

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

13 and 14 March 2012

(Extract from book 5)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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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, 13 March 2012

North–south pipeline: government policy

Raised with: Minister for Water

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 30 August 2011

REPLY:

Melbourne Water is responsible for the management of Melbourne's water supply and storages, including the Sugarloaf Reservoir.

Melbourne Water manages Melbourne's water supply and storages using a strategy which optimises water resources and utilises the most cost effective supply options available at any particular point in time. Melbourne Water has maintained the Sugarloaf Reservoir's water level in accordance with its annual operating plan. There has not been any water transferred through the north–south pipeline to the Sugarloaf Reservoir since October 2010.

Melbourne Water has maximised transfer of water from Maroondah Reservoir which has been spilling continuously and is the highest quality and lowest cost source water for Sugarloaf. Melbourne Water has also maximised water harvesting at Yering Gorge to take advantage of the high flows in the Yarra River.

The Melbourne water businesses are currently preparing a water-supply demand strategy which explores the most appropriate mix of actions to balance the supply and demand needs of Melbourne.

Hanging Rock: harvest picnic

Raised with: Minister for Tourism and Major Events

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 30 August 2011

REPLY:

I am pleased to report that when I visited the region on 29 September 2011, I announced that Tourism Victoria, through its events program, allocated \$6250 to assist with the tourism marketing of the 2012 event which was held in February 2012.

The Age Harvest Picnic at Hanging Rock is a weekend-long event that is managed by the Harvest Picnic Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation.

The festival continues to showcase the best of Victorian food and wine. Those attending are able to experience the farmers market, cooking demonstrations, and afternoon teas at various local wineries.

The event also provides Tourism Victoria and the industry with an opportunity to further cement Melbourne and regional Victoria's reputation as a leading food and wine destination.

The marketing strategy supported by Tourism Victoria included the development and distribution of brochures, exhibitor mail-outs, online marketing, social media, e-newsletters, advertising in the *Age* and metropolitan newspapers, competitions and public relations.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Drink driver education: accreditation standards

Raised with: Minister for Mental Health

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 31 August 2011

REPLY:

Section 49A of the Road Safety Act 1986 authorises the Secretary of the Department of Health to accredit agencies to conduct assessments on certain categories of drivers convicted of drink or drug driving. It also empowers the secretary to accredit driver education programs to help rehabilitate these drivers.

To support the role of the secretary in accrediting driver education programs under the Road Safety Act 1986, the Victorian Accredited Driver Education Program (VADEP) Advisory Committee was established. The committee comprises representatives from Victoria Police, VicRoads, the magistrates courts and the Department of Health.

The committee developed accreditation standards and procedures for drink driver and drug driver education programs in Victoria, which are set out in the VADEP *Drink Driver and Drug Driver Services — Standards and Resource Manual*. The manual facilitates fair and consistent decision making regarding accreditation pursuant to the Road Safety Act 1986 across Victoria.

According to the manual, an agency seeking accreditation is required to complete the accreditation application and check list. This includes the submission of a business case outlining the need for an agency to provide services in the location identified, as well as other necessary details. The requirement to provide a business case is intended to help ensure that there is consistency in the delivery of this important service across Victoria.

The Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (formerly the Trade Practices Act 1974) is commonwealth legislation that applies to all corporations and businesses operating in Australia. As such, the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 applies to agencies that may be accredited under the Road Safety Act 1986 only insofar as they also operate as a business, including in the provision of 'fee for service' driver education programs.

The Competition and Consumer Act 2010 does not apply to the Secretary of the Department of Health, nor the VADEP advisory committee, on the basis that they are not defined as corporations or businesses under the act. This means that the standards of accreditation, including the requirement to provide a business case, set out in the VADEP *Drink Driver and Drug Services — Standards and Resource Manual*, are not subject to the Competition and Consumer Act 2010.

I am advised that the requirement for an agency to meet the accreditation standards pursuant to the Road Safety Act 1986 does not preclude the agency from meeting its obligations under the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 as an operator of a private business.

Wine industry: smoke taint

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 27 October 2011

REPLY:

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for managing fire on public land. Together with the other fire agencies, DSE helps protect communities and the environment from damaging bushfires.

DSE is increasing the planned burning program on public land, taking every opportunity to undertake burns so the state is better prepared to deal with the threats posed by bushfire. Over 260 planned burns, totalling more than 38 000 ha, have already been undertaken so far this financial year.

