

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

25, 26 and 27 May 2010

(Extract from book 7)

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Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Vogels, Mr John Adrian	Western Victoria	LP

¹ Appointed 3 February 2009

² Appointed 9 March 2010

³ Resigned 1 March 2010

⁴ Resigned 9 January 2009

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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, 25 May 2010

Nhill: Luv-a-Duck plant

Raised with: Minister for Regional and Rural Development

Raised by: Ms Pulford

Raised on: 26 November 2009

REPLY:

Luv-A-Duck is an innovative company that has incorporated new technologies in their manufacturing, breeding and waste management processes.

The Victorian Government has worked closely with Luv-A-Duck for many years. Since 1999 the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development has assisted the company with various strategic planning, facilitation and expansion projects. Department support has resulted in great outcomes for the company including over \$6.2 million in investment, creation of over 100 extra full time employees and the direct engagement of 40 private local contractors.

Luv-a-Duck continues to develop new value added products and with the assistance of the Victorian Government intends to commission a new retail packaging line for products to be sold into Coles and IGA. The company is also investing in Research and Development to develop a new 'duck fat' product.

The company are very optimistic about these new initiatives and believe they will deliver further investments, uncover new market opportunities and create new jobs for regional Victoria.

VicForests: sawlog exports

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture

Raised by: Mr Hall

Raised on: 26 November 2009

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the Adjournment Debate on 26 November 2009 in the Legislative Council in relation to sawlog exports.

The needs and concerns of domestic log processors, the local harvest and haulage sector, mill workers and their dependent communities are of the highest priority for the Government in its bushfire recovery efforts.

The Government recognises the need for a strategic, transparent response to timber salvage from bushfires.

VicForests sawlog Pricing and Allocation Model (PAM) involves a phased transition from administered licence system to a fully competitive market auction system. An element of the model is the requirement that buyers process timber domestically until 1 July 2015 to assist industry transition to the new auction sales system while administered licenses are phased out. These arrangements provide industry with relative domestic market certainty.

Rail: Geelong line**Raised with: Minister for Public Transport****Raised by: Mr Koch****Raised on: 9 December 2009****REPLY:**

On 25 November 2009, the 4.55 p.m. Geelong-bound train experienced an engine failure between Little River and Werribee Railway Stations. Passenger safety is the paramount consideration of both the Victorian Government and V/Line. Because the location of the breakdown was between stations, buses could not reach the area and passengers were required to stay aboard the train. When situations such as this occur, passengers are transferred to alternate transport if it is deemed to be safe to do so. In this instance, it was deemed unsafe to remove passengers.

Due to rail traffic congestion during the peak period, a replacement locomotive left Melbourne at 6.15 p.m. and reached the site at 7.40 p.m. It took approximately 30 minutes to move the broken-down train, and passengers arrived in Geelong by 8.30 p.m.

V/Line provided complimentary travel vouchers to all passengers affected by the delays on 25 November 2009.

On 26 November 2009, the 4.55 p.m. Geelong service was cancelled due to a defective train and passengers were transferred at Southern Cross Station to the following service.

The Victorian Government has commenced work on the construction of the Regional Rail Link. Regional Rail Link is a \$4.3 billion project funded by the State and Federal governments that will provide dedicated regional rail tracks from west of Werribee to Deer Park, and along the existing rail corridor through suburbs including Sunshine and Footscray to Southern Cross Station. It will generally separate regional trains from metropolitan trains, freeing up capacity across the system to carry up to 9000 extra passengers per hour. The new tracks will, for the first time, allow regional services direct access into Melbourne.

Port Campbell community centre: redevelopment**Raised with: Minister for Regional and Rural Development****Raised by: Ms Tierney****Raised on: 3 February 2010****REPLY:**

Community meeting spaces such as the Port Campbell Community Centre are vital for rural communities and play an important role in facilitating social interaction.

The redevelopment of the Port Campbell Community Centre that you have brought to my attention would assist in ensuring the facility remains relevant to the needs of the local community.

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) received an application for funding from the Corangamite Shire Council in October 2009. I approved funding of \$225,000 from the Small Towns Development Fund to the Council to undertake the project on 16 December 2009.

