

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Tuesday, 5 August 2014

(Extract from book 10)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Honourable ALEX CHERNOV, AC, QC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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(from 17 March 2014)

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Procedure Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr D. Davis, Mr Drum, #Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney

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Economy and Infrastructure References Committee — Mr Barber, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Finn, #Mr Leane, Mr Lenders, Mr Melhem, Mr D. D O'Brien, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford and Mr Ramsay.

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Dalla-Riva, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, #Mr Leane, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Peulich, Mr Ronalds, Mr Scheffer, #Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

Environment and Planning References Committee — Mr Dalla-Riva, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, #Mr Leane, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Peulich, Mr Ronalds, Mr Scheffer, #Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

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

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Coote. (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr Madden, Mrs Powell and Ms Ryall.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*) Mr Eideh, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr D. R. J. O'Brien and Mrs Peulich. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Blackwood, Ms Campbell, Ms Thomson, Mr Wakeling and Mr Weller.

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Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Mr Scheffer. (*Assembly*): Mr Carroll, Mr McCurdy and Mr Southwick.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. R. J. O'Brien and Mr Ondarchie. (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Ms Garrett, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula and Mr Scott.

Road Safety Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elsbury. (*Assembly*): Mr Languiller, Mr Perera, Mr Tilley and Mr Thompson.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. R. J. O'Brien. (*Assembly*): Mr Howard, Mr Katos, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller.

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Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. P. R. HALL (to 17 March 2013)

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (from 17 March 2013)

Mr D. K. DRUM (to 17 March 2013)

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Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Millar, Mrs Amanda Louise ⁴	Northern Victoria	LP
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Leanders, Mr John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Lewis, Ms Margaret ¹⁰	Northern Victoria	ALP			

¹ Resigned 26 March 2013

² Appointed 8 May 2013

³ Resigned 1 July 2013

⁴ Appointed 21 August 2013

⁵ Resigned 3 February 2014

⁶ Appointed 5 February 2014

⁷ Resigned 17 March 2014

⁸ Appointed 26 March 2014

⁹ Resigned 9 May 2014

¹⁰ Appointed 11 June 2014

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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, 5 August 2014

Port of Hastings development

Raised with: Ports

Raised by: Mr Lenders

Raised on: 17 September 2013

REPLY:

The Victorian government has committed to developing the Port of Hastings as a second container port in Victoria to complement the Port of Melbourne in catering for the growth of container movements in and out of the state.

The previous Labor government did not make any decisions to invest to cater for the forecast increased container trade coming to Melbourne. This inaction would have severely compromised the capacity for the state to continue as the freight and logistics capital of Australia. Without other container port options, Victoria would lose trade that would never be recovered, seriously impacting negatively on our economy.

The state government has allocated \$110 million to the Port of Hastings Development Authority (PoHDA) to progress essential investigations and planning work required for development to proceed at the Port of Hastings. Planning work covering the economic, social and environmental issues, including transport connections planning, associated with the development will be detailed and take a number of years to complete.

The commitment to the expansion of the Port of Hastings has been welcomed emphatically by the communities of South-East Melbourne. An example is the recent media release, issued by the South-East Metro Councils, showing their support for Port of Hastings. Spokesperson for South-East Metro Councils, Cr Sam Aziz, has called on the member for Narre Warren North, the member for Narre Warren South, the member for Cranbourne and the member for Dandenong to 'stand up and advocate for the development of the Port of Hastings and the thousands of jobs that it would attract to the region'. Cr Aziz also called on the Leader of the Opposition 'to abandon the flawed Bay West policy and to support the development of the Port of Hastings'.

Upon completion of all the relevant planning work, PoHDA will be able to address issues on an informed basis—this will include forecasts of additional freight on the Dandenong Line.

I note that the removal of level crossings at Murrumbeena Road and Koornang Road have been funded as part of the Cranbourne-Pakenham Rail Corridor Project. I also note that planning works for removal of the level crossing at Grange Road and Poath Road have also been funded as part of this project. Removal of these level crossings will mean that there will be no blocked access, because of boom gates, from Bentleigh and East Bentleigh to the north along these four roads.

Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital aged-care facilities**Raised with: Health****Raised by: Ms Tierney****Raised on: 12 March 2014****REPLY:**

During Labor's 11 years in government, they chose not to fund the Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital aged care facilities. Labor believe the community's needs were not important. Ms Tierney, elected in 2006 also chose to stay silent on Edenhope, for almost eight years till now.

I can advise that a review process of the master plan for Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital has been completed. This will inform staging options for its redevelopment, and guide the health service's asset development strategy over the medium to longer term.

I can assure the community of Edenhope and surrounding districts that the delivery of the most suitable range of health services in appropriately designed facilities is of the paramount importance to the coalition government.

Freeway noise barriers**Raised with: Roads****Raised by: Mr Tee****Raised on: 27 March 2014****REPLY:**

VicRoads advises me that it has been discussing the two traffic noise attenuation trials with Boroondara City Council officers. In mid-2013, VicRoads wrote to residents adjacent to the Monash Freeway to provide a summary of the results of the Monash Freeway trial. VicRoads formally wrote to the council on 16 July 2014 and provided the full evaluation report of the noise attenuation trials on the Monash and Eastern Freeways. VicRoads will continue to work closely with the council on this important matter.