A key issue in regard to planned burning is understanding the impact burning may have on the local residents and the local economy, including grape growers, and managing these impacts where possible. The optimal time for effective planned burning is generally in late summer or early autumn. Unfortunately, this coincides with key berry development phases during which grapes are most susceptible to smoke taint.

To date the preferred approach to assisting grape growers is to burn at times that the fruit is less vulnerable to smoke taint. To do this, DSE North West regional staff have been working with the Pyrenees shire and grape growers to undertake our planned burning during spring and later in autumn when harvesting has been completed. This approach is also occurring in other grape growing areas across the state.

I am pleased to advise that favourable weather conditions in spring 2011 permitted DSE and Parks Victoria staff to undertake over 50 planned burns in central Victoria, including two important burns at Moonambel and Stuart Mill, which are north of the Pyrenees wineries. DSE staff were also hopeful of undertaking an additional 500 ha planned burn in the Pyrenees Ranges in spring, but unfortunately unfavourable weather conditions resulted in this burn being unable to be completed as planned.

Smoke from bushfires also impacts grapes and wine production varying with the intensity and duration of the fire and smoke events.

To help address the risks of smoke taint, the Victorian government funded the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to lead a project involving land managers and the grape and wine industry as part of a national initiative. Project priorities include:

- increasing the understanding of how smoke affects wine composition;
- exploring strategies to manage and reduce the uptake of smoke taint compounds;
- examining varietal differences in the accumulation of smoke taint compounds;
- identifying critical periods in grape berry development when grapevines are more susceptible to uptake of smoke taint compounds and identifying a calendar for planned burning;
- developing and evaluating a risk assessment tool to enable the grape and wine industry, and fire and land managers to determine windows of opportunity for controlled burning based on varietal sensitivity and grapevine developmental stage; and
- communicating activities and results with industry.

DPI staff are undertaking experiments involving exposing fruit to smoke in laboratory conditions and experiments will be undertaken using fruit sourced from vineyards exposed to smoke from planned burns and bushfires if the opportunity arises.

The new research has identified more than 20 chemicals that could contribute to the flavours in wine being affected by smoke taint. A method has been developed to detect reserve smoke taint which is only released during fermentation and as the bottled wine ages. This breakthrough will give producers a better idea of whether their grapes have been tainted and will help avoid future losses.

Stevensons Road, Cranbourne: landfill site

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 9 November 2011

REPLY:

I thank the member for raising the matter of remediation of the Stevensons Road, Cranbourne landfill site.

I am pleased that this matter has been resolved, fulfilling the Victorian coalition government's commitment to provide \$24 million in funding to assist the City of Casey with site remediation costs. I understand that the first instalment of \$6 million was paid to the City of Casey on 17 November 2011.

The member has acknowledged in her adjournment debate the valuable contribution of those actively involved in finalising the remediation agreement. I support the member's comments in that regard. In addition, I acknowledge the proactive work of the member, both within and outside of the Parliament, that has contributed to a positive outcome for the Brookland Greens and wider Casey communities.

The state government will continue to work with the City of Casey to ensure that the closed landfill is effectively managed into the future.

I would be happy to consider any invitation from the City of Casey to receive a briefing on the progress of remediation works.

Port Melbourne Primary School: enrolments

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 7 February 2012

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

A Department of Education and Early Childhood Development demographic study of government school requirements in the Port Phillip municipality was completed in November 2010. The department is currently undertaking two feasibility studies to assess the future need and viability of potential government primary school locations in the Port Melbourne area (also taking into account South Melbourne, Southbank and Fishermans Bend), and the Docklands/North Melbourne area (also taking into account West Melbourne).

Wangaratta: livestock theft

Raised with: Minister for Water

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 7 February 2012

REPLY:

I am informed that, under direction 4.5.4 of the standing directions of the Minister for Finance, North East Water reported actual and suspected thefts for the period ending 30 June 2011. This included two incidents of sheep being stolen from North East Water land. The sheep are grazed on pasture produced as part of North East Water's efforts to reuse wastewater from its treatment plants.

The sheep are traded by North East Water and typically generate returns between \$100 000 and \$150 000 per year — that is, the sheep have a positive benefit for North East Water. Given the value of the sheep stolen, the sheep trading practices by North East Water still returned a positive benefit to the water corporation for the last financial year and therefore, customer bills were not negatively impacted as a result of the thefts.

