

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 23 June 2010

(Extract from book 9)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Carli, Mr Clark, Mr Delahunty, Mr Lupton, Mrs Maddigan, Dr Naphthine, Mr Nardella, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Barker, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Langdon, Mr McIntosh, Mr Nardella and Mrs Powell.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Batchelor, Mr Cameron, Mr Clark, Mr Holding, Mr Lupton, Mr McIntosh and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders and Ms Pennicuik.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mrs Maddigan and Mr Morris. (*Council*): Mrs Coote, Mr Leane and Ms Mikakos.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Crisp, Mr Lim and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr Atkinson, Mr D. Davis and Mr Tee.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Dr Harkness, Mr Herbert, Mr Howard and Mr Kotsiras. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr and Mr Hall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr O'Brien, Mr Scott and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): Ms Broad, Mr P. Davis and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Ingram, Ms Lobato, Mr Pandazopoulos and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr Murphy and Mrs Petrovich.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Kairouz, Mr Noonan, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Mrs Shardey. (*Council*): Mr Finn and Mr Scheffer.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Atkinson, Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Mr Eideh and Ms Hartland.

Law Reform Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan, Mr Foley and Mrs Victoria. (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg and Mr Scheffer.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Hodgett, Mr Langdon, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr, Mr Guy and Ms Hartland.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Mr Noonan, Mr Scott, Mr Stensholt, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva, Ms Huppert, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Eren, Mr Langdon, Mr Tilley, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller. (*Council*): Mr Koch and Mr Leane.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Nardella and Mr Northe. (*Council*): Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Ms Lovell, Ms Tierney and Mr Vogels.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Burgess, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper and Mr Languiller. (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Peulich and Ms Pulford.

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JENNY LINDELL

Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

Acting Speakers: Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Green, Dr Harkness, Mr Howard, Mr Ingram, Mr Jasper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Languiller, Ms Munt, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz, Mr K. Smith, Dr Sykes, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson

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The Hon. J. M. BRUMBY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. R. J. HULLS

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:

Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clayton	ALP
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	Lindell, Ms Jennifer Margaret	Carrum	ALP
Asher, Ms Louise	Brighton	LP	Lobato, Ms Tamara Louise	Gembrook	ALP
Baillieu, Mr Edward Norman	Hawthorn	LP	Lupton, Mr Anthony Gerard	Prahran	ALP
Barker, Ms Ann Patricia	Oakleigh	ALP	McIntosh, Mr Andrew John	Kew	LP
Batchelor, Mr Peter John	Thomastown	ALP	Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn	Essendon	ALP
Beattie, Ms Elizabeth Jean	Yuroke	ALP	Marshall, Ms Kirstie	Forest Hill	ALP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Bracks, Mr Stephen Phillip ¹	Williamstown	ALP	Morand, Ms Maxine Veronica	Mount Waverley	ALP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brumby, Mr John Mansfield	Broadmeadows	ALP	Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn	Polwarth	LP
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Cameron, Mr Robert Graham	Bendigo West	ALP	Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent	South-West Coast	LP
Campbell, Ms Christine Mary	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio	Melton	ALP
Carli, Mr Carlo Domenico	Brunswick	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Clark, Mr Robert William	Box Hill	LP	Noonan, Wade Mathew ⁷	Williamstown	ALP
Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence	Mildura	Nats	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Nats
Crutchfield, Mr Michael Paul	South Barwon	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
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Dixon, Mr Martin Francis	Nepean	LP	Pandazopoulos, Mr John	Dandenong	ALP
Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Perera, Mr Jude	Cranbourne	ALP
Duncan, Ms Joanne Therese	Macedon	ALP	Pike, Ms Bronwyn Jane	Melbourne	ALP
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Powell, Mrs Elizabeth Jeanette	Shepparton	Nats
Foley, Martin Peter ²	Albert Park	ALP	Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison	Northcote	ALP
Fyffe, Mrs Christine Ann	Evelyn	LP	Robinson, Mr Anthony Gerard	Mitcham	ALP
Graley, Ms Judith Ann	Narre Warren South	ALP	Ryan, Mr Peter Julian	Gippsland South	Nats
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Haermeyer, Mr André ³	Kororoit	ALP	Seitz, Mr George	Keilor	ALP
Hardman, Mr Benedict Paul	Seymour	ALP	Shardey, Mrs Helen Jean	Caulfield	LP
Harkness, Dr Alistair Ross	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Mr Kenneth Maurice	Bass	LP
Helper, Mr Jochen	Ripon	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Hennessy, Ms Jill ⁴	Altona	ALP	Stensholt, Mr Robert Einar	Burwood	ALP
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Eltham	ALP	Sykes, Dr William Everett	Benalla	Nats
Hodgett, Mr David John	Kilsyth	LP	Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross	Sandringham	LP
Holding, Mr Timothy James	Lyndhurst	ALP	Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose	Footscray	ALP
Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp	Ballarat East	ALP	Thwaites, Mr Johnstone William ⁸	Albert Park	ALP
Hudson, Mr Robert John	Bentleigh	ALP	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hulls, Mr Rob Justin	Niddrie	ALP	Trezise, Mr Ian Douglas	Geelong	ALP
Ingram, Mr Craig	Gippsland East	Ind	Victoria, Mrs Heidi	Bayswater	LP
Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen	Murray Valley	Nats	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Kairouz, Ms Marlene ⁵	Kororoit	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Swan Hill	Nats
Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice ⁶	Altona	ALP	Weller, Mr Paul	Rodney	Nats
Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas	Bulleen	LP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Scoresby	LP
Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Doncaster	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Derrimut	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 2 June 2008

⁴ Elected 13 February 2010

⁵ Elected 28 June 2008

⁶ Resigned 18 January 2010

⁷ Elected 15 September 2007

⁸ Resigned 6 August 2007

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Wednesday, 23 June 2010

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of motion: removal**

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 51 to 56, 114 to 117 and 150 will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their notice to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 6.00 p.m. today.

NOTICES OF MOTION**Notices of motion given.****Ms CAMPBELL having given notice of motion:**

The SPEAKER — Order! I suggest to the member for Pascoe Vale that that notice will be edited.

Further notices of motion given.**PETITIONS****Following petitions presented to house:****Liquor licensing: fees**

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the need to urgently reconsider the proposed massive increases in liquor licence fees in view of the enormous adverse impact such across-the-board increases will have on many highly reputable liquor outlets, and most particularly those in country areas.

Such huge blanket increases in licence fees will impact on employment, community sponsorships, even business survival in some cases. Risk-based fees should actually address the problems which have arisen in 'hot spot' areas, distinguish activities increasing risk of antisocial behaviour, and be imposed selectively, to address those issues.

The petitioners therefore request that the Victorian government recognises the damage such across-the-board increases will cause, particularly in many country communities, and review the legislation as a matter of urgency.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (11 signatures) and Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) (11 signatures).

Electricity: smart meters

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the Legislative Assembly's attention the Brumby government's mismanagement of smart meters, in particular:

the Auditor-General's finding that the project cost has blown out from \$800 million to \$2.25 billion, all of which will be paid for in higher bills;

the Auditor-General's finding that the electricity industry may benefit from smart meters at the expense of the consumers who pay for them;

the unfairness of many consumers and small businesses having to pay for smart meters before they are installed; and

findings by Melbourne University that many families will have to pay around \$300 per annum in higher electricity bills as a result of Labor's smart meters.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly require the Brumby Labor government to immediately freeze the rollout of smart meters across Victoria until it can be independently demonstrated that consumers will not be forced to pay for the Brumby government mistakes in the smart meter project.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (6 signatures) and Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) (478 signatures)

Patient transport assistance scheme: rural access

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the inequitable nature of the current level of reimbursement under the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme (VPTAS) and points out to the house that many rural patients are disadvantaged under the current scheme.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

- update and revise the VPTAS regulations from 100 kilometres to 50 kilometres one way to the most appropriate town centre with medical/dental specialist treatment, not just the nearest available town centre;
- increase the current 17-cent-per-kilometre reimbursement rate and accommodation reimbursement rate of \$35 plus GST to levels that are more reflective of the current travel and accommodation costs;
- allow for the calculation of kilometres travelled to be based on the safest appropriate road route, not just the shortest distance alternative.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (5 signatures).

Students: youth allowance

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the proposal to change the independence test for youth allowance by the federal government.

The petitioners register their opposition to the changes on the basis that the youth allowance changes proposed in the federal budget place another barrier to university participation for students in regional areas; unfairly discriminate against students currently undertaking a 'gap' year; and contradict other efforts to increase university participation by students from rural and regional Australia.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria reject the proposal and call on the state government to vigorously lobby the federal government to ensure that a tertiary education is accessible to regional students.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (15 signatures).

Schools: regional and rural Victoria

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the Brumby Labor government's failure to support education in regional Victoria. In particular:

that country secondary school retention rates (the percentage of students remaining at high school until year 12) have fallen from 72 per cent in 2002 to 67 per cent in 2009 compared to city schools that have remained at 85 per cent; and

that when Labor was elected in 1999, Victorian government education funding per person was the second highest of any state, but after 10 years of Labor, Victoria now spends the least on education per person of any state in the nation.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria require the Brumby Labor government to stop their neglect of regional education and provide schools, teachers and students with the resources and support they need to improve educational outcomes.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (6 signatures).

Insurance: fire services levy

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the inequitable nature of the current fire services levy (FSL) on house, property and business insurance and points out to the house that everyone who benefits from fire services should contribute to their funding, not just those who take out insurance, whose premiums are effectively doubled by the FSL and associated taxes.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria investigate and implement a fairer model of funding fire services.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (200 signatures).

Rail: Seaford radio base station

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of members and friends of 1st Seaford Scout Group draws to the attention of the house the following.

The digital train radio system (DTRS) project is part of the Victorian transport plan. The works will involve installation of the system across 100 base stations within the rail reserve on the metropolitan network. As part of this process, approximately 74 new base stations will be erected.

One of these is to be erected at Seaford railway station. The rail reserve at Seaford is extensive. The 1st Seaford Scout Hall has been located on the reserve since 1962. The scout group pays an annual rental fee. The scout hall has an access and exit door on the north side.

The concrete base of the 25-metre tower is just 1.8 metres from the doorstep of the scout hall.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria intercede on our behalf to the Minister for Public Transport and ask him to cease works on the erection of the base tower at Seaford railway station until a more suitable location for the tower can be found on the railway reserve.

By Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) (267 signatures).

Rail: Somerville level crossing

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, draw to the attention of the house the dangerous Bungower rail level crossing in Somerville.

We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Victoria, therefore request the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to request the state government to urgently install boom barriers at this level crossing to prevent further accidents, deaths and injuries from occurring in the future.

By Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (24 signatures).

Baxter-Tooradin Road, Baxter: pedestrian crossing

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, draw to the attention of the house community safety concerns with the lack of a pedestrian crossing in Baxter-Tooradin Road, Baxter, adjacent to the new Baxter shopping centre.

We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Victoria, therefore ask the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to request the Victorian government to instruct VicRoads to urgently install a pedestrian crossing in Baxter-Tooradin Road, Baxter, adjacent to the new Baxter shopping centre.

By Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (107 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Shepparton be considered next day on motion of Mrs POWELL (Shepparton).

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Hastings be considered next day on motion of Mr MORRIS (Mornington).

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Benalla be considered next day on motion of Dr SYKES (Benalla).

DOCUMENTS**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General:

Access to Social Housing — Ordered to be printed

Management of Major Rail Projects — Ordered to be printed

Managing the Requirements for Disclosing Private Sector Contracts — Ordered to be printed

Ombudsman — Investigation into the probity of the Kew Residential Services and St Kilda Triangle developments — Ordered to be printed.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS**Schools: absenteeism**

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — What an amazing reaction there was from the government when the student absence figures for Victorian schools were released last week. I had submitted an FOI request for those figures, but because the government was worried about reaction to some very high absence rates, it leaked the figures to the media two days before I received them. When I said that in government the opposition would in some circumstances fine some parents who keep their children away from school, the government wheeled out Minister Jennings who said that this was a terrible thing. A couple of days later the Minister for Education finally decided to show interest in the matter and put out a belated media release, which also decried the opposition's position. What both ministers failed to say was the opposition was only saying that it would use a provision that already exists in the government's Education and Training Reform Act 2006. If Minister Jennings thinks that fining some parents who allow their children to miss school is cruel, his argument is not with me but with the minister, his colleague, who was responsible for that provision being included in the

2006 act. If the Minister for Education thinks that provision is so heartless, why has not she removed it on the five or more occasions this Parliament has amended that principal act?

Torquay: secondary college

Mr DIXON — On another matter, it was a pleasure to join my colleague David Koch, a member for Western Victoria Region in the other place, and the Liberal candidate for South Barwon, Andrew Katos, at a public meeting on Monday where it was explained to parents that a coalition government would give Torquay a stand-alone full secondary education school. This contrasts with Labor's piecemeal policy on the run which will see a huge P-12 school built on a small site in the wrong location.

Pauline Ogden

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — Last night I had great pleasure in attending an event to mark the retirement of Pauline Ogden from bestchance Child Family Care. Pauline is retiring after 30 years of working with children and families in the Monash area. Pauline's working life with families and children started when she began a playgroup, as she describes it, in a tin shed in Wheelers Hill. Since that time she has supported, helped and provided services for countless thousands of families. I know Pauline both because she is the deputy chief executive officer of an outstanding children's service located in Glen Waverley in my electorate and also, as Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, through her role on the board of Kindergarten Parents Victoria. She is an amazing leader with great skills as an innovator and has an outcomes-focused approach, and all that is driven by a lovely, caring and compassionate woman.

Mount Waverley Primary School: Peggie library

Ms MORAND — I also acknowledge the naming of the new library at Mount Waverley Primary School last week. I was pleased to attend the event to name the library after the Peggie family, who have had a connection with this great school for over 100 years. Ian and Beverley Peggie attended the special event; Ian Peggie is the grandson of John Peggie, who donated the land for the original site back in 1906. The site had previously been used as a market garden and orchard.