Craigieburn conservation area**Raised with: Planning****Raised by: Mr Ondarchie****Raised on: 6 May 2014****REPLY:**

Mr Ondarchie, MP, member for Northern Metropolitan, has sought my view on Craigieburn Conservation Area 34, which is identified in the Victorian state government's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

This conservation area has been created to protect habitat for the federally listed Growling Grass Frog under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The boundary of this area was determined through a combination of surveys, habitat modelling, population modelling and expert review and analysis. Residents were given an opportunity to comment on the habitat corridor in 2011 when the Growth Corridor Plans were prepared.

The Hon. Greg Hunt, MP, the former commonwealth Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Water, has approved all actions associated with urban development in Melbourne's northern growth corridor in the expanded 2010 urban growth boundary in August 2013, including areas that could potentially threaten matters of national

environmental significance, so long as the conservation areas identified in the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy are preserved.

While the conservation area will be designated as unsuitable for urban development, affected landowners will continue to have existing use rights. This means that landowners can continue their existing use of the land. Land will only be secured for conservation where landowners wish to further develop their properties.

The boundary of Craigieburn Conservation Area 34 may be varied slightly if necessary at the precinct structure planning stage to account for site-specific issues so long as there is no net loss in habitat for the Growling Grass Frog. This is subject to agreement by the Hon. Ryan Smith, MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

I draw attention to initiative 5.2.1 of the Naphthine coalition government's Metropolitan Planning Strategy, Plan Melbourne, which commits to undertaking an evidence-based review of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy in the medium term. This initiative will ensure that Victoria's natural assets are protected.

I understand that the Metropolitan Planning Authority and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries have also been working to address the issues facing landowners through the precinct structure planning process. I am in regular contact with Mr Ondarchie, MP, and continue to listen to the issues that Mr Ondarchie, MP, wishes to raise with me on behalf of Craigieburn residents and landowners.

Family violence

Raised with: Community Services

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 8 May 2014

REPLY:

Violence against women and children is unacceptable in any form, under any circumstances in any community in Victoria.

Responding to family violence is a key priority of the Victorian coalition government. Our vision is for women and children to live free from violence in Victoria.

This commitment is being implemented through Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children — Everyone Has a Responsibility to Act 2012–2015 (action plan). The action plan engages with a range of Victorian government agencies and is being implemented through partnerships with community sector organisations alongside broader reforms to legal, police and court processes.

The recent funding announcements have boosted this government's investment to over \$100 million in 2014–15 for initiatives in prevention, early intervention and response.

The 2014–15 state budget provides \$22.7 million over four years, which includes new investment to continue the Strengthening Risk Management program (the RAMPs); extending the risk assessment and management training, and increasing sexual assault service responses.

Also included in this package is funding for family violence responses to be delivered through the National Partnerships Agreement — Homelessness.

On 30 May the Premier and I announced a further \$30 million package for community services to:

- Further expand statewide the successful Strengthening Risk Management program that brings together police, the courts, family violence and family services to keep women and children safe and hold dangerous perpetrators to account.
- Fast-track support for women and children who have experienced family violence through an enhanced but streamlined response to police reports and referrals.

- Expand case management and practical support for women and children fleeing violence.
- Evaluate our family violence initiatives, including perpetrator interventions, to ensure their effectiveness.

We also believe it is important to address the underlying causes of violence against women and children and prevent violence before it occurs.

Primary prevention is the key to laying the foundations to challenge and change attitudes and behaviours which excuse or condone violence against women and their children.

That is why we will continue to support the National Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children, with a further \$3 million over three years, taking the Victorian government's total investment in the foundation to \$6.4 million.

Our action plan takes a direct approach to addressing violence against women and children and contains a practical actions in prevention, early intervention and response so that our long-term vision of women and children living free from violence in Victoria can become a reality.

Workplace safety

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 8 May 2014

REPLY:

The Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) is tasked with the responsibilities of undertaking activities to prevent workplace accidents from occurring, ensuring appropriate access to compensation for any persons injured while on the job and providing services to help injured workers return to work. These objectives are pursued by the VWA by working with employers and workers.

Prosecution is one of many regulatory tools used by the VWA to promote compliance with Victoria's health and safety laws and to prevent workplace and work-related deaths, injuries and disease.

The VWA publishes prosecution results on its website and in its annual report, and provides regular updates to key stakeholder groups through the advisory and stakeholder reference forums it convenes.

In relation to your concerns about WorkCover advertising campaigns, I can confirm the VWA continues to work collaboratively with Victorian employers and workers to drive behavioural change in workplaces. A number of strategies, such as providing education and information, targeted public awareness campaigns, and inspections of high-risk industries have all played a role in reducing the number of workplace injuries in Victoria.