The project will improve the amenity and functionality of the Port Campbell Community Centre resulting in accessible and affordable community meeting space options. The multi-purpose space will provide a flexible community space available for meetings, functions and other community uses, ensuring long-term sustainability and strengthening the centre's position as the primary community facility for the town.

Hospitals: early warning system

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr D. Davis

Raised on: 23 February 2010

REPLY:

The Hospital Early Warning System (HEWS) was introduced in September 2002 with the support of clinicians as a tool to help hospitals manage their workload.

The focus of HEWS is to better manage access for emergency patients. The benefit of HEWS is derived from improved communication and activating standardised hospital-wide internal escalation processes to create additional capacity within hospitals to deal with demand pressure within the emergency department, the hospital, and across the emergency system.

It is simply incorrect and misleading to claim that 'patients sitting in the back of an ambulance in need of access to a public hospital, will be directed and sent to another suburb or a distance place', when a hospital activates their HEWS plan.

I refer you to the publicly available guidelines and responsibilities for HEWS, and draw your attention to the following.

A HEWS request for Ambulance Victoria to divert selected patients will not extend to:

- time critical patients (however, where possible Ambulance Victoria will notify the hospital on HEWS of a time critical patient in transit,
- patients already in transit
- patients requiring a speciality service (e.g. trauma, spinal)
- patients with a 'significant history' likely to impact on the management of their current health problem (e.g. chronic disease, recent in-patient)
- non-emergency fleet or contractors
- patients being transported by helicopter, or peripheral crews

Data on the usage of HEWS is not collected as it is not considered to be a performance indicator; it is a process by which hospitals can manage demand.

The current system of HEWS is supported by health services and clinicians who recognise its value in managing emergency demand.

WorkCover: claim

Raised with: Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission

Raised by: Mr Rich-Phillips

Raised on: 24 February 2010

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

As a result of previous inquiries into this matter, the Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) has, since May 2006, required that any oral reports from medical practitioners in relation to this claim be confirmed in writing before being acted upon.

Previous inquiries have been unable to establish the identity of the individual officer who endorsed the decision that is the subject of this question. All decisions in relation to claims for compensation pursuant to the *Accident Compensation Act* 1985 (the Act) are made for and on behalf of the VWA. The decision forwarded to Mrs Smeaton on 14 May 2004 was made in accordance with the Act.

Melbourne-Lancefield Road: safety

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 9 March 2010

REPLY:

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

The Brumby Government is taking action to improve the safety of our roads for all Victorian road users. Victoria has recorded its seven lowest road tolls over the past seven years and recorded our lowest ever road toll in 2009. The Government's *arrive alive* road safety strategy aims to drive down the road toll by a further 30 per cent by 2017. As part of this strategy, the Government is investing \$650 million over 10 years for road safety improvement projects.

Victoria Police is responsible for collecting details of all injury crashes on Victoria's roads. This data is used by VicRoads for the analysis of crash trends and the determination of appropriate safety treatments on Victoria's road network.

A review of injury crashes reported by Victoria Police during the most recent five-year period (1 July 2004 to 30 June 2009) shows that 46 casualty crashes have occurred along the Melbourne-Lancefield Road between Sunbury and Lancefield. Of these, four crashes resulted in fatalities, 19 crashes resulted in "serious" injuries and 23 crashes resulted in "other" injuries.

A number of improvement projects have been carried out along the Melbourne-Lancefield Road between Sunbury and Lancefield since 2000. These include intersection improvements at Bolinda-Darraweit Road, Gisborne-Kilmore Road and Barry Road, installation of right turn lanes on the Melbourne-Lancefield Road between Digby Drive and Hutchinsons Lane, improved speed zone signage, approximately 50.3 km of shoulder sealing and the implementation of reduced speed limits through Romsey township together with construction of bicycle facilities.

Proposals for improvement projects must be considered and evaluated on a state wide basis. When determining projects, factors such as safety, amenity and environment are taken into consideration. Any improvements to the Melbourne-Lancefield Road as outlined above will be considered in this context.

In 2002/03 VicRoads undertook a safety and performance review of the Melbourne-Lancefield Road in response to community concerns. A further safety and performance review of this road has also been undertaken recently. In both cases, the review findings indicated that, based on current guidelines, further overtaking lane provisions are not warranted.