Ian Peggie's daughter and grandson were also in attendance. Ian's grandson is a student at the school, making a fourth generation connection between the

Peggie family and the Mount Waverley Primary School. It is a wonderful community connection reflecting the importance of schools in our community.

Locusts: control

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — The people of north-west Victoria are very relieved that the Brumby government has finally fallen into line with the Liberal-Nationals coalition and admitted that there will be a major locust problem in north-west Victoria this spring. The Premier's belated announcement of a war on locusts is an admission that the Liberal-Nationals were not scaremongering by raising the concerns of the community about a major locust plague threat in the spring.

In trying to be successful in this war on locusts, it is a pity the Premier did not listen to and adopt the whole Liberal-Nationals policy on this position, which was to have the government buy the chemicals and arrange for them to be distributed to farmers to use for spraying. The result of the government forcing farmers to buy chemicals and then apply for a rebate of the cost is that there is no overall knowledge of the amount of chemicals that are in store on farms, who has supplies and in what quantities, and where they will most be needed.

Most importantly, it is not too late for the government to admit that it has got it wrong and to set up a program in which the government buys the chemicals and stores them in the chemical reseller's premises so that they are available, and when the department coordinates the spraying program it can give a purchase order to the farmer to get the chemicals. In that way there will be overall control, we will know how much is needed, where the chemicals will go and whether they will do the job properly.

It is a great initiative that the government has finally admitted that there is a locust problem, but it has got the distribution of the chemicals wrong.

Kinfolk Cafe: community enterprise

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Community Development) — I rise to congratulate the volunteers at Kinfolk Cafe and its co-founders, Elliot Costello, Jarrod Briffa and Asuka Hara, for their hard work in setting up a wonderful social enterprise in the heart of Melbourne's central business district.

Kinfolk is a cafe that supports ethical and sustainable trade whilst redirecting profits back into local and international development projects. One of the most innovative parts of the enterprise is that it allows

consumers to elect where the profit from their purchase is directed. Some people might like to support local initiatives like Urban Seed, while others might want to see their money go towards projects in Nepal or Rwanda.

Kinfolk offers a range of volunteering opportunities for baristas and waiters and will eventually develop into a practical training program for hospitality students. About 35 volunteers have been involved in setting up the cafe in a range of areas including business planning, interior design and building. It is a truly amazing effort.

Through our community enterprise program the Brumby government has so far partnered with a number of community groups to commit approximately \$14 million to support more than 100 enterprise initiatives, which have created about 500 jobs and offered job training for about 600 other people. We have also joined with a private philanthropic trust to form Social Traders, which builds on our existing programs to support the development of social enterprises like Kinfolk.

These are extremely worthwhile projects of enormous social and economic value, and I would like to thank all the people who have worked so hard to get the Kinfolk Cafe up and running. I look forward to tracking its success well into the future.

Victorian Multicultural Commission: freedom of information request

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — On 9 February I sought, through freedom of information, copies of all agendas and minutes of meetings held by the Victorian Multicultural Commission between 1 January 2008 and February 2010. Members would think this was a very simple request for the chairman of the VMC and even the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to fulfil. If the chairman were fair, objective and non-political he would advise the minister's office that these documents should be released immediately, and if the minister treated our culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians with respect he would also do so.

Unfortunately after almost five months I have heard nothing from this arrogant government. What is it trying to hide, cover up or sweep under the carpet? This type of behaviour is typical of it and something that we have come to expect after 11 dark years of this incompetent Labor government. It is a Labor government which intimidates public servants into not releasing documents and which allows processes to be corrupted to avoid scrutiny. The Labor government will do anything and say anything to remain in government,

even if that means ignoring the rights of Victorians to knowledge.

King Street, Doncaster: traffic lights

Mr KOTSIRAS — Once again I call on the Labor government to tell the residents of Manningham when it will provide funds to upgrade King Street, Doncaster. The part of King Street that runs between Victoria Street and Blackburn Road is in very poor condition. This stretch of road is of strategic importance in facilitating traffic movements through the area. The King Street Residents Action Group has fought long and hard to have the entire length of King Street upgraded.

Beaufort Secondary College: 50th anniversary

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — On Saturday, 12 June, Beaufort Secondary College celebrated its 50th anniversary — happy birthday, Beaufort Secondary College! Over 400 people visited the school for the anniversary, including past and present staff and students.

Beaufort High School was officially opened in 1960 and changed its name to Beaufort Secondary College in 1990. The college has developed a reputation for excellence in education and striving for best achievement by its students. The organising committee of the 50th anniversary celebration was headed by Leesa O'Brien and included Lynelle Day, Jo Reid, Lester and Liz Harris, Colin Gerrard, Gary Finch, Enid Tweedle, Robert Wilkinson, Bob Mastin, Gail Lewry and Stephen McCauley, who is the current principal.

I congratulate the organising committee for putting together an event that brought a lot of joy and memories to the 400 people in attendance, being both past and present students and staff. Beaufort Secondary College plays an important part in the community of Beaufort and the broader Pyrenees region. I wish it well for the future.

Crime: victim support

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — Recent media reports of a sexual assault victim being denied the right to have her victim impact statement read to the court further highlight problems which the Attorney-General was warned about but has ignored. When this house debated legislation amending these provisions on 14 April I pointed out that one of the biggest practical problems with victim impact statements is that they generally cannot be given to the prosecution in advance of a

determination of guilt, which means the victim has to rush to complete and deliver the statement.

This is exactly what seems to have happened in this case when the victim, Emma, found out at short notice that the accused was going to plead guilty. She was faxed the form and completed it on a plane while flying down to the hearing. In Emma's case, even though it seems the prosecution had made her statement available in time, it has been suggested that the magistrate ignored her rights and refused to accept it, even though he knew it was in order, because he wanted to make up time he had lost in driving to the wrong courthouse. If this is the case, the conduct of the magistrate concerned is appalling and the Attorney-General should seek an urgent report from the Chief Magistrate so he can consider under section 87AAD of the constitution whether to appoint an investigating committee to investigate what has occurred and whether the magistrate should be removed from office.

Regrettably what Emma has suffered is symptomatic of a continued disregard for victims in the Victorian justice system, despite the Attorney-General's rhetoric. The law and operational procedures need to be changed so victims have more time to prepare their statements, are kept properly informed of proceedings against offenders and are genuinely consulted when their interests are affected.

Housing: seniors

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — I rise today to highlight the housing needs of older persons in Victoria. While most older persons own their own home — with figures from an Australian Bureau of Statistics report published in 2008–09 indicating that in 2005–06, 82.1 per cent of 65 to 74-year-olds and 87.5 per cent of persons aged 75 years and older owned their own homes — a significant number of people rent. These people often face difficulties around security of tenure, particularly in difficult periods of their lives when their health is declining. In my electorate there are large numbers of people who rent. Some of them own their own buildings but rent homes at the Summerhill Residential Park and face particular difficulties during the later years of their lives when they live at that park.

There are particular issues that need addressing around security of tenure for older people. I note the work that has been done in social housing by the government to increase the supply of such units, and I welcome that work, but further action is needed to protect the rights of older persons who do not own their own homes.

Ambulance services: mobile intensive care units

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — The Minister for Health just does not seem to understand the concern he is causing the community of Bass Coast with his total lack of compassion for people who are left with the legacy of his poor decision making, with family members having died because the minister will not allocate a MICA (mobile intensive care ambulance) unit to the South Gippsland area.

The minister should understand that there is a permanent community of 30 000 people in Bass Coast, which swells to between 70 000 and 100 000 people most weekends and for some of the special events, most of which are major Victorian tourism events. Such events bring in busloads of tourists, yet there is no dedicated MICA unit — a stretcher-carrying ambulance with two MICA officers on board — in the South Gippsland area. There is no dedicated single response unit, which is a car that carries MICA paramedics.

In fact qualified MICA officers are now being rostered on normal ambulance duties and called out to attend MICA emergencies only if they are available. Rosters do not ensure that MICA paramedics are available on most shifts. At times all qualified officers are on at the same time, which is not good enough, because it leaves huge gaps in MICA care. On the day of the horrific accident at Anderson in January that killed one and injured five, no MICA paramedic officers were rostered on. It is time the minister woke up to himself and did something about MICA paramedics in — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Shire of Melton: Keep Australia Beautiful awards

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) — I would like to extend my congratulations to the Melton Shire Council, which recently won the Sustainable City of the Year award. The accolade was given as part of the 2010 Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria Sustainable Cities and Clean Beaches awards. These awards recognise local sustainability achievements of communities across Victoria while motivating and encouraging all communities to further engage in positive environmental work. Melton Shire Council also won the Protection of the Environment award, which recognised the council's outstanding work for the protection of the local natural environment through its project The White-Bellied Sea Eagle Has Landed.

The Shire of Melton also received a special commendation in the Cultural Heritage award category. The council won the award for its Houdini 100-year celebrations, which featured a three-day festival of flight, including a range of activities that commemorated Harry Houdini making the first Australian power-controlled sustained aircraft flight on 18 March 1910.

I would also like to congratulate Mr Daryl Akers on winning the Dame Phyllis Frost award, which was given for his suitably outstanding environmental efforts.

Landcare: funding

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — At a time when primary producers, farming families and country people in general are battling for survival because of earlier dry and drought conditions it is extremely disappointing to see reduced funding being provided for Landcare organisations.

In the early 1990s former Premier Joan Kirner was a key figure in promoting the concept of Landcare across country Victoria. This involved farmers grouping together to develop Landcare and associated activities within their particular areas. Each Landcare group was supported by a paid Landcare coordinator, with funding provided to underpin and undertake projects to improve the land and to implement conservation measures, including the elimination of pests and the minimisation of land degradation. As a direct result of the promotion of Landcare groups, with funding support and the complete cooperation of landowners in a voluntary capacity Landcare maximised the overall benefits for the land, the landscape and the environment, also resulting in greater production for primary producers.

However, in recent years there has been a reduction in funding support from both federal and state governments, with limited allocation of funding through catchment management authorities and highly competitive applications for reduced resources. A critical issue is the lack of funding for Landcare coordinators, who played an important role in implementing Landcare activities and coordinating local volunteer efforts. I call on the state government to immediately review its funding support for Landcare, which was so successfully promoted 20 years ago, to ensure its continued success in rural areas and to pressure the federal government for a major funding boost.

Soccer: Matildas

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) — I rise to congratulate a talented Point Cook resident, Melissa Barbieri, who may be better known to members of the house as the woman chosen to captain the Westfield Matildas in Chengdu in China in this year's Asian Football Confederation Women's Asia Cup. I congratulate Melissa and the whole team on the Westfield Matildas' terrific win against Korea DPR.

Melissa has demonstrated her determination to pursue the game she loves after initially being encouraged to give it up when she was in the male team. After doing so Melissa got involved in other sports, such as basketball and tennis, but she then returned to women's soccer, putting her skills as a goalkeeper to good use and making her mark in soccer. At only 19 years of age she made the Matildas training squad as a midfielder.

Participation in sport provides so many positive benefits, including good health, fitness and social interaction. Sport promotes qualities such as teamwork, leadership, sportspersonship and sheer determination. Melissa is truly an inspiration to our local community, and we are extremely proud of her and the team, their successes and hard work. Well done!

Bridge Builders and Pembroke College: business breakfast

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I would like to congratulate Bridge Builders and students from Pembroke College for putting on an excellent business breakfast for 300 people last Wednesday, 16 June. Many of the students told me they got out of bed at 5.30 a.m. Their attitude, warm welcome and hard work was a delight to observe. They are a credit to their families and teachers and, most importantly, to themselves.

Police: Yarra Ranges

Mrs FYFFE — Over the past few years I have received many complaints about the length of time it takes for police in the Yarra Ranges to respond to calls. I hear from officers of the shortage of staff, with stations having only one officer in the watchhouse when there should be two.

The Yarra Ranges covers an area of 2500 square miles and is home to 145 000 people, yet there are many occasions when there is no coverage by a police van. I was therefore not surprised to see in the June edition of the Police Association journal a three-page article headed 'Policing the Yarra Ranges on the smell of an

oily rag'. The article highlights several examples of the lack of police. For instance, instead of three there are sometimes only two sergeants in the valley proper, and only one sergeant and seven officers run a roster to cover the entire valley area. Mooroolbark has recently been 2 sergeants and 16 officers down, and staffing at Warburton has been down 33 per cent for five years. There is no backfilling for people on leave or secondment, young members are not getting the supervision they need and the basic skills of new members are suffering because there are not enough senior members to teach and pass on knowledge. Overworked and despondent officers are expected to do a lot more with a lot less; there is no time for proactive patrols; and officers are frustrated when they know that the van has not been on the road for 6 out of 14 days.

Avalon Airport: regional economy

Mr EREN (Lara) — The Lara electorate has once again been the centre of great news for Geelong. Recently I was delighted to join the Premier at Avalon Airport for two very important announcements. The first was, of course, Tiger Airways's choice of Avalon Airport for its third Australian base. This will open up a whole new opportunity for people to have access to low-cost flights as well as create around 200 new jobs — a big win for the region.

The second was the announcement that Avalon Airport will continue to play host to the Australian International Airshow until at least 2015. This is thanks to a new agreement struck between the Brumby Labor government, Aerospace Australia and Avalon Airport. The air show will continue to be a showpiece for the Geelong region, boosting the local economy, providing jobs and attracting visitors from across the nation and the world. Congratulations to all involved.

Geelong Arena: World Cup broadcast

Mr EREN — I would also like to mention the first ever World Cup live site at the Geelong Arena, which was jointly funded by the City of Greater Geelong and the state government. I attended both the games against Germany and Ghana at the live site along with many other soccer lovers in Geelong dressed in their green and gold, and though the Socceroos have not been so successful thus far, the live site has been a success. It was great to see so many dedicated families and young people there to cheer on the Aussies in the early hours of the morning.

As many of you would know, Australia's hopes in the World Cup are still alive and dependent upon the game against Serbia tomorrow morning. I am sure it will be

an exciting and do-or-die game for the Socceroos. I wish them success and say, 'May the force be with you'. Go Socceroos, and go Geelong for the World Cup bid!