North East Water has instituted improved security measures and will continue to monitor livestock numbers. However, double fencing the property which is probably the most effective means to prevent further thefts, is currently cost prohibitive and would likely impact on North East Water customers' bills.

Victorian certificate of applied learning: funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Ms Broad

Raised on: 8 February 2012

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

In 2011 more than 20 700 Victorian students undertook VCAL with 440 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.

When VCAL was introduced in 2003, VCAL coordination funding included program planning and development funding for new VCAL providers to help establish the certificate. This support was later removed from the VCAL coordination funding by the previous Labor government. After nine years VCAL is a well-established senior secondary certificate in Victoria.

VCAL will continue to be funded through the student resource package (SRP) like the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) and VCE, which do not receive additional funding for coordination. In 2011 SRP funding supported an 11.9 per cent increase in the number of students undertaking the VCAL from 2010.

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 and assist in developing curriculum resources and coordinating structured workplace learning placements. The VCAA assists new VCAL providers to develop, plan and implement VCAL programs as part of its quality assurance support.

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 in 2011, 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.

Road safety: Road User or Abuser campaign

Raised with: Minister for Roads

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 8 February 2012

REPLY:

The Victorian government launched the cycling safety campaign on 6 February 2012. The campaign is aimed at improving the relationship between bike riders and drivers.

The objectives of the new campaign are to:

- foster positive and mutual respect between road users;
- clarify cycling-related road rules for all road users; and
- encourage drivers to treat bike riders as legitimate road users and share the road with bike riders safely.

The campaign is an online social media campaign based on Facebook. Members of the community are invited to take part in the campaign by joining the discussion, answering poll questions, taking an informative and entertaining quiz and watching a 45-second video which poses the question ‘Why do we act differently on the road?’.

Over the first week many people have taken part in the campaign, joining the online discussion, taking the quiz and watching the video. After one week of the campaign, the activity highlights are:

- 773 people like the Facebook page;
- 922 people are talking about this page;
- 1138 uses of the quiz;
- quiz users are 63 per cent male, 335 female; and
- 2522 views of the video.

When the six-week campaign is over, VicRoads intends to prepare a report on the common themes that have been raised and discuss how the government, VicRoads and cycling stakeholders can consider the suggestions.

Public transport: Box Hill interchange

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 8 February 2012

REPLY:

Box Hill is one of the busiest transport interchanges outside the CBD. However, the existing bus interchange has a number of amenity and design issues that should be addressed to bring the bus interchange up to modern standards and improved passenger comfort.

The Department of Transport has been working with the City of Whitehorse, the Department of Planning and Community Development and Centro to develop a range of options for the future development of the interchange.

Customer surveys and focus group work are currently under way in and around Box Hill station to identify how the community perceives the bus interchange.

These perceptions surveys will assist in developing potential options to upgrade the bus interchange to ensure that any investment is targeting the issues faced by users.

The Department of Transport, the City of Whitehorse and the Department of Planning and Community Development have also developed an overarching access and mobility plan to support growth and better integrate all transport modes in Box Hill.

While the short-term focus is on identifying priority improvements to the bus interchange, the Department of Transport and the City of Whitehorse will continue to investigate all transport needs and develop them as part of a longer term, integrated strategy.

Rabbits: control

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 8 February 2012

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the in the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 8 February 2012 regarding the rabbit plague.

This government takes the threat and impact of rabbits across regional Victoria very seriously.

Rabbits are not at plague proportions across the state. Data held by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) from 17 long-term monitoring sites across Victoria indicates rabbit numbers are starting to increase from a 15-year low at some sites. Initial analysis of the 2011 spring rabbit program indicates increases in both rabbit numbers and active warrens.

DPI is implementing 20 rabbit projects across Victoria in 2011–12 as part of the improved enforcement approach to weeds and pests. These projects will see over 1000 property inspections undertaken by DPI authorised officers with the aim of establishing over 180 000 hectares of land under long-term rabbit control.

DPI is currently delivering two rabbit compliance projects in the Mallee catchment management authority (CMA) region in 2011–12 at Berriwillock (targeting 120 properties over 36 800 hectares) and Manangatang (targeting 61 properties over 60 100 hectares).

These projects have been discussed and agreed with the Mallee CMA as part of an annual planning process DPI undertakes with the CMA to identify priority areas for rabbit control in the region.