Safety and operational performance of the Melbourne-Lancefield Road will continue to be monitored.

Drought: government assistance

Raised with: Minister for Agriculture

Raised by: Mr Kavanagh

Raised on: 10 March 2010

REPLY:

I refer to the matter that you raised during the Adjournment Debate in the Legislative Council on 10 March 2010, concerning the cessation of drought assistance in South Western Victoria - which is linked to Exceptional Circumstance (EC) declarations.

Until recently, the majority of Victoria was EC declared. EC events are rare and severe events that are outside those that a farmer could normally be expected to manage using responsible farm management strategies. Drought is an example of an EC event. A range of EC declared areas, including South Western Victoria, were set to expire on 31 March 2010 and 30 April 2010.

EC declarations underpin the provision of significant Commonwealth support, including EC Relief Payments and EC Interest Rate Subsidies.

Decisions to grant and extend EC declarations are made by the Commonwealth Government. The National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC) provides independent advice on the need for assistance to the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

A streamlined review process was introduced to make it easier for farmers who have not experienced a break in the drought to have their EC declarations assessed for a possible extension. Under the review process, NRAC reviews EC declared areas before their expiry date to assess whether an extension to the declaration is warranted. As part of the review NRAC assesses information from a number of sources. If NRAC assesses an area as no longer being in exceptional circumstances, and the Commonwealth Government accepts the advice not to extend the declaration, assistance ceases on the date the declaration ends. If NRAC supports extending the declaration, and the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry agrees, assistance continues until the new declaration end date.

With regard to the EC declaration for South Western Victoria, NRAC determined that seasonal conditions have allowed the majority of producers to return to typical farm management practices in the area and on this basis recommended that the EC declarations for South Western Victoria cease on 31 March 2010. The Hon. Tony Burke, commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, accepted NRAC's advice that conditions have improved in South Western Victoria, and on 25 February 2010 announced that EC assistance would not be extended for this area.

The Victorian Premier John Brumby announced a \$47 million drought package on 22 October 2009. The three Victorian initiatives that are linked to EC declarations will still be available to eligible farmers when the EC declaration ceases on 31 March 2010. These are the Municipal Rate Subsidy (MRS) 2009-10, Farm Improvement Grant and the Drought Apprenticeship Retention Bonus 2009-10.

There are other Victorian Government programs available to farmers that do not have EC eligibility requirements. The \$205 million Future Farming strategy released in April 2008 invests in programs to improve the ability of farmers to be productive, competitive and sustainable in the future. This strategy includes actions that assist farm families and rural communities to manage change, including the AgFutures Initiatives, Sustainable Farm Families, Case Management for Farmers, and the National Centre for Farmer Health.

At the Commonwealth Government level, there are also a range of programs, including Transitional Income Support (TIS) through the Commonwealth Government's Climate Change Adjustment Program. The income support is paid equivalent to the Newstart Allowance, providing a possible income relief substitute to the EC Relief Payments.

The Victorian Government will continue to monitor drought impacts in the South Western area and provide appropriate, targeted support which best meets the needs of affected farmers and their communities.

Thank you for raising this matter during the adjournment debate.

Multicultural affairs: City of Monash guidelines

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 10 March 2010

REPLY:

The City of Monash is one of Melbourne's most culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities and the local Council has long supported and promoted multiculturalism in Monash.

On 10 March 2010, the City of Monash supported the Glen Waverly Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival, which was also funded by the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC).

I am advised that the City of Monash invited all Members of Parliament from the Lower House to attend this event. The VMC and the State Government do not have any role in the organisation of the event.

The City of Monash supports a number of festivals and events that actively encourage the building of an inclusive multicultural community in Monash and recognise the benefits that diversity brings to the area.

The Council's support for community festivals and organisations complements the Victorian Government's commitment to multicultural affairs. In particular, it aligns with the Victorian Government's Multicultural policy, *All of Us*, and its priority strategy to support local councils to advance multiculturalism locally. It also supports the principles established in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* and the overall intention of the Act, which recognises and values the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the people of Victoria.