Public transport: myki ticketing system

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — On 12 July 2010 it will be five years since the Victorian government signed the myki contract. The myki mess rolls on. The Minister for Public Transport's announcement that the popular City Saver fare is to be scrapped in an attempt to kick-start the Premier's pet project is just another nail in the coffin of the Brumby government.

Myki has had another dose of 'I can't cope' syndrome. The rate at which passengers on the \$1.4 billion project touch off their smartcards on trams and at railway station fare payment devices, or validators as we better know them, is too slow. This is not the first time myki has had 'I can't cope' problems. On 1 January 2004, 19 months before the myki contract was signed, the government axed the rail plus 2 and short trip Metcards. This was supposedly part of the preparations for myki. The government dumped plans for myki to double as a cash card to allow purchases at convenience stores and other retailers, like Hong Kong's successful Octopus public transport smartcard. Then there are the off-peak zone 1 plus 2 weekday Metcards that will not be available on myki. Group-Get-About Metcards have also been dumped.

The government needs to tell Victorians when myki will be available for passengers, not just on Melbourne's trams and buses but also on V/Line trains and coaches. It claims it will be operating on all of these modes in 2010, which no-one in the community believes. Day after day, week after week, month after month we see different fare structures pulled apart because the system cannot cope. If that was the government's intention, why did it not buy an off-the-shelf system on day one?

Autism: funding

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I rise to congratulate the Brumby government on its announcement in the last budget of funds for autism programs in different regions and areas. In my area of Brimbank we have a group known as the Autism Angels that has called on the federal government to look at autism as a major problem in our communities and to provide assistance at that level. It is not just about providing education about autism in schools, there is also a need for support for families. Many times a parent has to stay home to look after a child, particularly once no more

institutional help is available. They need help with transport and medical needs as well as help with coaching in language development. Clearly it should fall to the federal government to look at this matter, because autism is creeping up on our communities in the same way that diabetes is, and it is an illness that is spreading far and wide across my electorate. I ask the commonwealth government to look at the situation and to come up with some assistance under one of its disability programs.

Wellington Road: bus lanes

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — It was reported recently that the Knox City Council was lobbying the state government for the possible conversion of the third lane on Wellington Road, Rowville, into a dedicated bus lane, resulting in Wellington Road being reduced to a two-lane carriageway. Consequently I canvassed a number of residents in Rowville and Lysterfield to seek their views on this important issue to assist me in my advocacy on this matter. I received significant feedback from my local community, with over 95 per cent of respondents indicating their opposition to the possible loss of a lane on Wellington Road. Therefore I call on the Premier to confirm to Rowville and Lysterfield residents that he will not remove the current third lane on Wellington Road.

Road safety: young drivers

Mr WAKELING — The Brumby government recently announced that it would be holding discussions in regard to possible changes to road rules for drivers under 25 years of age. Given the Premier has not chosen to speak to young people in the Ferntree Gully electorate, I believed it was important for me to canvass the views of these drivers, and 92 per cent indicated they do not support the possibility of the Premier implementing restrictions on night-time driving. Furthermore, they are also concerned about possible changes to the demerit point threshold.

However, these drivers were positive in their views on changes to laws relating to mobile phone use, mandatory interlock devices and vehicle impoundment for repeat drink drivers. I call on the Premier to stop ignoring these drivers in my electorate and allow their views to be heard before the arrogant government makes any decision to change road laws that will affect drivers under 25 years of age.

Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club: awards

Mr WAKELING — Recently I had the pleasure of attending the Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club's annual dinner to witness the awarding of life memberships to Sam Cavarra and Sharon Nied. These are two worthy recipients who have provided tireless service to the club.

Forest Hill electorate: Premier's reading challenge

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It was with great pleasure that on 24 May I joined celebrated children's author and Premier's reading challenge ambassador Brian Nankervis at Weeden Heights Primary School to congratulate students and celebrate the school's participation in this year's Premier's reading challenge. Previously a teacher himself, Mr Nankervis, who is known for his role in the popular music trivia show *RocKwiz*, spoke to students about his love of reading and his favourite books when he was at school. He was absolutely engaging, and every single person in the room was captivated, including me. The Premier's reading challenge is for all Victorian students from prep to year 10. The aim of the challenge is to promote a love of reading. It is not a competition but a challenge to each student to read, read more and read more widely. Last year 92 students at Weeden Heights Primary School completed the challenge, which is a fantastic effort, and the school is striving to do even better this year.

The school also competed in Kirstie's cover competition again this year. Run in conjunction with the Premier's reading challenge, this competition aims to give primary school students in the electorate an opportunity to be creative and to demonstrate artistically their understanding of the literature read throughout the Premier's reading challenge. Students were asked to design an alternative dust jacket for their favourite book or a book read as part of the challenge, with the winner from each school receiving a \$50 gift voucher proudly sponsored by Forest Hill Chase shopping centre and me. The winner from Parkmore Primary School was Leighton Yang; from Vermont Primary School, Talia Simpkins; from Burwood Heights Primary School, Varnika Aggarwal; from Burwood East Primary School, Harley Alford; from Orchard Grove Primary School, Henry Makmur; and from Weeden Heights Primary School, Nishant Guduru. Congratulations to everyone.

National Diabetes Week

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — This year National Diabetes Week runs from 11 to 17 July, and I would like to inform the house and encourage all members to become involved in raising awareness of this debilitating disease. Diabetes is a serious disease that affects about 1.7 million Australians, and currently there is no cure. It is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that requires long-term support and ongoing review and management. It takes time, energy and commitment to manage diabetes well, but with the right support and information it can be done. People with diabetes have a higher risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, circulation problems, amputation, nerve damage and damage to the kidneys and eyes.

During National Diabetes Week, Diabetes Australia is conducting a campaign to engage all over-50-year-olds in assessing their risk of developing the disease and informing them of steps that can be taken to reduce that risk. My office staff members are currently folding letters to send out a checklist survey to more than 20 000 people aged over 50 in my electorate. If all members of this house did the same, over 1.7 million people would receive potentially life-saving information. Sending out a survey that only takes 2 minutes for your constituents to complete could save lives. I encourage all people, even those who think they are not at risk, to take this test and make themselves more aware of the signs that often go unnoticed.

United Nations: One World exhibition

Mr LIM (Clayton) — On Friday, 18 June, I attended an event called One World, an exhibition of paintings of the United Nations family by Chinese artists, at the Melbourne Town Hall. The exhibition's theme explored the common ideals of unity, cooperation, progress and development regardless of our different nationalities. The diversity of geography and culture on show created a colourful international experience and fitted in well with Victoria's multicultural society. The exhibition brought together 200 prominent traditional Chinese painters, who were invited to create original works based on cultural texts and photographs of important landmarks around the world, collected and recommended by the 192 member states of the United Nations.

This project was inspired by and initiated during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and was exhibited in the headquarters of the United Nations before moving on to

other major cities around the world. The exhibition was sponsored by the State Council Information Office of China in conjunction with the China Artists Association and the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, and it was widely enjoyed by all who visited.

Melbourne has been privileged to host this special exhibition showcasing the best of what the People's Republic of China top traditional painters have to offer. I had the privilege of joining 30 of those 200 artists who came to the opening of the exhibition. I would like to thank and congratulate Sam Feng, managing director of the biggest weekly Chinese newspaper in Melbourne, the *Pacific Times*, for bringing this exhibition to share with the people of Victoria.

Chile: earthquake

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — It gives me great pleasure to rise today to congratulate the Chilean community and the Chilean-Australian community for the extraordinary efforts they are making in helping Chile with its post-earthquake reconstruction efforts. I take this opportunity to commend the Victorian government for its very generous support in the process and efforts of reconstruction in Chile.

As members may be aware, I happened to be stranded in Chile when the event took place and I can report to the house that I saw an extraordinary number of people making every effort to help each other and rebuild what was damaged. Members would know that the damage was spread over hundreds of kilometres.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time for members to make statements has now concluded.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Regional and rural Victoria: government initiatives

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Speaker has accepted a statement from the honourable member for Bendigo East proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house congratulates the Brumby Labor government for its ongoing investment and support for regional and rural Victoria including through *Ready for Tomorrow* — *A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* and condemns the Liberal and Nationals coalition for taking regional and rural Victoria for granted.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I am delighted to join with my colleagues to speak on this matter of public importance.

Last Tuesday's launch by the Premier of the government's blueprint for regional Victoria, *Ready for Tomorrow*, marked a new chapter in the story of the resurgence, revitalisation, rebuilding and reinvestment by the Brumby government in regional Victoria.

This is a statement that contains five new strategies, 51 new actions and a total of \$631 million that is all about driving a new era of prosperity, opportunity and growth for our regional communities. It is fair to say this is a statement that has been well received right across the state. The *East Gippsland News* talked about 'Banking on the blueprint'; the *Bendigo Advertiser* reported the '\$631 million bush boost'; the *Warrnambool Standard* had it right — 'On the right track' was how it described the release of the government's blueprint *Ready for Tomorrow*; and finally the *Wimmera Mail-Times* stated, 'Grampians cash will be fantastic'. How right they are!

Of course if we are talking about the *Ready for Tomorrow* initiative, we need to have a little look at yesterday. We need to look at the strong foundations on which regional Victoria has been built. We have seen a decade of investment, rebuilding and revitalisation after the shameful period of neglect by those opposite when they were in government. Over that period of time we have seen this government invest nearly \$1 billion in rebuilding and extending 430 regional schools and supporting the employment of an additional 2000 teachers and support staff across our regional schools.

There has been a \$1.5 billion investment in regional hospitals, with nearly 2900 additional nurses and paramedics across the state. There has been \$450 million to rebuild and upgrade more than 160 police stations. There has been major investment in road and rail and that vital connecting infrastructure. On top of that, \$11.7 billion worth of new investment has flowed into the regions, helping to create more than 120 000 new jobs in our regions. That is such a great outcome, and it is the foundation on which we are building *Ready for Tomorrow*.

There has been some other commentary, as you would expect. There was a comment made by the Leader of the Opposition — clearly he just does not get regional Victoria — claiming that the Premier had 'abandoned' regional Victoria. I am not sure what the Leader of the Opposition's definition of abandoned is, but I went and checked the *Macquarie Dictionary*, and it said the definition of abandoned was 'to leave completely and finally; forsake utterly; desert'.

That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition did in the 1990s when he was president of the Liberal Party and the Leader of The Nationals was the chief cheerleader for the Kennett Liberal-National party government when it cut and closed — closed schools, closed hospitals, closed rail lines and cut services. That is the real definition of abandoned, and that is what we saw in the 1990s. As a result, people were leaving the regions in droves. People did not want to live in towns where they had the threat of their rail line or their hospital closing.

From day one in government those of us on this side of the house embarked on a very different approach designed to build up the regions, invest in the regions and restore confidence. Regional Victoria today is a vastly different place. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition, whose favourite pastime is collecting editions of *Melway*, that perhaps if he spent a bit more time on the green maps rather than the red maps, he would know what was truly going on in regional Victoria, which is that we are seeing more people moving into our regions, recognising that there are more job opportunities, new infrastructure and services, and a great range of lifestyle choices.

It was in that context that *Ready for Tomorrow* was launched in Maryborough. What a fantastic location it was at the Maryborough train station. I was joined by my fabulous colleague the member for Ripon, and Minister for Agriculture, who is such a passionate advocate for that region. We are seeing the restoration of rail services to Maryborough later this year. How symbolic is that? I believe the rail line was closed in 1993. Who would have closed that? Of course it was those opposite who closed the rail line in 1993.

The irony was not lost on us when we were standing there at the Maryborough train station on the very day of the launch of *Ready for Tomorrow*, our government's commitment to regional Victoria, and who should return to the scene of the crime but the Leader of The Nationals. He tried to sneak in and have his own media conference up at the back of the Premier's media conference. This man has more front than Myer to return to the scene of the crime: the very train line that he was part of closing down. In 1993 the current Leader of The Nationals said in regard to the cuts and closures of the former Kennett Liberal-Nationals government that it was his view that they were 'for the sake of the good of Victoria as a whole'.

What is not good is leaving regional Victoria to rot, but what is good is *Ready for Tomorrow*, our government's blueprint. As I said, it builds on the strong foundations,

it looks to the future, it looks to some of those challenges, it looks to some of those opportunities and it puts in place a very strong framework, backed up by the policies and programs that lock in a new era of prosperity, opportunity and growth in regional Victoria.

I would like to turn briefly to each of the five new strategies in *Ready for Tomorrow* that are about supporting rural and regional Victorians. The first one is investing in skills and young people. Throughout the extensive consultations that we had across the state there was very strong feedback from all of the communities saying that they wanted to see more done in terms of supporting young people to stay in and be attracted to regional areas and, most importantly, to have the opportunity to study at a regional tertiary education institution.

But regional tertiary education institutions are also important, and this was understood by regional communities, as key economic development drivers in their own right. They employ many people and they enable the research to be applied in local communities. Having vibrant tertiary education institutions was viewed by communities, as it is very much viewed by this government, as being very important to support vibrant and thriving regions.

That is why we are investing \$110 million in skills and young people. The Investing in Skills and Young People strategy includes our new tertiary education opportunities package. In this package is the setting, for the first time, of some higher education targets to drive aspiration and participation by regional and rural Victorians in tertiary education institutions. This is a very important leadership position to take to send a very clear signal to communities and universities that we want more people to participate in a university education, and we have set some very clear targets to achieve that.

We are backing up those targets by setting aside \$75 million through our Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) for a new tertiary education infrastructure fund to support the building up of tertiary education institution facilities that open up more access for student accommodation and to invest in other infrastructure to expand courses in regional areas. This is a great fund that has been warmly welcomed by universities across the state.

There is funding to help young people return to the regions and undertake cadetships. We are providing \$12.5 million to help 1500 young people take up the opportunity to have a workplace cadetship in regional Victoria. There is funding of \$9 million to help

universities and TAFE institutions work together to enhance the delivery of tertiary education in our regions. There is funding as well for transport, leadership programs and youth programs, all designed to support young people in regional communities. Professor David Battersby put it very well when he said that the state government had 'connected the dots' in what was important in regional Victoria to attract and retain students.