In 2012–13 Victoria recorded its safest year on record, with 7.72 workplace injury claims per million hours worked. In the six months to 31 December 2013, injury rates declined further to 7.51 claims per million hours worked. Since the end of 2011–12, injury rates have declined by an overall 8.7 per cent, maintaining Victoria's place as the safest state in which to work.

As part of a proactive approach to improve workplace safety outcomes and safe return to work, the VWA delivers high quality public awareness and behaviour change campaigns to help prevent workplace injuries and educate employers and workers about their compensation rights and obligations. In 2014–15, the VWA will deliver a range of broad-based and targeted awareness campaigns that include public safety messages.

National sex offenders register**Raised with: Premier****Raised by: Mr Ondarchie****Raised on: 27 May 2014****REPLY:**

I refer to the matter raised regarding the establishment of a national public sex offender register, following a petition started by Mr Derryn Hinch. I thank Mr Hinch for his activism within the Victorian community.

I would also like to acknowledge the victims of sex offenders, and their families, who joined Mr Hinch on his 'Jail 2 Justice' walk in May of this year. The courage and resilience displayed by these individuals is truly remarkable.

Victoria has a range of measures currently available to protect vulnerable members of our community, including a sex offender register. Sex offenders who present an unacceptable risk to the community can be subject to strict and ongoing supervision at the completion of their custodial sentence. Sex offenders are also obliged to provide information about changes in their living circumstances to Victoria Police, so that the police are aware of their movements.

I am aware that details about sex offenders are published in other jurisdictions, including in the United States. The current evidence does not suggest that a public register reduces offending and as such the government has no plans to make public the details held on the Victorian register. We will continually monitor the efficacy of the strong measures we already have in place and pursue changes where there is evidence to suggest that offending will be reduced.

The Victorian coalition government is committed to building a better, safer Victoria. The rollout of 1700 additional police officers and 940 protective services officers is on track, which represents the single largest law and order recruitment exercise in Victoria's history. Suspended sentences have been abolished for sexual offences, ensuring that offenders cannot commit a crime and escape punishment. The government's parole reforms have delivered the toughest parole regime in Australia and strengthened oversight of sexual offenders.

The Victorian coalition government is committed to sending the message that respect for the law is of paramount importance in our community.

Latrobe Valley coal resources**Raised with: Energy and Resources****Raised by: Mr Scheffer****Raised on: 27 May 2014****REPLY:**

The Advanced Lignite Demonstration Program (ALDP) is part of a long-term strategy to secure the future of the Latrobe Valley and to foster new industries and create new jobs.

The ALDP is designed to prove new coal technologies at a large demonstration scale that will produce high value energy products that are valuable to the world market and establish a new export based industry in the Latrobe Valley.

Brown coal faces challenges, so we now need to find new smarter and cleaner ways of using the Latrobe Valley's vast coal reserves.

The ALDP is designed to accelerate development and deployment of technologies to drive new industries and make a significant economic contribution to the state.

If these technologies can be successfully commercially deployed, we can unlock the value of this huge resource for the benefit of all Victorians and create jobs and investment in the Latrobe Valley.

Applications for funding under the ALDP were carefully and extensively evaluated by an independent panel of national and international experts, assisted by technical experts.

As well as assessing the technical capacity of the proponents and projects, the panel assessed the proponents' financial position and ability to raise capital in order to identify projects with the highest potential for commercialisation which therefore would lead to ongoing sustainable jobs.

Based on this thorough and robust assessment of applications the Federal Minister for Industry, Ian Macfarlane and I had recently announced a total of \$75 million of ALDP grant funding to three projects.

Coal Energy Australia has been granted \$30 million for the development of a \$143 million demonstration plant producing fertilizer, pyrolysis oil and high value char used in steelmaking. The company estimates that the project will create up to 200 jobs in the construction phase and 130 ongoing jobs in the operating phase.

Shanghai Electric Australia Power & Energy Development has been granted \$25 million for the development of a \$119 million demonstration plant which will initially upgrade brown coal into 580 000 tonnes per annum of briquettes for export to Shanghai, China where they will fuel a power station. The company estimates that the project will create over 100 jobs during the construction of the demonstration plant and around 40 jobs during the operational phase.

Ignite Energy Resources has been granted \$20 million for the development of a pre-commercial plant producing upgraded coal products and synthetic oil. The company estimates that the project will create 130 jobs in the construction phase and approximately 40 ongoing jobs in the operating phase.

In total, these three projects are therefore expected to create hundreds of jobs in the construction and operation phase of the demonstration plants, which will bring new employment and investment to the Latrobe Valley.

It is possible that these large scale demonstration projects may require additional research and development (R&D) to better realise the future commercialisation of their respective technologies.

The government is working closely and collaboratively with the companies to support their needs and may involve discussions with public research institutions such as Federation University.

In addition, the Cooperative Research Centre for Greenhouse Gas Technologies (CO2CRC) has secured \$51.6 million in commonwealth funding under the Education Investment Fund and may include the potential for new research facilities at Victorian institutions such as Federation University.