A further rabbit compliance project in the central Mallee area (targeting 150 properties over 81 685 hectares) is under consideration for implementation in 2012–13.

Within the Mallee region the shires of Buloke and Yarriambiack have also been funded approximately \$82 500 and \$42 000 respectively in recent years through DPI's Future Farming initiative Building the Capacity of Local Government grant program to control rabbits on roadsides to support local community action.

The Mallee CMA is currently recruiting four Landcare facilitators to work with local communities on rabbits, weeds and other issues. Landcare groups also have access to one state-based and one federal-based Landcare facilitator to assist with extension work with local land-holders on rabbit control.

In line with the government's improved enforcement approach to weeds and pests, provision exists for DPI to consider undertaking compliance projects in the Mallee region in future years in support of sustained community-led action on rabbits.

Provision of technical advice by DPI to Landcare groups on best practice management techniques for controlling rabbits is also available at any time.

Liquor licensing: live music venues

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 8 February 2012

REPLY:

The government recognises that live music is an important part of the social and cultural fabric of Victoria, and that live music provides a considerable economic benefit for the state with many people employed directly or indirectly in the industry.

Under the previous Labor government, little-used licensing conditions were used on a one-size-fits-all basis to require live music venues to hire extra security guards for performances. This was applied with no genuine assessment of risk, such that cafes had to pay for security if they had musicians serenading diners. The increased costs from this blanket policy forced iconic live music venues to close, while other venues stopped having live performances or passed on the costs to customers.

In order to ensure that the contribution of live music to the Victorian economy and culture was appropriately recognised, the government has implemented a range of commitments from the 2010 state election to support live music.

The government has already amended the objects of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 to formally recognise the contribution live music makes to Victoria's hospitality industry and the wider community and to ensure that live music is an ongoing consideration in relation to all liquor licensing decisions. This amendment commenced operation earlier this year.

Additionally, the government has implemented its commitment to stop Labor's harmful one-size-fits-all policy that threatened Victoria's standing as a social and cultural hub for live music.

The live music round table will be established in the near future to discuss a range of liquor licensing issues involving live music. I plan to invite representatives from the music industry, licensees of live music venues, local councils, Victoria Police and government agencies to participate in the round table.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Dairy industry: government initiatives

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

Raised by: Mr O'Brien

Raised on: 9 February 2012

REPLY:

I refer to the question you raised during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 9 February 2012, concerning the role of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in supporting the Victorian dairy industry and your invitation to speak with south-west Victorian dairy farmers at the Sungold Field Days.

It was a pleasure to visit this year's Sungold Field Days event and speak with dairy farmers and their families and I enjoyed the hospitality of the south-west Victorian dairy industry.

In relation to DPI's role in supporting the dairy industry, DPI has consistently provided a wide range of services to the dairy industry over many years. Recent developments in the coordination of national research, development and extension (RD&E) under the national RD&E framework has made its role even more significant.

The national RD&E framework aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the national primary industries RD&E effort by avoiding duplication, promoting collaboration and focusing on national priorities.

With almost 70 per cent of the national dairy industry located in Victoria, DPI has accepted a national leadership role under the framework for providing dairy RD&E services to the Australian dairy industry.

The Victorian government has invested strongly in DPI to support this growing national role in dairy RD&E, with around \$22 million provided for dairy specific RD&E and a further \$50 million provided for RD&E related to cross industry issues.

In taking on this leadership role, it has been important for DPI to work in close partnership with Dairy Australia and other significant dairy industry co-investors, such as the Geoffrey Gardiner Dairy Foundation.

This collaboration under the national framework has built upon existing relationships between DPI and the industry. These relationships were vital in delivering other joint government/industry initiatives, such as the building of state of the art dairy research and development facilities at Ellinbank and the development of the Dairy Futures Cooperative Research Centre.

The Dairy Futures Cooperative Research Centre is a large scale partnership between the Victorian government, Dairy Australia, the dairy industry, pasture and cattle breeding companies and researchers. It is applying advanced genetic technologies to improve the performance of pastures and dairy cattle and has the potential to deliver significant real world gains for dairy farmers.