I would like now to turn to the second area, which is backing jobs and industry. This builds on the 120 000 new jobs that exist in regional Victoria today that were not there a decade ago.

We also recognise the significant contribution that regional businesses make to the life of regional communities and economies. That is why we are setting aside \$99.4 million under our Backing Jobs in Industry initiative to create new jobs and to boost regional industries and small business. Importantly, in this area we are seeing government leading by example. We will lead by example: we will build on our record of seeing more government jobs in the regions. There are already over 1100 government jobs in the regions under our program of shifting government jobs into regional areas, and the blueprint announces our plans to establish approximately 400 more public sector jobs across Ballarat, Bendigo and Moe.

There is also support for private industry. There is support through our \$28 million Industries for Today program to help businesses to invest, expand, look at increasing their export opportunities and train their workforces. There is a \$36 million Tourism Industry Support package. This includes funds to help investments in new tourism infrastructure, particularly in the nature-based tourism area, and there is ongoing support for regional businesses through our Industry Capability Network and Innovation Through Clusters program. It has been great to see the support from VECCI — the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry — which welcomes the blueprint and said that it 'ticks many of the boxes for regional Victorian businesses'.

Building Infrastructure, Connecting Communities is another strategy in the blueprint that is a response to the strong emphasis that communities have placed on supporting infrastructure. They understand well how critical infrastructure is to the ability to connect communities and how having the right infrastructure in place is to attracting people and families. That is why the blueprint contains a \$260 million boost, the single biggest one-off boost to the RIDF taking our total investment in this area to \$871 million. We cannot

forget that the RIDF sits on top of those areas of education and health in addition to core services. We are not trying to cut services, as some others are with their funds. This is on top of funding for those programs.

The blueprint includes funding for roads and bus services. It also includes funding to drive the advantages for regional Victorians under the rollout of the national broadband network, and it is all about making sure that we have the right infrastructure in place to support regional communities. It is interesting to note here that the mayor of Swan Hill, Cr Greg Cruickshank, was pleased to see the RIDF continue. He said:

... it is one of the major ways that we can get good dollars for infrastructure ...

How right he is! I know he is looking forward to talking to us more about some of those good dollars flowing to his area.

Another area of the blueprint is supporting the regional rural way of life, and I focus here particularly on our small towns, which are a vital part of our state. To have a thriving Victoria you have to have thriving small towns. That is why we have set aside \$50 million for our Sustainable Small Towns package to support our smaller towns through investment in areas that are important to them. Also in this area there is \$10 million for the provincial arts experience, funding for the country football and netball program, and other funds through RIDF for community infrastructure.

Finally I turn to the population boom. It has been very much a decade of 'If you build it, people will come'. It is different from the situation in the 1990s when there was a tendency to cut and close, and people left the regions in droves. The opposite is true today. That is what we want to see, and we recognise that regional Victoria has a most important role to play in supporting balanced population growth across the state. It is also why the Ready for Tomorrow blueprint includes a new regional settlement framework entitled, 'A state of many choices', that will be formally included in the state planning policy framework to help guide planners about future population growth. This is also something that regional Victorians have been calling for. I turn to the comments of the president of the Municipal Association of Victoria, Cr Bill McArthur, who said this was:

... the first coordinated state plan to provide strategic direction on regional and rural Victoria's role in responding to our population growth challenges.

He is right, and we are going to work in partnership with local government. We have set aside \$58.9 million of funding to ensure that the critical planning takes place. Of that, \$21.8 million is dedicated to supporting local government in its critical role in planning for future population growth and for governing the regions.

Also we are setting up a new way of doing business. We will continue the very good dialogue we have had with our regions. It has been great to see the mayor of the Gannawarra Shire Council, Keith den Houting, endorsing the approach we took when he said the consultation that led to the development of the blueprint was 'rewarding' — and it was rewarding. It was an incredibly rewarding process to go out and consult widely and deeply with communities on a number of occasions, and I think the outcome has been that we have the right policy and programs in place. We listened carefully, we have responded carefully, and we have in place the right set of policies and programs.

That is the way you develop programs and policy. You do not issue a three-page press release, cross your fingers and hope you have got it right. That is not showing people the respect that they deserve. It is about making sure that you do it right. That is why the Premier has established a new ministerial committee that will consider the work of the regional plans that are being prepared. That will continue.

As I said, this blueprint starts a new chapter of opportunity in regional Victoria. We will work with the regions as they develop their regional plans. They have the resources in the blueprint to be able to implement these plans, and most importantly they will have streamlined access into government. We will have a new ministerial committee, chaired by the Premier, to consider these regional plans, and the new Victorian Council of Governments where we will be formalising our relationship with Regional Cities Victoria and Rural Councils Victoria as together we work on investing in the future of our regions.

We will build on the achievements of the past decade. We look to a very bright future where regional Victoria continues to be a great place to live.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — It is a great pleasure to join this debate today. Here we have the Liberal-Nationals coalition is leading the way yet again. The government is in here speaking to a motion which is almost a replica of that which I was very proudly able to move in this place only a couple of weeks ago.

This motion seeks to reflect upon what is really a pale imitation of the real thing. We produced the real thing a

few weeks ago. We told Victorians we would have a \$1 billion regional growth fund established when we win government on 27 November this year; it would be there over the next eight years, on top of existing expenditure from the different departments; it would be there as a flexible fund; it would fill the gaps between the different forms of funding that is provided through the departments; and, very importantly, this would be built from the ground up.

We told Victorians there would be a role for the regional development committees, which already exist, which fact apparently escaped the attention of the Minister for Regional and Rural Development when she issued a press release on 29 May. As a matter of information for the minister, they already exist because this government set them up. Those regional development committees would be used to identify projects and would have a direct hand in the allocation of funding out of the regional growth fund to bring those projects to fruition. It was a great announcement.

On top of all that, this would be part of the important discussion about population, which is something we should not shy away from in a Victoria-wide sense and certainly not in a Victorian regional and country sense; we should embrace the population debate. The fact is that when you look at who we are, what our communities are, where we have come from and the way we are now constituted, so often you see that it is those people who have come to us from other parts of the world who are now driving the sorts of economies that we have in regional Victoria. As I speak I have the member for Shepparton here with me at the table. You would not see a better example than Shepparton of a community which has embraced the fact of other people coming to live with us.

The proposition that I advanced on 29 May on behalf of the Liberal-Nationals coalition had those two important components to it — \$1 billion driven from the ground up on top of existing departmental funding and making sure that those of us who live outside Melbourne are able to identify projects and then have a direct part in being able to see them implemented. The other issue is to do with attracting people in this all-important population debate, making sure that we can continue to welcome people from other countries into our communities. Of course that proposition was very well received. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development said in her press release of 29 May that this was a proposal that would be absolutely rejected by the regional cities because this was being done despite the regional cities, not to assist them.

The first press release that I have in my hand here is dated 31 May and is headed 'Regional Cities Victoria welcomes the coalition's commitment to regional Victoria'. It goes on to say quite reasonably and correctly that this is a great initiative. When I met with the Regional Cities Victoria group, in company with the member for South-West Coast, only a few days later we had protracted discussions and conversations. We were supposed to be there for about 25 minutes but we had an hour of a tremendously constructive discussion with that regional cities group in which we went through the enormous benefits we jointly see in being able to have this fund implemented. The group was thrilled with it, and of course it is not alone.

I have about 25 articles here. I will not read them all out but will just flick through them. This is from Australian Associated Press:

The Victorian Nationals have unveiled plans for a \$1 billion regional growth fund to boost jobs and upgrade local services and infrastructure.

There are similar sorts of things in the *Sunday Age* of 30 May and in an article headed 'Getting "fair share"' in the *Shepparton News* of 31 May — the *Shepparton News* is a great product — written by that terrific journalist Darren Linton. There is an article in the *Bendigo Advertiser* by Karen Sweeney headed 'Life will be better, Nats say'. It just goes on and on; there are pages and pages of it here.

Mr Helper — More than your policy!

Mr RYAN — The government calls for me to read more; I can continue to do that. There is an article here by Kate Coughlan from the northern part of Victoria. There is an article headed 'Coalition's fund puts pressure on Brumby'. It just goes on and on. An article in the *Geelong Advertiser* states:

Mayor John Mitchell says Geelong will battle for its share of a whopping —

'a whopping'; that is what he said —

\$1 billion regional growth fund to be set up by the state opposition if it wins the November election.

Those Labor Party members over there must have been shivering in their boots when they heard this announcement and read those papers.

There is another article headed 'Lib Nats announce \$1 billion plan for regional Victoria'. It just goes on and on and on, and why should it not? It has been carefully designed to ensure that we look after the needs of rural and regional Victoria. We want to make certain that in the course of this population debate — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I am sure the Leader of The Nationals does not need protection, but the member for Melton is a bit loud.

Mr RYAN — Yes, a bit like wind farms — a lot of hot air actually. Moving right along, the simple fact is — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of The Nationals does not help with that sort of comment.

Mr RYAN — Indeed. Moving right along, the great thing about this is that this is a clear line in the sand for people in rural and regional Victoria. They can see clearly what it is we intend — there are no ifs, buts or maybes — it is there laid out before them. They will be the driving force behind its delivery. That is the thing they love. This is not Spring Street telling them what it is they are going to have to have in the future. This is not the government of the day telling rural and regional Victoria, 'This is the way it will be'. This is the precise reverse of that. This is not the Premier saying on the front page of the *Age* that Melbourne has growing pains and therefore we are going to have some sort of crumbs off the table for rural and regional Victoria. No, this is going to be on the basis that because rural and regional Victoria makes the magnificent contribution it does, it will be a great thing not only for these communities but also for the state as a whole if we are able to further enhance it. Of course the announcement was welcomed. What do we have by way of this pale imitation from this government?

I have a couple of clippings here, and they are a bit interesting too. There is one here from the *Age*. It is headed 'Cash dash to shore up the future' and is written by Paul Austin, an esteemed journalist. He says:

Jacinta Allan and her Bendigo-based electorate are reaping the dividends as Brumby moves to protect his government.

John Brumby calls his government's blueprint for regional and rural Victoria 'Ready for Tomorrow'. He's proud of it. Some state Labor MPs call it the 'Save Jacinta project'.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RYAN — That is what it says; I am only quoting the article, so it has to be right! It goes on to say:

They're jealous of it.

I can see Labor members going red in the face even as I speak; I can see some of the usual suspects sitting on the government benches. I wonder who gave that bit of background information to the *Age* to print an article

like that. By Jove! 'Save Jacinta', it says. 'They're jealous of it', it says. Oh, dear.

There is another quote here, from an ABC News article, reporting the head of the Victorian Farmers Federation responding to the government's proposition:

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has criticised the plan saying it will not go far enough to support the growing population in regional Victoria.

VFF president Andrew Broad says the government is trying to buy votes ahead of the November state election ...

What a thing to say! The government would not do a thing like that, would it, surely? It would not be trying to buy votes before the state election now by producing a plan that it has been talking about since February last year, with the Premier of the state standing there talking about this regional blueprint! It has taken about 17 months and the government has produced it 185 days out from an election. It would not be trying to buy votes, would it, surely? No!

Mr Broad went on:

'We want long-term investment in infrastructure, and that costs real money, not a throwaway \$25 million here and \$25 million there', he said.

'Call me a little bit cynical, but that's my reading of it at this stage'.

You would have to say he was right on the money. When you have a look at the hotchpotch which is said to pass for this plan, it is no wonder that this sort of commentary is made.

Let us have a look at a couple of things about it. The first thing is this: the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — —

Mr Nardella — Which you opposed.

Mr RYAN — I hear the interjection from the member from Melton, who says it was opposed. I actually got the library to do a review of the votes and proceedings around the passage of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill — I think even the member for Melton would agree that the good folk who work in the library here at the Parliament of Victoria do a great job. I have got the result of that in my hand. What it shows quite clearly is that no-one ever voted against the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill. No-one ever voted against it. It is another Labor lie. Labor members will say anything; they will do anything. It is an absolute Labor lie.

Mr Nardella — You opposed it.

Mr RYAN — The member for Melton keeps insisting we opposed it.

Mr Nardella — You did. I was there.

Mr RYAN — I am holding in my hand the summary of the votes and proceedings, and it shows clearly that no-one voted against the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill. It is a myth; it is an urban myth — —

Mr Nardella — You opposed it.

Mr RYAN — He keeps saying it: 'They opposed it'. I am holding here the votes and proceedings which say precisely the contrary. It is a Labor lie; Labor members will say anything, do anything. If I were called upon by a member of this house to table the document that I now have — —

Dr Sykes — Table the document!

Mr RYAN — I am being called upon to table the document, Deputy Speaker. I am now tabling the document.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Is the member seeking leave to table the document?

Mr RYAN — No, because I am sure someone is going to take a point of order and ask me to table the document.

Mrs Powell — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the member is quoting from a document. It is a fairly substantial document, and I think it would tell the truth of what was happening, and I ask him to table it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is no need for theatrics. The Leader of The Nationals can simply make the document available to the house, rather than going through this.

Mr RYAN — I make the document available, particularly to the member for Melton. The reality is that no-one ever opposed the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. That is an urban myth, so let us just put that aside. Let us talk about some contemporary issues.

The government has failed to account for \$56 million of the \$611 million that has been allocated to this fund over the last 10 years.

Mr Nardella — What?

Mr RYAN — 'What?' says the member for Melton. He ought to go off and — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I will ask the member for Melton one more time to cease interjecting, and I ask the Leader of The Nationals not to take up the interjections from the member for Melton.

Mr RYAN — Certainly, Deputy Speaker. What the government's own budget papers show is that \$56 million of that \$611-odd million is in the forward estimates for this year. That is what the government's budget papers show. The money has not been committed, let alone expended. The money is still sitting in the forward estimates. What I want to know from the government when it now talks about this so-called additional funding for the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is what happened to that \$56 million? Is that in the money that is now part of this new document, or is the government going to allow it just to disappear into the ether? It has got to account for that money. It cannot be telling Victorians that it is putting more money into the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to the tune of \$260 million when \$56 million remains unused and is in the government's own forward estimates.