The government is already working in partnership with Federation University on important brown coal initiatives through funding for the Geotechnical and Hydrogeological Engineering Research Group (GHERG) at the Gippsland Campus. Funded through the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, GHERG focuses on the key issues affecting open-cut mines in the Latrobe Valley, including slope stability, groundwater impacts, environmental rehabilitation and the long-term sustainability of mine sites.

Kialla Country Fire Authority brigade

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 28 May 2014

REPLY:

I refer to the matter raised by you in the Legislative Council on 28 May 2014 regarding the damaged vehicle of the Kialla CFA Brigade.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) has acknowledged that the brigade-owned utility vehicle of the Kialla Brigade was damaged at the Wunghnu/Bunbartha fire in early February 2014. The vehicle, which is a 2008 model, was determined to be a repairable write-off by the insurer, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA).

The CFA's insurance policy with VMIA enables the replacement of a damaged vehicle with a new vehicle of the same make and model, provided the loss is within the first 12 months of registration. For any vehicle outside the 12-month period, the market value or pre accident value is applied, which is the case for the damaged Kialla Brigade vehicle. It is up to the Kialla Brigade to fund the gap between the market value or pre-accident value of this brigade-owned vehicle. CFA funds the gap in replacing damaged vehicles that it owns.

The Kialla Brigade is eligible to make an application for funding through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP). VESEP is an ongoing program funded by the Victorian government, which provides local emergency services volunteer groups access to grants for operational equipment, vehicles, trucks, tankers, watercraft, trailers and minor facility improvements. The 2014–15 program offers grants of up to a maximum of \$100 000 excluding GST for eligible applicants with VESEP contributing \$2 for every \$1 of funding by the volunteer group.

In 2013–14, the Victorian government provided record funding of \$8.9 million to CFA volunteers through VESEP. Grants were awarded to 220 CFA brigades for additional operational equipment, vehicles and appliances and amenities.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Caroline Chisholm Society

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Mr Melhem

Raised on: 28 May 2014

REPLY:

I refer to the matter raised regarding construction of a new headquarters for the Caroline Chisholm Society.

The Caroline Chisholm Society has been providing valuable services to new and expecting mothers and families since its establishment in 1969, including pregnancy counselling, support on legal and financial issues, and material support through donations of goods such as prams, clothing and food. The Victorian coalition government is proud to support the Caroline Chisholm Society by funding important services it delivers in the community.

Following the launch of Plan Melbourne in May 2014, the Victorian government opened the \$9.3 million Community Infrastructure Fund to support local community facilities and services. The Minister for Planning has announced the first 14 projects to receive support under the fund, benefitting community, health, sport, arts and education hubs in growth areas. This includes funding towards child health and family support buildings in Melton, a learning centre and an Aboriginal service and community hub in Wyndham, and an arts theatre in Officer.

Access to the Community Infrastructure Fund is provided to the community via local government. When applications are assessed, consideration is given to whether projects are supported at a community level. I understand that the Caroline Chisholm Society has secured funds for its headquarters from a number of sources, including the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Foundation and Strathmore Community Bendigo Bank.

I therefore recommend that the Caroline Chisholm Society discuss its project proposal with both the Moonee Valley City Council, and the Department of Transport, Planning, and Local Infrastructure, including how to make an application that meets Caroline Chisholm Society's needs and achieves the broader aims of the Fund.

I have also provided this advice in writing, in response to a letter from Mr Paul Webster, President of the Caroline Chisholm Society.

I thank the Caroline Chisholm Society for its important ongoing work in the community.

Hanging Rock

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Mrs Millar

Raised on: 28 May 2014

REPLY:

The Hanging Rock Reserve is an iconic natural asset in Victoria. Hanging Rock and its surrounds is a public reserve of approximately 68 hectares (167 acres) located near the 19th century township of Woodend. Major redevelopment of the hanging Rock Reserve and the adjacent Eastern Paddock has been considered by the Macedon Ranges Shire.

On 15 May 2014, I announced that the Naphthine coalition government would invest \$1 million over four years to contribute to the maintenance of this treasured icon. These funds will help safeguard against inappropriate development of the site, ensuring that Hanging Rock will be available for all Victorians and visitors to enjoy. The Macedon Ranges Shire has agreed to halt their plans for redevelopment of the site. The Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure and the Macedon Ranges Shire will continue to work together to ensure that the site is rezoned to avoid any prospect of future development.

On 12 March 2014, Hanging Rock Reserve and Eastern Paddock were nominated to the Victorian Heritage Register ('the Register') under the provisions of the Heritage Act 1995.

On 23 May 2014, the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria recommended to the Heritage Council of Victoria that Hanging Rock Reserve be included on the Register. The Executive Director also recommended that the Eastern Paddock not be included on the Register.

These recommendations have been publicly advertised for 60 days (until 22 July 2014). After this date the heritage council will consider the recommendations and any submissions, and make a determination.

The Naphthine coalition government is committed to protecting our natural landscape and ensuring one of Victoria's most important cultural sites are protected for future generations to enjoy.