Rail: Geelong service

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 25 March 2010

REPLY:

V/Line advises that on Thursday 25 March 2010, the 4.50 p.m. Marshall to Southern Cross service terminated at Geelong due to what was recorded as a smouldering fire in the electrical control panel of the centre carriage of the train, in an area not occupied by passengers. While this incident emitted smoke into the air conditioning, there was no flame. The smoke was the result of what was subsequently determined to be an electrical malfunction.

Passenger safety is of paramount importance, so passengers were evacuated as a precaution. There were no injuries or issues arising for any of the passengers on the train.

Horsham Special School: funding

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 13 April 2010

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

The Department will continue to work with Horsham Special School on their capital plans to be considered in future state budgets.

Over the past 2 years, the Grampians Region of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has been working closely with the Horsham Special School to identify and address any minor works required. The Region will continue to work with the school and local community to address any needs that may arise.

The Region will meet with the full school council to further refine planning details identifying any further minor works to be undertaken and to listen to any other concerns that they may raise.

Eastern Metropolitan Region: early childhood services

Raised with: Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Mr Leane

Raised on: 13 April 2010

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Thank you for your representations on behalf of six kindergartens and early years centres located in the outer east of the Eastern Metropolitan Region that have submitted applications for Stage 1 Renovation and Refurbishment, Children's Capital Program 2009-10.

The Children's Capital Program 2009/10 reflects the Victorian Government's commitment to enhancing existing early years' infrastructure throughout the state to enable community based not for profit kindergarten and child care services to offer more flexible services, and achieve high quality outcomes for children and their families.

I am pleased to advise that following a rigorous assessment process, all six early childhood services that you identified have been successful, and have been approved for funding by the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development through the 2009-10 Children's Capital Program as follows:

Gray Court Preschool - \$69,400 towards replacing floor coverings and kitchen, creating a specific first aid area, replacing the sandpit and installing a shade sail

Swinburne Children's Centre in Croydon - \$67,785.10 towards construction of an outdoor pergola and awnings

Pinjarra Kindergarten - \$9,482 towards a new shade sail for the playground

Tarralla Kindergarten - \$100,000 towards refurbishing the current entry, office, and storage and outdoor space

Croydon Central Kindergarten - \$34,339 towards renovating the outdoor area and purchasing of indoor equipment

EACH Child and Family Centre - \$98,790 towards renovating the existing building to remove the storage room and provide additional toilet facilities.

Housing: Southern Metropolitan Region

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 13 April 2010

REPLY:

I write in reply to the Adjournment Debate question you raised with regard to monitoring the impact of foreign investment on the Victorian property market.

Since your question was raised, the Commonwealth Government has responded to public concerns by announcing new measures to ensure that foreign investment in residential property in Australia increases the supply of dwellings and is not speculative in nature. Amongst these measures is a new national data-monitoring compliance program to be undertaken jointly by the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. I understand that work on a pilot program has already commenced between the Foreign Investment Review Board and Land Victoria.

However, portfolio responsibility for land registry matters rests with the Hon Gavin Jennings MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Templestowe Road, Bulleen: pedestrian safety

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr Atkinson

Raised on: 13 April 2010

REPLY:

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

The Brumby Government is committed to improving access for all pedestrians so that our roads can be crossed safely. A key focus of VicRoads' Pedestrian Crossing Program is to improve pedestrian access to key destinations such as shopping centres, railway stations and bus stops. Prioritisation of funding for pedestrian facilities is based on a number of factors, including the level of vehicle and pedestrian activity, the extent to which the treatment improves pedestrian safety and the cost to implement the project.

I can assure you that the needs of all road users, including pedestrians, are taken into consideration when planning for major improvements to the arterial road network. Your constituents' concerns regarding pedestrian safety on Templestowe Road are noted. Proposals for improvement projects must be considered and evaluated on a statewide basis. At this stage, there are many other proposals for pedestrian facilities that will deliver superior safety outcomes for pedestrians. However, VicRoads will continue to monitor pedestrian safety on Templestowe Road to determine the need for any additional pedestrian facilities in the future.