There are other elements of all this too. The government talks about \$260 million being added to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, and on these numbers as a statement that is in fact so, but what the government does not make clear and what you see when you go through the document — it is a one-pager in appendix A, page 63, which sets out the various items of expenditure — is that there are 40 infrastructure initiatives that total up to \$630-odd million, but the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund turns out to have only \$110 million left in it after these other infrastructure initiatives. And on it goes and on it goes.

The reality is this is another urban myth. This whole proposition about a \$631 million program is another urban myth. Leave aside the fact that \$25 million of it is going into the cattery down there at Skilled Stadium. That is a great initiative; we very strongly support it, but it ought to be funded out of appropriate sources, not this.

If we win government on 27 November, if we are able to do it, regional and rural Victorians will see the dawning of a great new age, not just the repetition of this sort of urban myth we have again had produced today.

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak to this matter of public importance. It is a bit of an irony in this debate to follow the Leader of The Nationals, who has spent his

entire time defending the pitiful effort by The Nationals to produce a regional development policy. This morning before coming into the chamber I printed off from The Nationals website its policy — not a press release, not a two-page press release, not a three-page press release, whatever the arguments are on that, but the policy headed 'Vic Liberals and Nationals launch \$1 billion regional growth fund'. It is three and one-eighth pages long. I could be charitable and describe it as four pages, but one page has a mere two paragraphs on it. It has about as much detail in it as a *Melway* that has been left on the back sill of the opposition leader's car to fade in the sun, and it goes on with a whole diatribe. One section of the policy shows how sloppily this document, and therefore this policy, has been put together. It states:

Over the coming months we will be meeting with communities, local government, health and education associations —

and it goes on. I will be damned! We have been doing that for the entire time we have taken to develop our policy statement, *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*. We have consulted with communities. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development has been leading a task force moving around regional and rural Victoria. The Premier has engaged with many of these communities, and as ministers and individual members of Parliament we always consult with regional and rural Victoria. It is no wonder that our product is a plan to grow Victoria and to build Victoria in its regional and rural areas. It is a detailed plan, with 5 strategies and 51 actions, as opposed to the three-and-one-eighth-page document of The Nationals. I think they could have produced it better with a packet of Laxettes.

If we compare these key competing ideas in the 3½-page document on the one hand and the detailed 66-page blueprint for regional Victoria on the other, the coalition's proposition is for \$1 billion over eight years. I have news for the coalition: quite apart from the fact that the government's proposition covers a whole lot of infrastructure funding from sources other than the Consolidated Fund and has to address a narrow area in terms of support for regional Victoria, \$631 million over five years is of course more than \$1 billion over eight years. The Nationals proposition clearly short-changes regional and rural Victoria.

Let me go to some of the details contained in the *Ready for Tomorrow* blueprint. Take for example the \$99.4 million Backing Jobs and Industry action plan in my portfolio area of agriculture. This will mean direct support for many agricultural enterprises in many agricultural and processing sectors in this state, helping

them to develop export markets, innovation, capital investment, and process and supply chain improvements. Take the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, of which the Leader of The Nationals has been a vehement and consistent critic right from the day the newly elected Labor government introduced it as its first legislation. He has been a consistent critic of it.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund has done a terrific amount of good in my electorate repairing in part the damage left by the seven dark years of the previous coalition government and of course taking forward the great communities that I serve. That has been repeated right around the state. Take the \$2 million Young Farmer First Farm grants. This is not an extraordinary amount of money, but it is well targeted to ensure that young farmers in this state can see a future and get a bit of a hand to get into agriculture and build their families' prosperity as well as the state's prosperity in agriculture.

By way of further example, take the \$1.2 million for Dairy Australia to ensure that the industry continues to breed dairy cows most appropriate for Australian conditions. Again it is not an extraordinary amount of money, but it will leverage approximately \$60 to \$100 million over the next 10 years in farm gate productivity improvement. That is what I call strategic investment. Of course you cannot capture that sort of careful, targeted thinking and those sorts of initiatives in a so-called three-and-one-eighth-page policy document.

Let us look at the investment in the Global Network Satellite System, which will receive a \$4.89 million upgrade to increase the number of base stations from 30 to 102. Precision agriculture is the future, particularly for cropping agriculture in this state, if not globally. Why should Victorian farmers not have a government that thinks through the details and works out the initiatives to support them with dramatic productivity improving methods and measures such as this?

Let us look at the \$13.9 million to support Landcare and Bush Broker programs, which again assist farmers and farming communities to protect and manage native vegetation on private land. There is also \$500 000 for the Industries for Today and Tomorrow program to develop a comprehensive food strategy to grow regional Victoria's \$25.4 billion food and beverages industry, which again is not an extraordinary amount of money, but it is a very well targeted investment to ensure that Victorian agriculture and Victoria's fantastic and innovative food industry is supported into the future. Then we have \$200 000 — again, not an

extraordinary amount of money in the scheme of things — for the Victorian Farmers Federation to assist the Young Agribusiness Professionals program to build the capacity and leadership potential of young farmers in this state.

Just from going through my portfolio areas you can see that we have a detailed proposition before us in the regional blueprint, *Ready for Tomorrow*, which supports agriculture, rural communities and regional cities and small country towns as well. We have seen this government's commitment to, firstly, rebuilding regional and rural Victoria and then taking it forward to unprecedented growth and opportunities into the future. We have seen the Liberal-Nationals coalition come up with three-and-one-eighth pages of absolute diatribe, with minimal detail and the startling revelation that in the coming months coalition members are going to go around and actually talk to people. Gee whiz! They have had 10 years to talk to people. I would have thought they would have started quite some considerable time earlier. A policy of three and one eighth pages is an absolutely disgraceful effort by this coalition.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast will get the call if he wants it.

Mr HELPER — It is fair to say that being in opposition is a difficult task. I acknowledge that being in opposition must be a very difficult task to perform well. One of the tasks of being in opposition is to whinge and whine, and we all accept that. The only thing that this coalition does excel at is whingeing and whining; it certainly does not succeed in coming up with its own policies. After referring to regional and rural Victoria as the 'toenails of the state' it insults regional and rural Victoria again with a three-and-one-eighth-page policy with absolutely no detail, with a vague reference of actually talking to people and no thoughts and less money for more issues that it wishes to cover with regional and rural Victoria.

The comparison is stark. When looking at regional and rural Victoria now and also 10 years ago, any objective person would come to the conclusion that it is in a better space, is much more vibrant and much more resilient to the challenges that remain out there and that will always be there, and *Ready for Tomorrow*, makes us ready for tomorrow.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — It is interesting following the Minister for Agriculture. This is the same Minister for Agriculture who promised the

people of Avoca in his own electorate that they would get a connection to natural gas, but reneged on that promise. This is the same Minister for Agriculture who, on the *Country Hour* program on the ABC the other day, could not give a commitment to retrospectivity with respect to payment for chemicals for locusts when he was questioned time and again on that program. This is the Minister for Agriculture who is an embarrassment to the agricultural community of Victoria and he has failed to deliver again this morning.

Yesterday the Minister for Regional and Rural Development in answer to a Dorothy Dix question, quoted from the Warrnambool *Standard*, and I will commence by also quoting from the front page of that paper about the government's so-called regional blueprint. On page 1 in an article headed 'Give us our cut' it says that the government has played politics with regional funding and the south-west is not getting its fair share.

The headline in the *Hamilton Spectator* of 17 June is 'South-west misses out'; the headline in the *Portland Observer* of 18 June is '... regional blueprint has nothing for Portland district'; and on 19 June the cartoon in the Saturday edition of the Warrnambool *Standard* depicted John Brumby hoarding a piggybank full of cash and denying south-west Victoria access to that cash for key infrastructure.

In contrast to that, there has been enormous support for the position taken by the coalition with regard to its policy for a \$1 billion fund for regional and rural Victoria. It is interesting to note, and I can see why the Labor Party has trouble with that fund when you read the debate on the last matter of public importance regarding this issue when the member for Melton said:

They come in here and announce a \$1 billion fund over eight years, \$25 million a year ...

No wonder the Labor Party has problems with this fund: it cannot add up, it does not understand the funding and it certainly does not deliver for country Victoria.

Regional Cities Victoria has put out a press release headed 'Regional Cities Victoria welcomes the coalition's commitment to regional Victoria'. I have met with Regional Cities Victoria and it thinks this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. The Victorian Farmers Federation put out a press release headed 'Farmers back opposition's regional growth fund pledge'. In the *Geelong Advertiser* the mayor of the City of Greater Geelong, John Mitchell, said Geelong is going to be fighting for its share of that funding because it thinks it is a great growth fund.

This is a very broad topic, and I will highlight several examples to demonstrate the clear hypocrisy of the city-centric Brumby Labor government on regional and rural issues. The facts are very clear. When we look at key issues concerning the quality of life in regional and rural Victoria, whether it be health outcomes, longevity, Victorian certificate of education completion and participation in tertiary education and training or socioeconomic status and average incomes, the outcomes in those key life areas for Victorians living in regional and rural areas are significantly poorer than their city cousins.

It is also of note — —

Mr Helper interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — It is interesting that the minister interjects. The gap between the city and the country in those key life areas has increased during the 10 years of this Labor government. Those are the facts.

I am proud to live and work in country Victoria, along with many of my colleagues. We are committed to making a real difference and improving the quality-of-life opportunities and outcomes for regional and rural Victoria. We want to make a real difference to those outcomes, not play politics with the people of regional and rural Victoria, as this government does, but actually deliver a real difference.

We believe that Melbourne is growing too fast and action is needed to promote decentralisation of people, industry, jobs and opportunities into regional and rural Victoria. We believe that regional cities and surrounding towns, and indeed rural Victoria, can provide real opportunities to cater for our growing state population and improve livability not only in country communities but in Melbourne itself through reduced population growth and population pressure.

The coalition's \$1 billion regional fund will play a key role in delivering this result. One of the great strengths of the coalition's approach, as opposed to the Labor Party's approach, is that our fund will be driven by local regional communities and local community leaders who will target the needs of those cities, towns and rural communities. The two ministers who have spoken have said that it is only a three-page document. One of the reasons for that is because we are not telling country people what is good for them. We are going to listen to country people and country people are going to decide how to run this agenda. It is not going to be driven by Spring Street, it is not going to be driven by a city-centric government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Dr NAPTHINE — It is interesting that the members are interjecting, but let us have a look at it. In June 2010 — —

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — The member for South Barwon would be very interested in this. It is a document entitled *Victoria's Barwon South West Region — Advice to Government* and was prepared by the committee of Regional Development Australia and Regional Development Victoria. What does it say are the highest priorities? I quote the chair of the Regional Development Australia Barwon South West Committee, Bruce Anson, who said that three projects in particular are critically important for the region. They are the implementation of the green triangle freight action plan, the upgrade of the Princes Highway west and the Geelong cultural precinct. Those are the three most important projects for the Barwon south-west region.

In June 2010 how many of those three projects got funding in the government's blueprint? One, two, three? No, zero! None of the three most important projects for the Barwon south-west region got funding.

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — The only one who has given a commitment to duplicate the highway to Colac is Tony Abbott, the federal Leader of the Opposition.

The green triangle freight action plan is no. 1 on this regional list. On 8 April 2009 the government announced new road and rail freight links as the key element of the \$340 million green triangle freight action plan. In a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing the minister admitted there were no new dollars for that plan in the 2010–11 state budget. What is worse is that we now have the situation reported in an article that appeared in the *Portland Observer* of 18 June and headed 'Freight plan in tatters'. It is the no. 1 priority for the Barwon south-west region under a committee established by the Australian and Victorian governments, but the plan is in tatters because there is no funding from the state government. Now we find that the federal government has said no funding will be available until at least 30 June 2014. The green triangle freight action plan, the no. 1 project, is in tatters.

The only ones who have committed to the Princes Highway west are Tony Abbott and the coalition, supported by Sarah Henderson, the great Liberal Party candidate for the federal seat of Corangamite, and Daniel Tehan, the great Liberal Party candidate for the federal seat of Wannan. They are the ones who are

doing the hard work on the Princes Highway west while Labor is missing in action.

Let us look at the racing industry for a short time, because the racing industry is a great employer in rural and regional Victoria. We judge governments by what they do, not what they say, particularly the Labor government because the Labor government talks big and delivers little. What has happened in the last few years in the racing industry? The state Labor government has closed harness racing tracks at Boort, Gunbower, Ouyen, St Arnaud, Wangaratta and Wedderburn, and it has said that Stawell and Ararat will be merged into one club after closing one of those tracks. It will be interesting to see where the member for Ripon, who is the Minister for Agriculture, stands on that issue, which is hot in his local area.

The government has also taken country harness race meetings and given them to Melton. In 2010 it closed the Wangaratta greyhound track in rural and regional Victoria. In 2008 the government cut 28 country race meetings and removed TAB status from many others. In 2009 it cut another 38 country meetings, and it announced it would close nine country training centres in Camperdown, Casterton, Coleraine, Edenhope, Kerang, Mansfield, Mortlake, Murtoa and Warracknabeal. Further it said that there would be no new capital funding for another 10 country training centres, and many trainers have made the decision to move away from these centres at Ararat, Bairnsdale, Benalla, Colac, Hamilton, Horsham, Tatura, Stony Creek and Yarra Valley. This government's track record on one of the major industries in country Victoria, the racing industry, is to close tracks, close training centres and take away race meetings. That is what this government does to country Victoria.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I am certainly pleased to support the matter of public importance raised by the member for Bendigo East that this house congratulates the Brumby Labor government for its ongoing investment and support for regional and rural Victoria, including the Ready for Tomorrow blueprint for regional and rural Victoria, and condemns the Liberal and National coalition for taking regional and rural Victoria for granted.