Caroline Chisholm Society

Raised with: Community Services

Raised by: Mr Elsbury

Raised on: 29 May 2014

REPLY:

I acknowledge the valuable work the Caroline Chisholm Society is doing to respond to the needs of families and supporting them to achieve and maintain a safe and nurturing environment.

My department initially met with the Society on 19 December 2013 to discuss and review grant funding opportunities that may assist the agency in raising the required funds for its new building.

Further meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis and my department has committed to provide information to the agency about other grants that may become available.

Maternal and child health services

Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Ms Mikakos

Raised on: 29 May 2014

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The review of the Victorian Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service has involved widespread consultation and engagement with parents, nurses, local government, unions, academic and industry experts and the service sector.

Over 40 formal submissions, and several reports, including one undertaken by HDG Consulting Group, were provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (department) to assist in developing the Maternal and Child Health Service Proposed Future Directions consultation paper. These submissions and reports outlined advice to the government about the future directions of the MCH service and informed rather than dictated the proposed future directions outlined in the consultation paper I released in May 2014.

The consultation paper identifies the key areas for reform to the Victorian MCH service, including related actions and initiatives. The purpose of the current consultation process is to further develop and prioritise these actions and initiatives, with a view to releasing a final directions paper later this year.

Since the release of the consultation paper, a number of discussions have been held with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Victorian Association of Maternal and Child Health Nurses (VAMCHN). In addition, in response to their request, I agreed to extend the closing date for the consultation period to 13 June 2014. I am advised the ANMF and the VAMCHN have provided the department formal detailed responses to the consultation paper which will be used to inform the development of the final directions.

The MCH review will not result in any changes to the current qualification requirements for MCH nurses. In the development of the new directions for the MCH service, the need to ensure flexibility in service delivery and improve collaborative practice between MCH nurses and other community services and professions has been highlighted and is strongly supported by the sector.

The MCH service is co-funded with local government and, as a result, the development of the new directions is a collaborative process in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Glen Devon Primary School site**Raised with: Education****Raised by: Mr Elsbury****Raised on: 10 June 2014****REPLY:**

I am informed as follows:

The former Glen Devon Primary School site is currently vacant and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is completing a review to determine if the property will be required for future educational purposes.

I am advised the buildings on the site were demolished in early 2013, to reduce risks to the local community and remove a public eyesore.

I understand the community interest around the future of former school sites such as Glen Devon, and I can assure you that the department is thoroughly investigating all options for the future of the site, including its retention for educational purposes.

Any decision on the future use of former school sites are considered in line with normal state budget processes.

Foster care**Raised with: Community Services****Raised by: Mr Leane****Raised on: 10 June 2014****REPLY:**

The Victorian government recognises the vital role of foster carers in making a difference to the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Their contribution cannot be overstated.

A carer reimbursement is paid fortnightly to foster carers as a contribution towards the costs of caring for children. While this is not considered a 'payment' for being a carer and is not a source of income, it is designed to contribute to (but not limited to) the cost of household goods and services, food, transport, fuel, health and educational needs and personal care items.

In addition to the reimbursement, the new placement loading of approximately \$737 is paid over the first six months of all new general home-based care placements to assist in meeting the immediate or 'start-up' costs of foster caring. All foster carers are also paid \$998 per year to assist to meet educational and medical costs. Foster carers of school-aged children receive \$320 (primary) or \$481 (secondary) each year as part of the Education Assistance Initiative (EAI).

In addition to the financial support offered by the carer reimbursement, carers are eligible for the Victorian government's Carer Card which offers a wide range of discounts and benefits from businesses, local government and community organisations.

A review of all payments and allowances that foster carers are eligible for at both a state and commonwealth level has also commenced. The product of this review will be an information guide that will be available to all Victorian foster carers outlining the various entitlements and financial assistance which they can access.

Through the Out-of-home Care — A Five Year Plan (the plan) released in March 2014, the Victorian government has provided funding for enhanced support for foster carers, including an investment of \$18.2 million to meet growth in demand for caregiver reimbursements and client expenses.

Also as part of the \$128 million funding package that supports the plan, government has committed to 100 new therapeutic home-based packages to help divert children and young people away from residential care and into alternative home-based care placements such as foster care. These packages will be flexible and tailored to provided therapeutic responses for children and young people with complex needs within a home environment.

A reform advisory group has also been established as part of the plan. Some of the key areas to be addressed include; the barriers to more collaborative and respectful engagement with foster carers and building more effective working relationships at the local level between child protection, placement co-ordination and out-of-home care agency staff.

The Victorian government has also led a national analysis of professional foster care, and dialogue with the commonwealth government is continuing regarding federal impediments to progressing models of professional foster care.

Family violence

Raised with: Attorney-General

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 10 June 2014

REPLY:

The Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths (systemic review) examines family violence-related deaths to inform future approaches to prevent and reduce family violence.

The systemic review collates information on all family violence homicides in Victoria in a central database to monitor the frequency of these deaths, identify trends and report on factors of interest to Coroners and the community.

The work of the systemic review is an important component of the coronial system, and the Coroners Prevention Unit continues to support the State Coroner to lead the systemic review.

