recovered over and above existing revenue, or over which electricity consumers they may be recovered.

The government has appointed an expert task force on powerline bushfire safety. The task force is consulting with the community, and will report back to government on the most cost-effective and equitable options for implementing the remaining recommendations of the royal commission.

The task force will also advise government on the best use of the \$50 million it has already pledged towards replacing the most dangerous electricity assets. These costs will not be met by electricity consumers.

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.

Thursday, 30 June 2011

Budget: Northern Victoria Region

Raised with: Treasurer

Raised by: Ms Broad

Raised on: 4 May 2011

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

All coalition government election commitments will be delivered in the government's first term.

Funding will be provided within the state budget from a range of sources including the Community Support Fund and other specific portfolio programs, including those in the education and transport portfolios.

Public transport: Western Metropolitan Region

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

The previous government's contract with Metro required the introduction of a new or 'Greenfields' timetable within 18 months of the commencement of Metro's franchise on 30 November 2009. There may have been costly commercial implications if the coalition government had declined to allow Metro to introduce this new timetable.

For the Werribee line, this meant an adjustment to the timing of Werribee and Laverton trains to provide additional peak train trips, including one additional V/Line train trip from Geelong.

In both the morning and afternoon peaks, trains now operate from Werribee every 11 minutes on average. During the off-peak, trains operate every 20 minutes, running express from Laverton to Newport, then through to Flinders Street and on to Frankston.

The Altona loop is now serviced by trains operating between Laverton and the city during peak periods. Having the trains originate at Laverton, rather than Werribee, provides a more reliable service to stations in the Altona loop, reducing the risk of late-running trains and consequent bypasses of the Altona loop, as well as increasing available capacity in the morning peak. To accommodate this change, the frequency of peak period trains to the Altona loop reduced from a train every 20 minutes to every 22 minutes. The introduction of Laverton services also enables all Werribee services to run express during the peak and inter-peak periods, improving journey times for passengers from the Werribee region.

During the off-peak period, a shuttle train operates on the Altona loop from Laverton to Newport and returns every 20 minutes. This change provides more reliable trains for the entire line, including the Altona loop, by more evenly

spacing Werribee trains, providing a consistent 10 minute off-peak frequency from Newport to the city. On the Williamstown line, trains now operate every 20 minutes during the off-peak.

The new timetable also improves the frequency of evening weekday trains departing Flinders Street between 7.35 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. to Altona and Werribee from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes. Early indications have shown an improvement to performance on the altered services.

Following the introduction of the timetable, punctuality on the Werribee line has improved from 68.4 per cent in April 2011 to 80.8 per cent for the month of May 2011.

Bypasses of the Altona loop have improved significantly from an average of 2.2 per cent from January to April 2011, to 0.9 per cent recorded in May 2011.

The coalition government has announced that the proposed upgrade of 20 premium stations will not proceed.

The government will instead focus on making the network safe again by deploying Victoria Police protective services officers at every railway station in metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres after 6.00 p.m., seven days a week. Additional Victoria Police officers will also patrol the train, tram and bus networks.

Ambulance services: subscriptions

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Elsbury

Raised on: 25 May 2011

REPLY:

- The Baillieu government has committed \$241.9 million over four years to provide more affordable access to ambulance services by halving the Ambulance Victoria membership subscription scheme fees to \$37.50 for singles and \$75 for families.
- This initiative is intended to contribute to reducing cost of living pressures for Victorians.
- The Victorian Auditor-General identified that demand for ambulance services is primarily driven by ‘population growth, the ageing population, increases in chronic disease and changes to the composition of households, with more people living alone.’ (October 2010).

Health: practitioner registration

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Ms Crozier

Raised on: 26 May 2011

REPLY:

I have looked into the issues raised by Ms Crozier on 26 May 2011 concerning the operation of the national registration and accreditation scheme, and specifically, how practitioners can be assured they are registered while their registration renewal application is being processed.

The shift to national registration has been confusing, particularly when the arrangements that practitioners are familiar with have changed and there have been delays in processing registration renewal applications.

The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Victoria) Act 2009* makes clear that a practitioner is registered and can continue to practise if their name appears on the relevant online register, even if the registration expiry date that appears against their name has passed.

Section 108 of the national law states that if a registered practitioner applies to renew their registration, their registration continues until the national board decides to either renew or refuse to renew the registration. To clarify the status of registration during the period when an application is being processed, a statement to this effect appears on the public register against the practitioner's name.

I am advised that the latest renewal during May of over 82,000 nurses and midwives is proceeding smoothly. As of 7 June, over 95 per cent of nurses and midwives have successfully renewed their registration, with several weeks remaining before the expiry of the one-month grace period.

Local government: rates

Raised with: Minister for Local Government

Raised by: Mr Ramsay

Raised on: 1 June 2011

REPLY:

Thank you for your question regarding annual budgets and rate increases. Under the *Local Government Act 1989* council are required to adopt their budget by 31 August each year. They are also required to give the public a right to make a submission on any proposal contained in the budget, including the level of rates to be raised in the budget.

As councillors are democratically elected to council it is their responsibility for making financial decisions, including the level of rates required, in accordance with their communities' needs.

If families or individuals are being challenged at the moment with ever-rising costs of living pressures, there are provisions available under the *Local Government Act 1989* which give a council discretion to defer payment or waive the whole or part of any rate or charge or interest for individuals or by class of ratepayers on the grounds of financial hardship.

I am committed to working with the local government sector as minister to seek productivity improvements and work with councils, where possible, to find ways to reduce costs of operations. It may be possible that where councils can reduce costs and establish greater levels of efficiency the pressure on rates could be reduced.

The Baillieu government has actioned its commitments to assist councils in reducing costs through the allocation of \$160 million for country roads and bridges. This provides for 40 rural councils to have access to up to \$1 million per year over the four year life of this initiative. 48 rural and regional councils will also be eligible for funding under the \$100 million Local Government Infrastructure Fund which is part of the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund.

I am also committed to continuing to work with the commonwealth government to see what can be done to address financial issues being faced by local government in Victoria.

Dental services: Western Metropolitan Region

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 1 June 2011

REPLY:

I direct the member to the reply on a similar adjournment debate raised by Mr Finn on 03 May 2011.

[Hansard reference: Legislative Council, 26 May 2011, page 1487]

Feral cats: control

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 16 June 2011

REPLY:

The Victorian government, along with other commonwealth and interstate agencies, is currently conducting a research program to develop an effective feral cat toxicant and baiting regime. Any moves to address feral cats in the interests of farmers will need access to such an effective management tool, which is currently not available.