What we have with the government's detailed, thorough plan for the next stage of development and support for regional and rural Victoria is in stark contrast to what we saw put out by the coalition a couple of weeks earlier. Clearly the opposition was aware that the government was about to present its thorough plan after it had undertaken substantial consultation with people from across regional and rural

Victoria; it knew we were about to deliver a detailed document in regard to our support for regional and rural Victoria. What did the opposition try to do? It did not have anything ready to go, but it thought that if it could at least get the Leader of The Nationals out to somewhere in regional Victoria, get something in front of the media and throw a figure out there, with a couple of pages in a media statement to back it up, then it might be able to attract a bit of attention for itself. But what it really has done is embarrass itself significantly by putting out a half-baked plan that is lacking in detail.

Although I want to speak mostly on our government's positive proposal, I also want to reflect on what the *Weekly Times* editorial had to say following the release of the opposition's package, which of course was not even supported by the Leader of the Opposition; it was simply trotted out by the Leader of The Nationals. The editorial from the week following that announcement has the headline 'We need more dollar details' and refers to what was presented by the Leader of The Nationals. It states:

Sounds good, but there is nothing much to report beyond the headlines.

How can The Nationals, given their experience in government, deliver such a slim piece of policy to regional Victorians?

Ten years in opposition should have taught The Nationals that they can't assume country people will vote for them.

It's as though Peter Ryan has forgotten the most important lesson of Victorian politics: 'Don't take the bush for granted'.

That is what the *Weekly Times* had to say about the pathetic presentation by the opposition.

By contrast, the regional blueprint *Ready for Tomorrow*, which we as a government presented when the Premier and the Minister for Regional and Rural Development came to Ballarat two weeks ago, outlined for the people of regional Victoria, including regional leaders, the details of the plan. They presented a thorough 61-page document which includes our proposals for taking the next step with regional Victoria.

Let us not forget that this is not just the starting point; this is continuing on from when we were elected in 1999 and inherited a situation where regional and rural Victoria was seen as being the toenails of the state. Let us not forget that. Unemployment in regional Victoria was extremely high and rural communities were feeling thoroughly let down by the Liberal and National coalition government at the time when they saw country schools closing, teachers and police being

sacked and many other services, such as regional rail services, being ripped out of regional Victoria.

We started the plan with the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund as a key part of that and in so many other ways, such as supporting regional schools and regional hospitals. We supported the regions by working with local councils and regional business leaders to see a turnaround.

Following on from that, this plan we have put forward, which as I said was developed after a comprehensive process of consultation with leaders from regional Victoria, local government leaders, industry leaders and so on, has been well received across regional Victoria. I will talk more about how it has been received in Ballarat. We know that this detailed plan looks at five key strategies, which are important and reflect upon the advice we received, and they will certainly take us forward. The first is investing in skills and young people, recognising that we want to keep young people in the regions and see that they are supported and have a pathway to stay on, especially a pathway into higher education and skilling options within the regions.

We have allocated \$110.1 million towards that aspect of this strategy, which will see universities such as the University of Ballarat working more closely with TAFE to ensure that courses are linked and that the needs of young people from the regions are met by providing appropriate accommodation and other supports to ensure they have the opportunity to further their education beyond secondary level, gain skills and stay in the regions. The strategy will even attract people from Melbourne out to the regions to do that study. It is a great initiative, which I note is strongly supported by such people as the vice-chancellor of the University of Ballarat, David Battersby.

The second strategy is about backing jobs and industry — \$99.4 million has been allocated towards a new action plan to create thousands of new jobs not only by boosting regional industry but also by looking at what government jobs no longer need to be centred in Melbourne and can be relocated to the regions. The Bracks and Brumby government has already moved the State Revenue Office from Melbourne to Ballarat, which has brought 300 jobs to Ballarat. It is a fabulous initiative which has spun benefits out to Bendigo and Geelong. This proposal will see that initiative continue, not just through action to have government employees employed in the regions but also by ensuring that regional industries are given further support so they can build, find opportunities to expand and provide further jobs for people in the regions. This initiative will work across a broad range of industries.

The third strategy is about building infrastructure and connecting communities. Again, this initiative is backed by significant funding. Some \$203.9 million has been allocated to provide regional Victorians with the world-class infrastructure they need, such as water, energy — including cleaner energy — transport, opportunities for industry to develop and improving broadband connections into the regions. A broad range of strategies are in place through which Regional Development Victoria and other bodies can work with councils and businesses to see Victoria develop and ensure that wherever you live in the regions you will have good quality services.

The fourth strategy is about supporting the regional and rural way of life. This initiative is backed up with funding of \$158.4 million for sports clubs and to provide cultural and other opportunities for communities to ensure that the way of life in these country communities and in the regions is a quality lifestyle.

The last initiative is about planning better regions. It is a new partnership through which the state government works with local government. Some \$58.9 million has been allocated so that local governments can plan appropriately for the future. How was this plan received in the regions? It has been received incredibly well. I would like to have gone into more detail about the specifics of opportunities within the regions, but we saw the *Courier* headline the following day 'Bright future ahead with bush cash splash'. The article contains comments from such people as the mayor of Ballarat, Judy Verlin, a person who historically is not particularly Labor friendly — she has been a Liberal candidate for Ballarat West on two occasions in the last 10 years — and states:

Ballarat mayor Judy Verlin said the announcement reflected on the key asks of regional cities and was a chance for regional areas to tap into a range of opportunities.

Cr Verlin, who is also chairperson of the Regional Cities Committee, said the blueprint focused on attracting and retaining skills in the regions.

'The city is well-placed to tap into these opportunities through the strong TAFE and universities we have here', Cr Verlin said.

Committee for Ballarat chairman Tony Chew said that overall, the regional blueprint was a good initiative.

The article contains more positive comments, so this initiative has been very well received in my region and has provided a stark contrast to that pathetic effort — the so-called billion-dollar line thrown out by the opposition which has been followed with no details. Coalition members are simply attempting to attract a bit

of media attention, but they have not provided any homework or background.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I rise to make some comments on the matter of public importance that has been put forward by the member for Bendigo East, and I will compare it to a similar motion which was put forward by the member for Gippsland South on 9 June on behalf of the coalition. Today the member for Bendigo East has put forward a matter:

That this house congratulates the Brumby Labor government for its ongoing investment and support for regional and rural Victoria including through the *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* and condemns the Liberal and Nationals coalition for taking regional and rural Victoria for granted.

The echo in the room might be caused by the fact that we heard all of this the last time a matter of public importance was discussed, on Wednesday 9 June. On that day the member for Gippsland South, on behalf of the coalition, put forward a matter:

That this house congratulates the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition on its far-sighted policy commitment to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund for the benefit of regional and rural Victoria.

Again we see that the government continues to follow the great leadership of the Liberal-Nationals coalition. Further, on 29 May the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition launched its policy to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund, which will fund projects in regional Victoria over an eight-year period. Only 16 days later, on 15 June, the Brumby government announced a plan for funding growth in regional Victoria with the announcement of funding of \$631 million over five years, which was accompanied by a document entitled *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*.

We all know that shortly there will be a state election. After 10 years of neglecting rural and regional Victoria, members of this government have come in here and said, 'This is our vision for tomorrow; we are doing something about country Victoria'. I think people in rural and regional Victoria can see right through this and understand the ploy that this government is trying to pull off.

It is the coalition that cares about rural and regional Victoria, not the government. Coalition members understand the importance and the vital contribution that rural and regional Victoria makes not just to this state but nationwide, through its food and fibre and all the great things that come from country Victoria. We understand the need for country Victoria to grow, and

coalition members understand the need to provide even basic services to country Victoria.

Earlier this morning I listened to the Minister for Agriculture speaking about his portfolio. He spoke about all the good things that are in the government's fund for agriculture, but he did not once mention that he is also the Minister for Small Business. It is interesting that he did not mention that, because at a recent breakfast meeting in Shepparton the guest speaker asked 40 or 50 small business people, 'Who knows the name of the Minister for Small Business?'. Not one small business owner knew who the Minister for Small Business is. I urge the Minister for Small Business to get out there and talk to those people. He should listen to them and hear what they say they need. If he wants to make sure that country Victoria grows, he needs to make sure that small business also grows. I urge the minister to get out there amongst country Victorians and businesspeople and talk to them to see what they want.

The coalition's proposal to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund, which was highlighted by the member for Gippsland South and the member for South-West Coast, sets out what our \$1 billion regional growth fund is all about. Let me tell members what it is about. It is about establishing a dedicated fund for rural and regional Victoria, and about 48 councils being able to access this defined fund, which will also be enshrined in legislation. Coalition members understand that the fund is to supplement, not replace, normal government expenditure. To make sure that the coalition's fund is transparent and above board, we are going to make sure that the details of all grants of those funds expended will be published on a website.

All projects receiving more than \$25 000 in funding will be subject to an independent review. Funding decisions will be driven by local communities with the assistance of five regional committees, not by some bureaucrats in Melbourne. The decisions on funding will not be coming from Spring Street or any bureaucrats; they will come from people in the community who know and understand the importance of that funding. It is the local committees that will be making those decisions. Members of those committees will be the ones who will identify, assess and approve priority local projects under the 40 per cent of the funding component that they will be in charge of. For the use of the other 60 per cent of funding, the chairs of the five regional committees will provide advice to the minister on the priorities. The coalition's proposal to establish this fund has been accepted widely across country Victoria. The Leader of The Nationals has

spoken of the information he has read in various newspapers about public support for the fund.

Let me compare the coalition's proposal to the Brumby government's proposal of \$631 million over five years. The government proposes that all decisions on projects and funding will be made by bureaucrats in Melbourne, and that there will be no public evaluation or scrutiny of individual projects. The government proposes that project data will be published once a year in an annual report, and there is no requirement for the data to be published on a website. Local councils will be able to apply for funding for projects such as streetscaping and building and refurbishing community halls, and it will be Melbourne bureaucrats who will decide who gets what funding.

Again this is councils spending their limited resources on having to apply for the funding, having to pay for people to prepare the tenders. They are going to spend their very limited resources on the effort to apply, and they may be refused. It is too little, too late from this government.

This government talks about how important local government is, and I agree. The coalition understands the importance of local government and the significant role it will play. The member for Bendigo East said the government is going to work in partnership with local government. If you listen to the Municipal Association of Victoria, you will hear that after a decade the government does not work in partnership with it at all; there is very little discussion with local government. I hear that because I have travelled around Victoria and spoken to over 50 councils, 30 of them in regional and rural Victoria, and I know what they think of the government's consultation — very little.

I know what councils think about this government shifting costs onto local councils. Small regional communities are hurting. The government continues to shift costs and responsibilities onto local government, and it is hurting. A report was given to the Minister for Local Government about two weeks ago. It is titled *Local Government Financial Sustainability: Focus on Small Rural Councils* and is also known as the Whelan report. It was written by Merv Whelan and his son, Rohan. Merv Whelan is a highly respected member of the local government community who understands and supports local government. He has been talking to local government over the years and is a municipal inspector. The Whelan report says:

This report examines the relative financial sustainability of Victorian councils using a statistically based model. Sustainability is defined as a council's capacity to service the required needs of its community ...

The report further says:

The 18 small rural councils identified in this report do not have the capacity to adequately service their communities. The provision of guaranteed long-term operating entitlements, as recommended by this report, is essential to their future sustainability.

Two-thirds of those councils are in northern Victoria. In their report Merv and Rohan Whelan go on to say:

The state government has a responsibility to ensure that councils have adequate financial resources to achieve these purposes. Sustainability of these councils is dependent on the provision of guaranteed long-term funding ...

The report also says:

The combined annual underlying operating deficits incurred by these councils —

the 18 councils —

... totals \$34 million. This does not include the additional costs attributable to unfunded works and services.

How on earth can councils survive when they are getting absolutely starved of funding by this government? There was a really sad issue just last week when the Strathbogie Shire Council had to close Kirwans Bridge, which is near Nagambie. In 2008 the council did not have enough funds to continue its maintenance, so it had to load-limit the bridge to 3 tonnes, which meant it was a huge concern for emergency service vehicles. This is a heritage-listed bridge. It is one of the longest and oldest in Victoria; it is 120 years old. The government refused to help the Strathbogie council maintain its assets and as a consequence people in the community of Strathbogie are angry at having this really important bridge closed. The council is saying that it is probably now going to cost \$1 million to repair the bridge, and again the government is refusing to assist.

These problems in local government and local communities have not just happened overnight; they have happened because this government has ignored them for 10 years.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — Thank you, Acting Speaker. It is always a pleasure to make a contribution when you are in the chair, and I will make a contribution on this matter of public importance.

The Brumby Labor government has been building infrastructure right through its period of its government, certainly through the period that I have been the member for South Barwon. Whether it be new hospitals, new schools, new train lines, new police stations or new water-saving infrastructure, we are

building it and we will continue to build it. This government has spent \$1 billion on regional schools, and it has spent \$1.5 billion on health. It has built new police stations and has initiated a number of other projects I will expand on, particularly in my region of South Barwon.

This new regional blueprint is delivering again — an addendum, if you like — as the next chapter in a vision of opportunity and prosperity for regional Victoria. The message I receive is that regional Victoria is in a much better place than it was in the 1990s. That does not mean there is not still work to be done; there is. It does not mean that we do not need to provide more infrastructure; we must.

I was lucky enough to participate on a number of occasions in the consultation on the regional plan, whether that was with my regional councils in an organisation such as G21 or whether it was with the Committee for Geelong, and I note that a number of senior ministers, including the Premier, have repeatedly been to those meetings. The final meeting and extensive consultation for this 61-page, very detailed document we have released was held at Skilled Stadium. It was attended by representatives of councils from there to the South Australian border. The Premier was there again and was at the table with the Minister for Regional and Rural Development.

Regional councils were asked what their requirements were in terms of funds that would assist them. Whether they were small shires like the Surf Coast shire or large municipalities like the City of Greater Geelong, or any of the others in between, they were allowed to contribute and have an input on what programs the government should continue. They mentioned the smaller shires, they mentioned the Small Towns Development Fund, they mentioned the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and they mentioned the ability to support young people, whether they were going to university or doing TAFE courses, with accommodation and additional places. They were part of the consultation. I do not think anyone, unless they had a vivid imagination, would suggest that that was the government of the day telling those regional and rural communities what they wanted. It was quite the reverse, and the genesis of this project was those consultations.