Ambulance services: western Victoria

Raised with: Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 5 May 2010

REPLY:

This question matter falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Health.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Wednesday, 26 May 2010

Maribyrnong River, Yarraville: access

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 10 March 2010

REPLY:

The Port of Melbourne Corporation (PoMC) is committed to implementing the initiatives in the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Maribyrnong City Council and the PoMC which includes providing public access to the river at Footscray Wharf.

The redevelopment of the Footscray Wharf has been delayed due to the inability to negotiate vacation of several boats. The MoU recognises that works could not commence until existing boats were removed. The PoMC attempted to evict the boats through court action but were found not to have authority over the waters around Footscray Wharf. The authority rests with Parks Victoria which manage and control the water around the wharf.

The PoMC has advised my Department that it is working with Parks Victoria to remove the remaining boats but must comply with certain administrative law requirements. This process commenced on 19 April and will take in the order of 8 to 10 weeks.

In anticipation of the remaining boats being removed, PoMC is updating tender documentation to allow works to commence as soon as possible. PoMC has confirmed with my Department that interim works will include a public viewing area as well as a general upgrade of the site, demolition of unsound wharf, new fencing and construction of rock revetment.

The land between the end of Lyell Street and the Maribyrnong River, which is now owned by the PoMC, is covered by the Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme. The port has considered the land's use and does not believe the public access to the river via Lyell Street is appropriate given the port and logistics activities associated with its industrial purpose.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Thursday, 27 May 2010

Western Health: waiting lists

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr D. Davis

Raised on: 3 February 2010

REPLY:

The number of patients on the elective surgery waiting list is publicly reported every six months in accordance with nationally endorsed definitions. These definitions have been in place since 1998, and are in line with other states and territories. The elective surgery waiting list identifies patients that are ready to be admitted to hospital for their surgery.

The Opposition sought a list of patients who had come off the elective surgery waiting list because they had their surgery, and have now tried to pass it off as a secret waiting list.

It is extremely concerning that the Opposition are deliberately misusing a record of people who have come off the waiting list—in what can only be described as a shameful attack on health service staff.

This is a list of people who have come off the waiting list because they had their surgery—just as the Opposition requested under FOI. To now claim this is a ‘secret’ list is downright dishonest and unfair slur on our hardworking doctors, nurses and other health staff. The Opposition must apologise to hard working doctors, nurses and other health staff at Western Health for falsely accusing them of keeping a secret waiting list.

Youth: Berwick housing

Raised with: Minister for Housing

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 3 February 2010

REPLY:

The property located at 50-52 Bellevue Drive, Berwick has been purchased by the Department of Human Services to provide stable, affordable accommodation for young people who have a connection to the City of Casey.

The site is located in a well established residential area, with a number of youth friendly activities within walking distance or easily accessible by public transport at the end of the street. These activities include sporting facilities, a church, retail and entertainment facilities, a TAFE and a university.

The site is one of four Support For Young People That Really Counts (SFYPTRC) services to be located across the state in areas of high population growth with relatively low levels of established support services for young people.

The service is designed to provide a strong support base for young people who are seeking to move forward with their lives. All tenants of the service will be young people primarily between the ages of 17-21 years. Support will be provided to the young people on an individual basis to match their needs. The service will link young people to

employment, education and training opportunities as well as assisting them to re-establish relationships with their families and build strong, positive relationships with other members of their community.

All tenants will be subject to a legally binding tenancy agreement no different to that available in the private rental market and, as is the case in the private market, failure to abide by that agreement will place the tenancy at risk.

The Step Forward model underpinning the SFYPTRC program does not cover 24 hour supervision and it was initially proposed that staff would only be available on-site from 8 a.m.–9 p.m. Monday to Friday.

However, recent changes in the operating environment of the SFYPTRC have resulted in the department introducing a short stay component to be delivered from the Bellevue Drive site for a period of approximately 10 months. The introduction of the short stay component will ensure on-site 24 hour a day, 7 day a week staffing for the initial months of the SFYPTRC program operation.

These arrangements will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the service is optimally configured to meet the changing needs of the young people requiring assistance

Hospitals: data reporting

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 24 February 2010

REPLY:

The government has implemented a range of measures to strengthen public hospital performance reporting. These include:

- independent system-wide audits of emergency department and elective surgery data collections
- six spot audits each of random health services each year
- the appointment of a Director of Data Integrity to oversee the audits and investigate complaints about public hospital data
- termination of the bonus funding pool
- automatic notification to elective surgery patients informing them of changes to their surgery date or ready for care status
- reinforcing health service boards' accountability for data accuracy
- requiring health services to provide a data attestation statement in their annual reports
- improved data security including the use of unique user logins and passwords, and the activation of system transaction logs.