The issue of reports is not the only function of the systemic review. Since its inception in 2009, the systemic review has undertaken more than 50 in-depth reviews of family violence related deaths, four of which have been completed since the implementation of the organisational restructure on 1 August 2013.

In addition, the Court has published 24 family violence related coronial findings on its website.

Tom Hafey

Raised with: Roads

Raised by: Mr Finn

Raised on: 10 June 2014

REPLY:

The section of Swan Street between Punt Road and the Yarra River was named Olympic Boulevard in August 2006, following representation from the City of Melbourne on behalf of the Melbourne Olympic Committee and the Melbourne and Olympic Park Trust. This was done to commemorate the 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.

The Olympic theme has been developed in this precinct and the Olympic Rings adorn the relatively recently completed pedestrian footbridge over Olympic Boulevard to AAMI Park.

Renaming a road is done in accordance with statutory processes undertaken by the Registrar of Geographic Place Names. Renaming would require the support of the Melbourne City Council given the impact it would have on businesses adjacent to the road.

Alternatively, Tom Hafey could be commemorated at a location where other sporting greats are commemorated, such as the Parade of Champions outside the MCG.

I recommend the member for Western Metropolitan consider making representations to the City of Melbourne or the MCG Trust in this regard.

Drysdale sports facilities

Raised with: Sport and Recreation

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 11 June 2014

REPLY:

I acknowledge your interest in the Drysdale Clifton Springs Sporting Precinct development and congratulate you on your ongoing support for the provision of sport and recreation facilities in your community.

Providing high quality sport and recreation facilities in regional Victoria is a key aim of the Victorian government and funding to support these objectives is provided through a range of programs including the Community Facility Funding Program (CFFP).

The CFFP — Major Facilities category supports the development of major community sport and recreation facilities that are high quality, accessible, sustainable and well used. The maximum grant amount available for funding from this category is \$650 000.

I have arranged to visit a number of sports facilities in the Greater Geelong region including the Drysdale Clifton Springs Sporting Precinct and look forward to hearing more about the proposed development of the site.

Kindergarten funding

Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 11 June 2014

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Across Australia, two National Partnership Agreements have been in place since 2008–09, committing states and territories to increase the number of hours a child attends kindergarten to 15 hours per week (or 600 hours per year) in the year before school, while also increasing participation rates and ensuring the ongoing quality of early childhood education programs.

To meet the requirement of 15-hour programs, the Victorian government provides contributory funding for 10 hours of kindergarten per week and the commonwealth government provides funding towards the remaining five hours through a National Partnership Agreement.

The original four year National Partnership allowed for the provision of a national agreement to provide ongoing funding when the original National Partnership expired. The then Labor commonwealth government reneged on this ongoing funding agreement and instead offered a three year National Partnership with declining funding. The states and territories refused this offer and an 18 month National Partnership was negotiated that maintained funding levels to allow the delivery of 15 hours of kindergarten with future funding subject to a review.

The current National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (NP UA ECE) expires at the end of 2014.

The 2014–15 federal budget papers did not include figures on future funding allocations for universal access but noted that provision has been made in the Contingency Reserve for additional funding in 2014–15 and 2015–16, subject to negotiations with the states. At this stage it is not clear what the level of future funding will be in this period.

A review of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education is currently being undertaken. The Assistant Minister for Education, Sussan Ley, MP, has advised states and territories that a decision on future commonwealth government funding arrangements will not be made until the completion of this review, which is expected soon.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is examining a range of possible scenarios that may eventuate following the commonwealth's decision on the NP UA ECE. As the commonwealth has not yet made a decision on future funding, it would be premature to discuss this preliminary analysis further.

Although the commonwealth government contribution is uncertain from 2015, the state's contribution is not. The Victorian government remains committed to providing contributory funding for 10 hours of kindergarten per week.

Motor vehicle registration fees

Raised with: Roads

Raised by: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 12 June 2014

REPLY:

I am informed that, as at the date the question was raised:

Registration renewal periods of less than 12 months are available to eligible pensioners, Health Care cardholders, and for some vehicles operated by, or on behalf of incapacitated persons. Current legislation does not provide for discretion to offer short-term periods more generally.

In order to provide flexible registration payment options, VicRoads has been developing a new registration and licensing system that will enable flexible payment options. Unfortunately, the project, which began development in 2008, was at risk of going over budget.

I have now directed VicRoads to pause development of the system for 12 months to review and assess this use of taxpayer funds. A decision as to whether to proceed with the new system will be made following this evaluation.

Housing standards

Raised with: Housing

Raised by: Mr Melhem

Raised on: 12 June 2014

REPLY:

The Home Sweet Home—Act For The house, Not The Tenant report published by the Footscray Community Legal Centre describes the experiences of low-income renters in the western suburbs.

The report raises a real concern that some tenants do not pursue their legal rights for fear of eviction or rent increases. I note that this government supports a number of services and protections for tenants.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) was specifically established as a low-cost dispute resolution service to facilitate community access, including for residential tenancy matters. VCAT conducts hearings in nine metropolitan areas and 27 regional locations.