The member for South-West Coast uses the excuse that the three-page document released by The Nationals, including key infrastructure funding on things such as education and health, will be put out but they are not telling anyone at all; they will start consultations now. If that is not the greatest admission of indolence ever

heard, I challenge anyone to give a better example. It is lazy policy. It is policy on the run and it is policy on which there has been absolutely no consultation in Geelong.

One wag on the City of Greater Geelong Council said, 'We have a couple of people down our way looking rather forlornly for black cats in the Otways'. It is exactly the same as looking for the Leader of The Nationals and the senior members of the opposition. They are the black cats in the Otways. People are looking for them; they have heard about them; there are rumours about them; but they do not seem to appear. They are not there, and if they are, we need a few more catchers of black cats. Maybe we will see them out and about now for their so-called consultation on the regional plan, but they are three and a half years late. I will not mention who the wag is from the City of Greater Geelong Council, but I think it is a great analogy.

The opposition has come up with a postage stamp policy; it fits on the back of a postage stamp. Our plan includes infrastructure that is in addition to projects where we fund schools such as Torquay College and its expansion into a P-12 school and, importantly, an additional primary school at North Torquay. The opposition's funding includes health; ours is in addition to the \$631 million, with infrastructure such as the southern hospital that we are committed to announcing in Armstrong Creek. It is another major infrastructure contribution in that area.

I note with interest that the Leader of The Nationals is continuing his criticism of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), although I am encouraged by the fact that the opposition will duplicate the fund lock, stock and barrel. It is exactly its policy, and it is a great admission that the fund is a significant contributor to the prosperity of regional Victoria. As a strong Geelong Football Club supporter I note with concern that the member for Gippsland South, who is the Leader of The Nationals, has said we should not have funded the Kardinia Park development from RIDF. He has said it is not a project worthy of RIDF funding. That will be news to Brian Cook, and I will certainly articulate that message to him and to the Geelong Football Club. Is the member saying he does not support it? I note that some members of the Liberal Party have said they support it, so do opposition members support it being funded from RIDF, do they not support it being funded from RIDF or do they not support it at all?

The member for South-West Coast said, which again is diametrically opposed to what members of The

Nationals have said, that the duplication of the highway from Winchelsea to Colac should be funded from RIDF. It is a \$400 million road. Is he saying seriously that we should contribute \$200 million of a \$260 million RIDF fund to one road? Certainly we are not saying that.

Ms Duncan — Would they do that?

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Indeed, would they do that? If he is saying that is what we should do, then he should put up and say the opposition in government will fund the duplication of the Princes Highway west from Winchelsea to Colac from its fund or he should shut up. You cannot have it both ways unless, as form seems to indicate, you are the greatest hypocrite that God put breath into. That would be the only consistency.

Mr Ingram interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — As the member for Gippsland East says, it would be a contest between The Nationals and the Liberal Party about being the greatest hypocrites.

Getting to the more positive elements of the project — and there are myriad of them — I want to record the substantial enjoyment of and strong comments from the mayors I interact with. I know the mayor of the Surf Coast shire, Libby Coker, has spoken in glowing terms about the fund. She is looking for funds, particularly through a small towns grant through RIDF, for projects that suit her community. The ridiculous assertion that the Brumby Labor government is telling these communities what they want is arrant nonsense. You only have to ask the two mayors I deal with regularly — at the City of Greater Geelong it is John Mitchell, and at the Surf Coast it is Libby Coker — who are keen to work with us. They have already started discussions about what projects would fit into RIDF or be eligible for a small towns grant, whether it be things like sporting facilities or other programs we have funded in the past like recreational activities such as the Surf Coast Walk.

Some \$800 000 has gone from RIDF to expand recreational opportunities in the Surf Coast, including the extension of the natural gas project to Barwon Heads, which was extremely well received by that community. There are a number of activities in respect of tourism and the potential for nature-based tourism that the Surf Coast council has already indicated a strong interest in accessing. The Barwon Heads community has expressed some excitement about the program for small towns, or small villages if you like,

and I know the member for Macedon has a couple of them in her electorate. Certainly the Barwon Heads community is very excited about accessing that fund and about promoting our smaller villages.

Generally, I think the program is a great all-rounder. I note the hypocrisy of the opposition, and I am concerned about the Geelong Football Club.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! I call the member for Wodonga — sorry, it is Benambra.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — It is Benambra, which is one of the state's original electorates. It has a long history in country and rural Victoria.

Mr Ingram — And where is Benambra?

Mr TILLEY — Without wasting any time, part of Mount Benambra is in my electorate, but as time has changed the electorate has decreased in size. I am losing more and more of that area.

I rise to make a contribution on this matter of public importance. We are hearing that the government is ready for tomorrow. It has a blueprint for rural and regional Victoria, but it says, 'Let us not talk about yesterday or the last 11 years and the dirty little secrets. Let us talk about the future. Let us be forgiven for all our sins of the past. Let us not worry about any of that'.

Ms Duncan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member for Macedon is listed to speak next.

Mr TILLEY — Government members condemn the Liberal-Nationals coalition for doing the very thing that country and rural Victorians want us to do. They put us in this place to fight for them and to defend their rights to ensure that there will be certainty in the future for country and rural Victoria, because if we were just to roll over then heaven help country Victoria!

The utterly brazen nature of this government and its senior members never ceases to amaze me. Who knows? Maybe I could be wrong; I do not know. Maybe I am giving government members a little more credit than they deserve. Maybe they are not brazen. Maybe, and there is more than a hint of truth here, they are arrogantly out of touch with the problems of real Victorians throughout the state and particularly in country and rural Victoria. That is why I come here today to debate this self-aggrandising and factually flawed matter of public importance.

For 11 long, dark years those opposite have governed Victoria. The conditions for governing in the last quarter of the 20th century have been better than they have been for any other Victorian state government. On coming to office Labor inherited a massive surplus. The debt which the old comrades from the Cain and Kirner days left Victorians saddled with throughout the 1990s had been — —

Mr Ingram — I thought you were going to talk about the future!

Mr TILLEY — These are some of the dirty little secrets this lot tries to bring into the place, but they want forgiveness. We are talking about the dirty, dark days of the last 11 years and the Cain and Kirner days which left Victorians saddled with debt through the 1990s. That was largely paid off — lest we forget the rivers of gold which flowed into the government's coffers — thanks to the massive growth in GST revenues.

The question Victorians are asking, particularly those in my community and in the great towns around Wodonga, Corryong, Beechworth, Tallangatta, Yackandandah and Chiltern, is: what have they got to show for it? There are many people living there, and I have a great connection with people in those communities, because they continually speak with me to share their dreams and the problems they are experiencing. I seek to address those problems through representing them in the Parliament of Victoria. North-eastern Victoria is a great region, but the communities have had nothing but rhetoric from this government. They have had bucketloads of spin, high taxes, record levels of violent crime and shamefully poor service delivery, and there is no sign in the near future of this abating.

The Ready for Tomorrow; Forgive Us for Yesterday blueprint for regional and rural Victoria continues the appalling record of this Labor government's major programs. It is big on spin and big on glossy brochures and taxpayer-funded advertising on a whole heap of promises, but it is a sham. This blueprint is nothing but an ad hoc collection of rubbery figures and a reannouncement of existing programs. The bottom line is that it lacks long-term vision because the blueprint's sole purpose is to get the Premier and Labor to November.

There is a palpable sense of anger in rural and regional Victoria that has been generated by 11 long years of Labor lies to rural Victorians on issues such as the north-south pipeline, the crumbling condition of our local roads and local infrastructure, burgeoning hospital

waiting lists, Labor's dodgy spending commitments through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and the appalling record of Labor during its term of office on land management and on protecting Victorians and preparing them for bushfires.

On 5 May the *Border Mail* editorial spelt out the bewilderment of Victorians in the north-east at yet another high-taxing, high-spending, low-delivery John Brumby budget, which delivered them nothing. The editorial states:

North-east Victorian residents may be disappointed in a state budget that seems to carry little for the region's development and infrastructure.

The editorial notes that Labor would not guarantee plans for either the Wodonga transport hub or any upgrade to the Wodonga police station, and that is still the case today. It also notes:

A new Wodonga ambulance station, promised in March last year by the member for northern region, Candy Broad, seems to have disappeared from the budget papers for now.

The editorial goes on to sum up that situation quite wisely:

... in an election year there could rightly be some cynicism among north-east voters who may feel neglected while electoral prospects are shored up elsewhere.

The *Border Mail* had more to say about the neglect of regional Victoria shown by the Brumby Labor government, and in particular how regional Victoria has been completely ignored in this blueprint. The policy fails to recognise the enormous contribution that north-eastern Victoria makes, in particular through primary production, through its manufacturing platform and through water. Something of the order of about 38 per cent of all the water coming out of Lake Hume and Lake Dartmouth is a contribution to supplies in the Murray-Darling Basin and downstream. It is a great catchment area.

In the last couple of days the government has loved to quote, but not fully, the story, particularly from the *Border Mail*. The *Border Mail* editorial of 16 June discusses the blueprint further and states:

Wodonga and other north-east centres have been roundly ignored by the Victorian government's long-awaited \$631 million regional cash announcements.

Last month, when the region was overlooked by the Brumby government in its annual budget announcements, residents were told there was a likely bonus on its way in the blueprint announcement planned as a midyear boost for the government before campaigning gets under way for the November poll.

So Labor in May lied with the never-never promise of action in June. The *Border Mail* editorial then states:

... the coffers are bare for Wodonga and the north-east ...

The *Border Mail* editorial concludes with the obvious question when it asks:

Local government representatives from our region believe the message from the Brumby government is positive but without the confirmation of funding, how can residents believe that they haven't been shunned once more?

Yesterday the minister took the opportunity to respond by quoting the mayor of Wodonga, but she took only one little excerpt from an article, and today we heard the minister going on ad nauseam about support from a number of mayors in local government. Of course they are going to say thank you to any nickel-and-dime benefit. Local government is struggling. It gets absolutely no support from this state government and has to compete in competitive grants programs. There is a lack of funding and support for local government. What happens then? The flow-on effect from this arrogant and wasteful government means the ratepayer gets it in the neck.

The prevailing attitude of the Brumby Labor government is that Victoria does not extend too far past the Melbourne urban growth boundary. Members opposite and their apparatchiks would be amazed to discover that Victoria actually extends a fair way north of the Great Dividing Range. Eleven years of a city-centric approach to regional development cannot be allowed to continue unchecked for another four long, dark years. This is why a Liberal-Nationals coalition government will establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund.

The regional growth fund will be established to supplement, not replace, existing provision by government of core services, facilities and infrastructure throughout regional Victoria. This fund will promote a bottom-up, grassroots approach to identifying community projects and will provide flexible funding through regional development committees. That will lead to a regional resurgence throughout the next decade. Wodonga in north-eastern Victoria is about to redevelop its central business district, but it is a blank canvas and the glib announcement that came out a couple of days ago does not provide certainty, assurance or backing from the government, apart from a throwaway one-line comment.

Labor's dishonest campaign on regional funding is being found out. It has been exposed. The Victorian Premier told Australian Associated Press in May that

Labor's Regional Infrastructure Development Fund had already invested \$1.3 billion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — Thank you, Acting Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the member for Benambra. Again we had an example of the opposition criticising this government, but in his contribution the member, who was supposed to talk about the future, went back 18 years. He went back 18 years to try to use some examples of how the coalition would deal with the future. The member for Benambra called this a debate. His idea of a debate is very consistent with the Monty Python version of a debate, because he stood here and made nothing but a series of disparate assertions that had absolutely no basis in fact. He did not even try to provide some examples to back up his assertions. He made references to things like 'these dodgy projects' that this government has funded in regional Victoria. I would like him to just name one of these 'dodgy projects' and to go to the community that received that so-called dodgy project and tell the people there he would not have funded the project and would remove it if he could.

The member for Benambra made a series of assertions with no basis in fact. Just because he states it, and he can say it as many times as he likes, does not make it any more true. He sits up there now, grinning. He knows what he has just done is mislead the Parliament. He has not described what this government has been doing over the past 11 years at all.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DUNCAN — All of these men across the chamber can yell and scream at me as much as they like, and still I will continue to outline and be proud of what this government has done over the last 11 years.

Sadly even the member for Shepparton, whom I actually have a lot of regard for, stood here — and did so very nicely, with a straight face — and suggested what she thought we were on about in this matter of public importance (MPI) after the launch of the government's regional blueprint, which has been 18 months in preparation and which builds on what we have been doing for the last 11 years. She tried to suggest, as did the Leader of The Nationals, that somehow we are copying the coalition's three-page press release, which is really quite laughable. It is embarrassing to hear them say that, and the fact that they could stand there and say that with a straight face is quite galling.

I should say to the Leader of The Nationals that crowing does not suit him. He does not look good crowing. It is like Barney Rubble standing up and crowing — it is not a good look for him. He would be far better off continuing the way he tries to present himself usually, which is as this sort of very humble, country solicitor, the 'Oh, shucks, I'm just a humble guy' type. I think it is much better for him to continue to try to play that role.

You could give the Leader of The Nationals and the member for Shepparton credit for some of the things they said — that is, they have done nothing for 11 years, they have just rediscovered regional Victoria and they are now going to provide a \$1 billion fund over eight years from which members of the community themselves will be able to get money and determine how they spend it. From what I understood the member for Shepparton to say, they do not even have to apply for this funding but somehow it will just be given to them and at some future point they will decide how they will use it.

During the last MPI that we debated in this chamber we on this side of the house accused The Nationals of copying the former Howard federal government's Regional Partnerships program. Members will recall that the commonwealth Auditor-General of the day was scathing about the way the money under that program was distributed and about money being pork-barrelled in what were then National Party electorates at the expense of other regional areas. This tendency was reconfirmed for me more than ever by the contributions made by the Leader of The Nationals and the member for Shepparton. There is so much flexibility in their proposal that people will not even have to apply for the funding.

The current fund has been operating under this government since 1999. I remind the house that the very first piece of legislation this government introduced in 1999 was a bill to establish the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. It was not a \$1 billion eight-year fund that was used, and this was confirmed by the member for Benambra, to supplement core services. That sounds to me very much like a proposal that if we need some more core funding for services, such as extra nurses in a particular hospital or an additional physiotherapist or some extra schoolteachers or something, that would be taken out of this fund.