All claims of data falsification are examined by the Director of Data Integrity. In this case, the Director of Data Integrity spoke directly to the doctor at Geelong Hospital about allegations of data manipulation. The doctor advised that she had made a general statement that was not specifically directed at Geelong Hospital, that she had no evidence of data manipulation at Geelong Hospital or elsewhere, and that there were no matters that could be investigated by the Director of Data Integrity.

Independent auditors are examining emergency department and elective surgery waiting list data at every reporting health service as part of the statewide audits.

Water: Thomson River supply

Raised with: Minister for Water

Raised by: Mr P. Davis

Raised on: 25 February 2010

REPLY:

The three Melbourne retail water companies, Southern Rural Water and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change all hold entitlements to water in Thomson Dam.

Bulk entitlements held by the three Melbourne retailers collectively, provide for:

- up to 172 billion litres of water each year from the Thomson River; and
- a 1068 billion-litre capacity share of Thomson Reservoir.

The bulk entitlement held by Southern Rural Water provides for:

- a 6 per cent share of inflows to Thomson Reservoir each year; and
- a 45 billion-litre capacity share of Thomson Reservoir.

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority manages the environmental entitlement on behalf of the Minister for Environment. It provides for:

- 10 billion litres of inflows to Thomson Reservoir each year; and
- passing flows in the Thomson River.

The orders granting these entitlements, along with all subsequent amendments and qualifications, can be accessed from the Victorian Water Register website,

<http://www.waterregister.vic.gov.au/Public/Reports/BulkEntitlements.aspx>.

In December 2007, I temporarily qualified the environmental entitlement to give Melbourne access to the environment's 10 billion litres. The qualification transferred eight billion litres a year to Melbourne, and set aside remaining two billion litres in reserve case it was needed for Melbourne or for the environment.

This water was informally called the 'environmental drought reserve' because it was available to the West Gippsland CMA if required to manage impacts from low flows.

In September 2009, I further temporarily qualified rights to environmental water in the Thomson system due to Melbourne's ongoing severe water shortage. This qualification reduced passing flows in the Thomson River to retain an average of 10 billion litres of water extra in storage each year for use by Melbourne.

It also allowed the two billion litres set aside annually under the 2007 qualification, plus the six billion litres that had already accumulated in the environmental drought reserve since 2007, to be used exclusively for environmental purposes.

In addition, the Victorian Government has returned an extra three billion litres of water to the Thomson River each year as environmental flows, as part of easing water restrictions in Melbourne. This is in addition to three billion litres that the Melbourne retailers agreed to forgo earlier this year, so that it could be used to mitigate the impacts of low summer flows on environmental values and downstream diverters.

The three Melbourne retail water companies, Southern Rural Water and the West Gippsland CMA are responsible for operating and managing their water use or supplies within the terms of their entitlements, as amended or qualified. All parties are aware of the allocation arrangements in place under the temporary qualifications of rights.

Maffra Secondary College: flagpole

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Hall

Raised on: 25 March 2010

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Maffra Secondary College has recently completed Stage 2 of a major redevelopment of the College. The project has received funding of \$5.3 million as part of the Victorian Schools Plan.

As part of the project the school has received grants of approximately \$160 000 that may be spent on discretionary items including computers, furniture and equipment. The college is permitted to spend some of these funds on a replacement flagpole.

Duck hunting: season

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 25 March 2010

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate matter you raised on 25 March 2010, regarding your request for the suspension of the current Victorian duck hunting season due to the few number of ducks that you observed in Gippsland during the opening weekend and, the low breeding index as shown in the Eastern Australian Aerial Waterbird Count.

Before determining duck season arrangements, I received advice from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) on environmental, population and waterfowl habitat indicators in order to establish the status of populations across eastern Australia.

This analysis includes waterfowl counts conducted in November and March by DSE in addition to information provided by the Eastern Australian Aerial Waterbird Count (EAAWC).