Furthermore, Consumer Affairs Victoria has undertaken a range of actions to inform tenants of their rights, including information on their website and a RentRight App.

The Department of Human Services provides annual funding to the Tenants Union of Victoria to provide advice and assistance to social housing tenants on their tenancy rights. In 2012–13, the department provided funding of \$742 147.00 to the Tenants Union of Victoria. This funding supported the provision of direct assistance to approximately 1000 tenants, and the development of web-based tenancy education materials. There were over 150 000 downloads of this material in 2012–13.

This government responded to community concern about the standard of some accommodation in the private rental market, particularly in relation to the quality of rooming house accommodation. New rooming house standards came into effect on 31 March 2013 that set out minimum standards with respect to privacy, security, safety and amenity in rooming houses.

Victoria also has minimum standards for rental accommodation under a range of legislation. For example, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the National Construction Code and the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009 prescribe standards for matters such as smoke detectors, locks on external doors and windows, and for rooming houses.

Latrobe Valley energy industry

Raised with: Energy and Resources

Raised by: Mr Scheffer

Raised on: 12 June 2014

REPLY:

As the member for Morwell, and Minister for Energy and Resources, I regularly meet with a range of energy industry stakeholders, including representatives of the power industry, to discuss issues of relevance to the energy industry.

One issue of particular importance at the moment is falling demand. Since 2009, Victoria's electricity demand has declined by about 1 per cent a year. The latest forecasts from the Australian Energy Market Operator expect Victoria's demand to continue falling over the next few years before returning to slow growth thereafter.

While falling demand is important, and is placing some pressure on Latrobe Valley generators through lower prices, it is not an immediate threat to their operations. In the Latrobe Valley Express article referenced in your

question, outgoing EnergyAustralia chief executive, Mr Richard McIndoe, recognised this when he said he envisaged Yallourn continuing to contribute to the grid for many years to come.

Over the longer term, the government is seeking to assist the Latrobe Valley in diversifying its economy. The Latrobe Valley Industry and Employment Roadmap is a long-term plan for industry and employment growth in the Latrobe Valley. One of the key delivery mechanisms for projects under the Roadmap is the \$15 million Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund. This fund provides assistance to businesses to support transition and enable growth and diversification to ensure a sustainable future.

Kindergarten funding

Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 24 June 2014

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Across Australia, two national partnership agreements have been in place since 2008–09, committing states and territories to increase the number of hours a child attends kindergarten to 15 hours per week in the year before school, while also increasing participation rates and ensuring the ongoing quality of early childhood education programs.

To meet the requirement of 15-hour programs, the Victorian government provides contributory funding for 10 hours of kindergarten per week and the commonwealth government provides funding towards the remaining five hours through a national partnership agreement.

The original four-year national partnership allowed for the provision of a national agreement to provide ongoing funding when the original national partnership expired. The then Labor commonwealth government reneged on this ongoing funding agreement and instead offered a three year National Partnership with declining funding. The states and territories refused this offer and an 18-month national partnership was negotiated that maintained funding levels to allow the delivery of 15 hours of kindergarten with future funding subject to a review.

The current national partnership expires at the end of 2014. The 2014–15 federal budget was not definitive about the future of universal access. The budget papers referenced provision for ‘additional funding in 2014–15 and 2015–16, subject to negotiations with the states,’ but did not provide detail about funding levels.

The commonwealth review of the national partnership is currently underway and due for completion soon. Prior to the budget, the commonwealth stated that it would not comment on future funding for universal access until the review is completed and due consideration given to the findings.

Until a decision on future funding arrangements has been advised from the commonwealth government, I cannot advise services if funding levels will continue post December 2014. I know this uncertainty creates significant difficulties for services, especially in their planning and preparation for 2015. Therefore, I have met with and written to the Hon. Sussan Ley, MP, Assistant Minister for Education on a number of occasions to pursue ongoing commonwealth government funding as a matter of urgency for Victoria.

I have also used the Standing Council of School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC), a forum where the responsible Australian and New Zealand ministers discuss national school education and early childhood development policy, to raise this matter. At the last two meetings of the SCSEEC, I have argued for continued investment from the commonwealth government to enable Victoria to sustain universal access to 15 hours of quality early childhood education. I will continue to advocate strongly on behalf of Victoria.

Although the commonwealth government contribution is uncertain from 2015, the state’s contribution is not. The Victorian government remains committed to funding its share of 10 hours of kindergarten per week.

As the review into universal access is due soon and the commonwealth government will soon make a decision about the future funding of this program, I encourage you to urgently contact the commonwealth government.

You can reach the Hon. Sussan Ley, MP, Assistant Minister for Education, by email: assistant_minister@education.gov.au or through her website: <http://sussanley.com/contact/>.

Bus route 451

Raised with: Public Transport

Raised by: Mr Melhem

Raised on: 24 June 2014

REPLY:

As part of the Brimbank bus network changes, Public Transport Victoria (PTV) is creating faster, more frequent and direct bus services in Melbourne's suburbs, to attract new patronage and reform bus networks that have been left largely untouched for decades.