In addition to its RD&E services, DPI also undertakes regulatory and emergency management roles which assist the dairy industry. DPI's service offer is divided into 11 key areas:

- supporting productivity growth through improved feed base management;
- supporting productivity growth through improved animal management;
- supporting dairy farm business management;
- irrigation farm water use efficiency and water savings;
- dryland farm water use;
- sustaining natural resources;

- adaptation to a changing climate;
- animal welfare research, advice and regulation;
- animal health and minimising disruptions to market access;
- minimising the threat of introduction and spread of invasive plants and animals; and
- supporting dairy farmers to prepare for, and recover from, natural disaster emergencies.

Further information on each of these priority areas is provided in DPI Services to Dairy Farmers document. I encourage you to access this document on the DPI website and learn more about what the Victorian government is doing to support its largest rural industry. It can be accessed at:
<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/dairy/dpi-services-to-dairy-farmers>.

Technology: national broadband network

Raised with: Minister for Technology

Raised by: Mr Ramsay

Raised on: 9 February 2012

REPLY:

The establishment of new telecommunications infrastructure can be a sensitive issue. The Victorian government is aware of this but also understands the importance of high speed broadband for quality of life and economic development in Victoria.

The Victorian government believes that NBN Co has a responsibility, which it must meet, to ensure that community concerns are dealt with properly. The Ballarat area is one of the first release sites where NBN Co proposes to deliver wireless broadband to up to 12 000 premises.

In this instance, while NBN Co has stated a strong preference to co-locate its infrastructure on existing towers wherever possible, they have indicated that up to 22 new towers will be required in this area. These towers will spread over five local government areas — Pyrenees, Moorabool, Hepburn, Golden Plains and Ballarat.

I understand that 18 applications for new towers have so far been received by the relevant councils and each council will assess these applications in relation to the principles established under the Victorian telecommunications code of practice and their local planning scheme. Following council decisions, applicants and/or objectors have recourse to the standard Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal appeal processes.

The Victorian government believes that there must be an appropriate balance between the economic and social benefits for communities of broadband and the need for sensitivity to the impact of that infrastructure on communities. The current process requires that this balance is first considered at the local level by way of an application to the relevant local council.

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

Schools: Modern Greek language programs**Raised with: Minister for Education****Raised by: Ms Mikakos****Raised on: 28 February 2012****REPLY:**

I am informed as follows:

The member has confused and combined two distinct initiatives that are part of the Baillieu government's strategy to improve and extend languages education following the significant decline in the number of schools teaching, and students learning, languages, including Modern Greek, over the last decade.

In August 2011 the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development commissioned the University of Melbourne to deliver a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) credit-bearing training course for qualified language teachers. CLIL methodology, which is widely used in Europe, is a dual focused language teaching approach in which subjects such as science or history are taught in and through the target language. Thirty teachers, representing nine languages, including one teacher of Modern Greek, participated in this course. Regrettably, the teacher of Modern Greek did not complete the course. Two additional CLIL credit-bearing courses will be offered in 2012 and all qualified languages teachers, including teachers of Modern Greek, will be eligible to apply.

The 18-month Innovative Languages Provision in Clusters (ILPIC) pilot was initiated in July 2011 to enable clusters of schools to trial strategies to improve the quality and continuity of their languages provision. Clusters of schools were invited to apply and 14 clusters involving 102 schools were selected to participate. A total of seven languages are being supported through this initiative. No cluster applications proposed to include Modern Greek as one of their focus languages. The ILPIC initiative is being evaluated and its findings will assist all schools, including schools which teach Modern Greek, to develop effective strategies to support, improve and provide continuity of languages learning for their students.

The Baillieu government believes all languages are important. Schools and clusters of schools, together with their communities, are best placed to make decisions about the languages to be taught and how to implement, extend and improve their languages programs based on their local knowledge, resources, expertise and partnerships in the school and with the broader community.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

Higher education: TAFE funding

Raised with: Minister for Higher Education and Skills

Raised by: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 9 February 2012

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The Victorian government is strongly committed to investing in skills and training, and to maintaining a high-quality vocational education and training (VET) system in Victoria.

Reforms introducing a training entitlement began in 2009, and came into full effect on 1 January 2011. During this period, demand for training has been extremely strong. Over 425 000 individual students undertook government subsidised training in 2011, representing a 44 per cent increase on the 295 000 students who enrolled in 2008 — before the reforms started.