The majority of waterfowl are nomadic in nature and with the significant weather events exhibited in Queensland and New South Wales, it is expected that Victorian waterfowl numbers will fluctuate. These significant events create favourable habitat and breeding and as such, attract large numbers of waterfowl from across the country.

The breeding index as shown in the EAAWC, although lower than the long-term average, exhibited the largest number of different species breeding since 2001 (excluding 2005). In addition, game bird counts were at their highest level since 2001.

Due to these factors and favourable environmental conditions throughout eastern Australia, game bird populations are considered sustainable.

Port Phillip Bay: channel deepening

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 15 April 2010

REPLY:

There were small changes, in the order of 1 cm, predicted in the height of the tides as a result of the dredging of the Great Ship Channel at the Entrance to Port Phillip Bay.

The Office of the Environmental Monitor (OEM) commissioned the National Tidal Centre in 2008 to assess the tides for the year following the dredging of the Bay's Entrance.

The National Tidal Centre examined the records from the tidal gauges in the bay before and after dredging. It also compared the records from the bay with those from tide gauges in Bass Strait where there was no effect from dredging.

Twelve-monthly reports were publicly released. They showed that the tidal changes were consistent with the small changes predicted and that was no change in the sea level to the Bay.

The OEM acknowledged in its December 2009 quarterly review that there was continued community interest in the Bay's tides. It recommended that this interest could be addressed through releasing further tidal data.

Given the continued community interest, the OEM has agreed to work with the Department of Sustainability and Environment to publicly release quarterly tidal summaries for 2010 and 2011.

Environment: landfill levy

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 6 May 2010

REPLY:

On 24 March 2010, I announced that the landfill levy will be increased. Increasing the levy will provide further incentives for Victorians to improve their resource recovery. Higher levies will help divert up to 1.2 million tonnes of waste per year away from landfills. The levies are also anticipated to support an additional 700 jobs in the waste industry, and bring greater security to over 2000 workers in recycling. The revenue will go towards supporting measures to ensure these outcomes are realised; and to other initiatives in resource efficiency, climate change and sustainability.

I have advised councils that any increase in rates as a result of the new levies should be passed on in a clear and transparent manner. Additionally, new revenue will be provided back to councils to help them reduce their waste efforts. As such, councils are receiving a direct benefit from the new levy settings, and are not acting simply as collection agencies. Councils and communities can also speak to their relevant waste management group for further advice.

Increased revenue from the new levy settings will be hypothecated directly into the Sustainability Fund. This means that it will not form part of the Government's consolidated revenue and will be allocated to projects and agencies that deal directly with sustainability. Money from the fund therefore directly supports local sustainability initiatives, and is also used to fund environmental agencies such as the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), Sustainability Victoria (SV) and the waste management groups (WMGs). EPA, SV and the WMGs have essential roles in helping Victorians reduce the waste going to landfill, increasing recycling, and keeping community and environmental impacts of waste disposal to a minimum. Their involvement and adequate funding is critical for Victorians to continue to manage their waste in a way that is reliable, affordable and safe. Councils will further be supported through the provision of \$14 million to assist them with new resource recovery investments and initiatives.

Analysis by DSE indicates that, at the household level, the increased levy will result in a very small increase in council rates in the order of 20 cents per week in the first year. This makes up a very small proportion of total

household waste charges, which are around \$124 per household per year, and a substantially smaller part of households' total rates bill. The Government has acknowledged that councils will most likely pass the cost of the increased levy on to households through council rates, and has advised them to be transparent about the origin and quantum of any new charges.

In order to address the issue of illegal dumping, \$6 million will be allocated from the increased levy revenue to establish a strike force targeting such practices. A further \$5.5 million will be spent on cleaning up contaminated legacy sites. The EPA has a significant enforcement role in relation to illegal dumping. In the past six months, it has prosecuted four businesses for such dumping, which resulted in one conviction and a \$10,000 fine. Increased funds from levy revenue will assist the EPA in this important role. As quoted in the Australian Financial Review on 5 May 2010, the new EPA CEO has pledged to increase the vigour with which the EPA approaches prosecutions for illegal dumping.