Similar improvements have previously been made in Point Cook leading to a doubling in the number of users of those services.

The new Brimbank bus network responds to what PTV's market research says is required to grow bus patronage: quicker, simpler and more direct bus routes, higher frequencies, better timetable coordination between trains and buses, and bus routes that run seven days a week. All this has been delivered in Brimbank with the new bus network.

An additional 310 trips have been introduced each week. An extra 45 000 Brimbank residents are now within 800 metres of bus services that run at least every 20 minutes in peak periods, and an extra 18 000 residents are within 400 metres of buses that run every day of the year.

Old bus route 451 is a relatively direct route between Brimbank Shopping Centre and Sunshine railway station, but includes a highly indirect route section in northern Deer Park. This inconveniences a lot of customers trying to reach Brimbank Shopping Centre as they have to wind through many back streets on their slow journey. Additionally, route 451 only operates every 60 mins at most times on weekends.

In moving to a more modern bus network, PTV is establishing a fast, frequent, direct route along Station Road and Kings Road connecting Watergardens, Brimbank Shopping Centre, Deer Park railway station and Sunshine. This new route 420 operates every 20 minutes during the day Monday to Saturday, and every 40 to 60 minutes at other times. It allows residents of Brimbank to travel north-south along the Kings Road/Station Road corridor for the first time.

PTV advises that bus route 423 operates every 20 minutes during commuter peak periods, and every 40 minutes at other times. This actually represents an increase in service frequency on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, where buses on route 451 previously only ran hourly.

Deer Park residents who do not live near Station Road are still able to travel to Sunshine by connecting to trains at Ginifer or St Albans stations, or by changing to new route 420 on Station Road.

PTV will carefully review the performance of the new network and will consider the case for any further refinements in the future.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria

Raised with: Energy and Resources

Raised by: Mr Melhem

Raised on: 25 June 2014

REPLY:

I refer to the matter raised during the Adjournment Debate in the Legislative Council on 25 June 2014 regarding the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) 2013 Annual Report.

I confirm that EWOV's report has demonstrated an increase in complaints in relation to credit issues and hardship. I commend EWOV for the work it has undertaken to assist customers resolve disputes with energy retailers, including matters relating to credit management issues.

Customer hardship

The Essential Services Commission (ESC), which regulates the retail energy industry in Victoria, is aware of EWOV's Annual Report and will take compliance action against retailers where necessary.

Recently the ESC held a forum attended by industry, consumer groups and welfare agencies to discuss the increasing number of disconnections and credit management issues experienced by energy customers. I understand that retailers have committed to undertaking further work in this area in consultation with consumer groups.

As you may be aware, there are protections in the regulatory framework to assist customers who are experiencing payment difficulties and financial hardship. Each retailer is required to have a customer hardship program, approved by the ESC, which outlines the assistance that retailers provide to customers so that they can stay connected to supply.

Further to this, the ESC's Energy Retail Code contains consumer protections to ensure that customers are only disconnected as a last resort. This includes:

- Customer eligibility for a payment plan where they are experiencing payment difficulties; and
- Disconnection and reconnection processes, including the required notifications that must be provided to customers prior to disconnection. That gives the customer an opportunity to contact the retailer for assistance prior to a disconnection taking place.

Retailers who do not follow the correct processes when disconnecting a customer are not only in breach of the regulatory framework, but may be required to make a payment to the customer that has been disconnected. This is known as the wrongful disconnection payment, and its requirements are specified in the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001.

Any customer experiencing difficulties in paying their energy bills should contact their retailer to see what assistance is available to them. If they are dissatisfied with their retailer's response, they can contact EWOV for further assistance.

Easing the pressure of energy bills

The Victorian government recognises and understands the concerns about energy price increases experienced over recent years and we are committed to easing pressures on household budgets.

Since coming to power, the government has:

- Introduced a new all-year electricity concession payment to provide relief for struggling Victorian households;

- Maintained the Utility Relief Grant Scheme, which provides grants of up to \$500 for eligible households unable to pay electricity, gas or water bills due to a temporary financial crisis;
- Introduced flexible pricing to give consumers new options to save;
- Established the new Switch On website which contains the My Power Planner tool and other information to help consumers to save on their energy bills;
- Introduced legislation to close a legal loop hole that would have cost Victorians up to \$94 million in additional electricity supply charges by distributors;
- Advocated for national reforms to the regulation of network charges by the Australian Energy Regulator, to improve its ability to scrutinise network costs;
- Intervened in appeal proceedings to oppose network operator budget increases that would increase prices for Victorian consumers;
- Successfully advocated for national reform of the appeals framework for network revenue determinations, to reduce cost-overruns and make it fairer to consumers;
- Reviewed the smart meter program to reign in cost over-runs; and
- Introduced a new 'fair and efficient' feed-in tariff to reduce burdens on households arising from cross-subsidies under the Premium Feed-in Tariff scheme.

I trust that this information is of assistance.