To support this unprecedented growth, the Victorian government made a record investment of around \$1.2 billion in vocational training in 2011. This is around \$400 million more than before skills reform commenced. While growth in delivery and revenue at TAFE institutes has varied, there has been a 4 per cent growth in government-subsidised enrolments at TAFEs from 2008 to 2011.

The government undertook a review of fee and funding arrangements in 2011 to make sure that a solid structure is put in place to meet the growing demand on the VET sector, to manage costs responsibly, and to create a more competitive, effective and affordable system. Certain changes have since been made to manage the impact of recent strong growth. The government will be making further announcements in response to the review in the coming months.

The Victorian government strongly believes that Victoria's TAFEs are vital public bodies that make a significant contribution to the community as well as being a critical part of the training system.

Higher education: TAFE funding

Raised with: Minister for Higher Education and Skills

Raised by: Ms Mikakos

Raised on: 9 February 2012

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The government is strongly committed to investing in skills and training, and to maintaining a high-quality vocational education and training (VET) system in Victoria.

Reforms to the VET system, including the introduction of a training entitlement, began in 2009 and came into full effect on 1 January 2011.

Demand for training has been extremely strong. Over 425 000 individual students undertook government subsidised training in 2011, representing a 44 per cent increase on the 295 000 students who enrolled in 2008. Increasing student participation was a key driver of the move to a demand driven and contestable VET system.

To support this unprecedented growth, the Victorian government made a record investment of around \$1.2 billion in vocational training in 2011. This is around \$400 million more than before skills reform commenced.

While growth in delivery and revenue at TAFE institutes has varied, there has been a 4 per cent growth in government subsidised enrolments at TAFEs from 2008 to 2011.

There has been a significant increase in access to training, enabled by the growth in the number of non-TAFE training providers that can offer government subsidised training. This gives students a much greater choice of where and when they study.

The government undertook a review of fee and funding arrangements in 2011 to make sure that a solid structure is put in place to meet the growing demand on the VET sector, to manage costs responsibly, and to create a more competitive, effective and affordable system. Certain changes have been made, post that review, to manage the impact of recent strong growth to ensure the system's affordability. The government will be making further announcements in response to the review in the coming months.

TAFE institutes in Victoria are independent statutory authorities. They are responsible for all decisions relating to their workforces and employment matters. In some cases, I am informed that TAFEs are making decisions to redirect staffing to different areas of business in response to changes in choices being made by students.

The Victorian government strongly believes that Victoria's TAFEs are vital public bodies that make a significant contribution to the community as well as being a critical part of the training system.

Young people and regional Victoria remain top priorities for the government.

More unemployed young people aged 15 to 24 years are gaining access to the Victorian training system. The total number of government-funded enrolments by unemployed young people has increased across all Victorian regions achieving almost 58 000 enrolments at the end of 2011, double the number of enrolments in 2008 and 38 per cent higher than in 2010.

The government has re-introduced concession places for health care card holders aged 15–24 who are studying a diploma or advanced diploma course at a TAFE institute. The reintroduction of concession fees has helped remove some financial barriers to education and training for many young Victorians. Eligible students currently pay only \$100 per year in tuition fees.

The policy's targeting reflects the fact that young people continue to be under-represented in Victoria's education and labour market with around 17 per cent of 15–19 year olds and almost a quarter of 20–24 year olds not engaged in full-time education or employment.

In July 2011 the government launched the \$20 million Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund (RPF), an initiative to support tertiary education institutions develop and deliver higher education programs and pathway programs in regional Victoria.

The RPF program was developed to address significantly lower rates of higher education participation and attainment in regional Victoria when compared to metropolitan areas.

Eight projects have been awarded \$11.6 million in funding in the first of two funding rounds. Many hundred enrolments will occur as a direct result of the RPF program, and the projects it supports.

The Gippsland Education Plan has made a number of innovative recommendations to improve access and participation in tertiary education by residents in Gippsland. The report will also play an important role in addressing similar educational needs in other regional areas.

The government is considering its recommendations and will respond shortly.

Rail: Doncaster

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 9 February 2012

REPLY:

For many decades, there has been strong community support for an extension of rail to Doncaster. The coalition government is clearly delivering on its commitment to plan for the delivery of rail to Doncaster, and it allocated \$6.5 million in support of this work in the 2011–12 state budget.

A consortium was appointed in October 2011 to carry out the Doncaster rail study and their terms of reference are clear. Part of this task is to determine what would be feasible to construct from an engineering perspective and to provide recommendations to government.