If that is the proposal, it actually represents a cut to the funding that is currently being spent on regional infrastructure under this government. That money is not being spent on supplementing core services but on

building infrastructure in regional Victoria. The fund that the Leader of The Nationals crowed about in a very unbecoming way represents a cut to regional Victoria. We need to look at what coalition members say they would do in the future versus what they did when last in government.

The only thing I can disagree with in the commonwealth Auditor-General's report that was scathing about money being pork-barrelled into then National Party electorates is that the Kennett government slashed seats held by members of the then National Party as much as any other seats. It closed their hospitals, it closed their schools, it sacked their teachers and their nurses as savagely as it cut across the rest of the state. We know that being in a Nationals seat does not protect you when a coalition government is in power. We know the dominant partner in any coalition is the Liberal Party, and it will cut when and where it sees fit, and we saw that occurring under the Kennett government.

In the last few years of the Kennett government unemployment in country Victoria got worse. The gap between unemployment in the city and unemployment in country Victoria got worse the longer the Kennett government was in office. It did not get better; it got worse. The gap got much wider under the Kennett government. I ask people to remember what the coalition did when it was last in government. They should not concentrate on what it says it will do in the future, because we know what it did when it was in government.

I am very pleased to speak in support of this matter of public importance. I am pleased to have listened in on one of the briefings that the minister brought to Macedon last week when she briefed representatives of local government and various government departments, community organisations and hospital services who were present to hear about some of the detail of this regional blueprint, which is really about planning for the future and which builds on what we have been doing over the last 11 years. This is not new. This government has not just discovered regional Victoria. This blueprint provides a plan of continuing investment and outlines what this government will continue to do in partnership with local government.

I am sorry to tell the member for Shepparton that, yes, people will have to apply for this funding. One of the other members suggested Spring Street determines how these funds are spent. That is not the case. Unlike the coalition's fund, which appears to not require any paperwork or paper trail at all, communities will have to apply for the regional infrastructure funding, but it is

not us telling them how they should spend their money. They will determine what they would like funding for and they will apply for that funding, and they may be successful in obtaining it. It is not us telling them what they should spend money on. It is us listening to what it is they want and their meeting the criteria for funding under the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, because we believe there should be some criteria; otherwise it can become simply unaccounted-for pork-barrelling money, which we know this coalition and the federal Howard government have used in the past.

Members opposite sit there and laugh and say this government is all the bad things in the world, but of course we know when the coalition was in government not only did it cut and slash but it did not like any oversight of what it did. Contrary to what the member for Shepparton said about the oversight for the coalition's proposed fund being on a website somewhere, the oversight of this government is conducted by the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman independently of government. Again I point to what the coalition did when it was last in office: it sacked the Auditor-General and sought to remove any oversight of its government. This government is very different from that.

I commend this blueprint. I congratulate the Premier and the ministers for the work they have done in putting this together.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — It gives me great pleasure to make a contribution to the matter of public importance (MPI). It has been an interesting debate, given that government members seem to have spent most of their time being critical of the coalition rather than talking about the positive aspects of the blueprint for regional Victoria. Despite the preamble in the MPI which says it is ready for tomorrow, I will do what this government has a propensity to do — that is, to go back into history a little. I will not go back as far as the last millennium, but I will go back as far as February 2009. As usual this blueprint is overdue, full of motherhood statements and fails to address the practical needs of regional Victoria.

In this house in February 2009 the Minister for Regional and Rural Development said during her contribution on the annual statement of government intentions for 2009:

Finally, there is the outline of a blueprint for regional growth, which is going to be one of our top priorities for 2009.

She went on to make some other comments in relation to the virtues of the blueprint. Here we are now in June

2010 with the release of the blueprint for regional Victoria, and one would imagine that this is just a consequence of a follow-up of the coalition's fantastic announcement of the regional growth fund.

Turning to the content of the blueprint itself, it is no wonder that we in the Morwell electorate are quite disappointed with aspects of it, particularly in comparison with the coalition's regional growth fund. There is very little reference to communities in the Morwell electorate. There is reference to neighbourhood renewal programs, which are basically at the end of their tenure, if you like, after eight years; so we are talking a little bit about the past there. There is a reference on page 15 to some bushfire recovery programs, which again were announced in the past. Page 13 also talks about some regional fast rail programs and improved rail connections between Melbourne and Traralgon; again these are past projects. One would have to conclude that the prelude to *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* has very little substance in terms of the overall content of the blueprint itself.

If one wants to talk about the fast rail improvements this government spruiks in the document, one only has to look at the V/Line performance results for May 2010 for the Gippsland line. In terms of the percentage of scheduled services on time to 5 minutes on short-distance journeys, the figure for Gippsland is 77 per cent, yet the target is 92 per cent. In terms of long-distance journeys, the Gippsland line has a performance result of 71.4 per cent as against the target of 92 per cent. It is interesting that the government would try to spruik the fast rail program in the blueprint itself.

Still on transport, page 44 refers to the Victorian transport plan and specifically the government's unfunded \$4.3 billion regional rail link, but the document makes absolutely no reference to the Gippsland line. I have just outlined to the house some of V/Line's performance targets, yet under this \$4.3 billion plan there is no reference to Gippsland at all. We are talking about upgrading lines and improving connectivity between Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Melbourne, but there is no reference at all to Gippsland. In fact this government is intending to decrease some services from Gippsland to Melbourne. We know that the previous Minister for Public Transport said that some services will terminate at Flinders Street station and not Southern Cross. Out of the \$4.3 billion, what do we have? Absolutely nothing for Gippsland commuters.

I will mention one positive aspect of the blueprint, and that is the intention to improve bus services in the

Latrobe Valley. This is desperately needed. The links to some of our educational precincts are poor, to say the least. The Churchill town bus routes are virtually non-existent, and it is about time money was committed to bus services in the Latrobe Valley. However, it is extremely disappointing that a Latrobe Valley bus service review report has been in existence for some time. The review was due for completion in around October of last year but is still not public. We do not know the results of that bus service review, but one would hope that money will be committed through this program that will improve bus services in the Latrobe Valley.

As I said, there are other little references to the Latrobe Valley — on page 49 in terms of the arts and on pages 56 and 59 in the context of potentially being able to accommodate population growth.

It is interesting to note the minister's media release of 15 June 2010, which is headed 'Gippsland to share in \$631 million blueprint for regional and rural Victoria' and in which she speaks about jobs. The third bullet point of the media release talks about:

\$17.2 million for the regional growth for the future strategy to ensure future growth in regional centres ...

Within that third bullet point — we are talking about Gippsland — she actually says:

This will support the development of a comprehensive land use and urban plan for Geelong ...

Acting Speaker, I do not need to tell you that Geelong is a fair distance from Gippsland. In this media release that the minister has put out she is actually referring to Geelong in the context of Gippsland. I think that gives you some sense of this government's lack of understanding.

The member for Macedon also talked about jobs in her contribution to the debate and espoused the virtues of what this government has done to improve jobs in regional Victoria. I would like to bring to her attention figures relating to unemployment during the March quarter 2010. In Morwell in the last 12 months the unemployment rate has risen from 7.8 per cent to 8.6 per cent. I do not quite understand how the member for Macedon came up with her figures, but I certainly want to convey to her the point that it is difficult in regional areas to find jobs, particularly in the Latrobe Valley at the moment.

I also want to refer to some comments the Minister for Environment and Climate Change made when he spoke recently about green jobs in Victoria. When he was pushed further on the specifics of whether the Latrobe

Valley might be a beneficiary of some of these jobs, his answer was to suggest that we wait until the blueprint was released and we would know more then. If you look at page 19 of the blueprint under the heading 'Facing the climate change challenge' you see that there is absolutely no reference to the Latrobe Valley at all. There is a lot of discussion of current programs, but much like the recently released *Victoria's Energy Future* document it offers absolutely nothing to Latrobe Valley workers in the electricity industry who face a future of uncertainty just at the moment.

The Minister for Regional and Rural Development was pushed on ABC radio recently to answer some questions specifically about the Latrobe Valley. She was asked what jobs were going to be available in the Latrobe Valley under this blueprint for regional Victoria. The minister did what she normally does and waffled on for about 5 minutes without giving any indication or certainty as to what jobs might be available in the Latrobe Valley. I think that is indicative of the government's blueprint for regional Victoria specifically as it relates to the Latrobe Valley.

On page 32 of the blueprint, under the heading 'Backing jobs and industry', a quote applauding this government is attributed to the Australian Industry Group, but of course what the blueprint does not contain is aspects of a submission the AIG provided to this government prior to the 2010–11 budget. That submission says in part:

Government departments have not sufficiently supported Victorian and Australian businesses.

I think there is ample opportunity for this government to consider its procurement and purchasing policy. It could much better support Victorian manufacturers, particularly a few I could name in the Latrobe Valley.

The blueprint for regional Victoria pales into insignificance in comparison with the coalition's proposed regional growth fund. Other speakers on this side of the house have spoken about the fantastic regional growth fund that will really bring back local decision making on funding priorities and will be driven by local communities. It gives people, particularly across the Gippsland region, a real chance. The four other regional committees will have the opportunity to ensure that their regions move forward into the future. It is a much better proposition than the blueprint for regional Victoria.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to support the government's motion and to congratulate the Minister for Rural and Regional Development and recognise the great leadership of our Premier in bringing about this

document entitled, *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*, which we have recently put to the Victorian people.

There is no doubt that since 1999 there has been a transformation of confidence and livability in country Victorian communities. It is obvious wherever I travel around the Seymour electorate, and it is obvious whenever I travel around other regional and rural communities right across the state, as I did as the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and now do as Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Bushfire Reconstruction. In 1999 rural and regional communities decided enough was enough. We were tired of being treated like and called the toenails of the state. There is no doubt that through this state government's programs, such as in health, education, transport, community safety and the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, rural and regional communities are seeing improved services and infrastructure.

The new state government at the time made the RIDF, or Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, its first piece of legislation. At that time it was opposed by members opposite, who did not understand what it would take to turn country Victoria around after some time of absolute neglect. As many local communities saw their local councils moved from their local areas and jobs go — they saw them go from VicRoads and from transport — and saw their local schools or hospitals closed down and in some cases their local railway lines closed down, it was very obvious that all these things impacted on the feelings of those communities and on people's pride in those communities.

The state government — the Bracks government at the time and now the Brumby government — saw this as a really important issue, and the people of rural and regional communities connected with that. To this day, across the board in the main, rural and regional communities have respected that. As a result members like me in Seymour and the member for Bendigo East, who is the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, have maintained our places in this Parliament representing those people because they know that our hearts are in the right place and that we are here to represent them.

People want jobs and good community infrastructure. They want streetscapes they can be proud of. They want schools they can be confident in sending their children to, where their children are going to learn and be nurtured and be cared for in a good environment. They want quality health care. They want a community

they can feel proud to be part of. Those aspirations are not just for country communities. They are for communities no matter where they are, including in the suburbs.

I have been doing a bit of work in St Albans lately in my job as community development parliamentary secretary and I went for a little tour recently in that area with people from the St Albans Connect project. What I got from them was this real sense of community and real sense of pride in their community but also the desire to make it better. No matter where you are, where you live, people want to live in communities. They do live in communities, and we are very proud of those communities.

These programs that the state government is bringing about, and has been bringing about for the last 11 years, are very much a part of that. After almost 11 years of being in government we know that when one aspiration is met people want to keep on improving and see more and more things done. That is why this new blueprint for regional and rural Victoria, Ready for Tomorrow, is so important. People want to have the confidence that governments, including state governments, recognise that their community is important, and they want to have some hope that they can actually improve their communities. I think that that has been a really big part of what we do.

The priorities of local communities that have been coming up over time in the Seymour electorate have been met by programs through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, especially the Small Towns Development Fund, which has seen a number of towns and communities improve their infrastructure, improve their meeting spaces, their streetscapes, and as a result of that those communities feel very proud but also concede that they can be better. They do not only want to be a great place to live now — most of the communities in my area want their place to be a great place for people to visit as well, so tourism is really becoming a major focus, perhaps combined with other industries.

Probably the biggest of those is connected to the farming community, primary production. As people would be aware, things like wineries, olive groves and producers of other small boutique products are specific to regions and are things that people like to get out there and see. People like to buy those products, and country communities, I am finding, are keen to take advantage of that so they can provide more jobs for their children. Their children might want to live in those communities after they have gone away to study or, if they can, after they have studied somewhere locally in their

community. The fantastic thing about the Ready for Tomorrow policy is that if they choose to stay and work in their community, then they have the opportunity to do that.

I am very pleased that this process began when I was chair of the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee in the last Parliament. The committee did a report on retaining youth in and attracting youth to rural areas, and I know this particular issue was a major one. It is great to see some actual investment going into the things that the universities, the TAFEs and the people in those communities told the government they wanted to have access to. That is an important part of the Ready for Tomorrow policy.

The minister, the Premier and the departmental heads went around the whole of the state talking to regional communities, their leaders, their councils and their business leaders and asking them, 'What are the things we need to do next to make sure that provincial, rural and regional Victoria can continue to be a better place to live, work and raise a family?'.

We have seen the opposition's recent announcement, which is short on detail. I do not want to go into that because I am sure it has been covered ad nauseam. From listening to those opposite I have picked up that they dislike it when the government makes the case for why people see *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* as a good thing. What they dislike is when we start talking about regional fast rail; extensions to and replacement of train lines, whether it be to Bairnsdale or now Maryborough; or the opening and building of hospitals and schools. When we start talking about those improvements we have made, opposition members do not like it, and they say it is all about tomorrow. Yes, it is all about tomorrow — and that is what my electorate is telling me it wants to know about. My constituents want to know what our plan for the future is, and that is why this blueprint is so fantastic. They are saying, 'We need to know'. Regional plans will soon follow this blueprint, so there will be even more specifics about where we are going as a government and how we are going to help those communities to thrive into the future.

That is what we are doing, and I think that what opposition members do not like is that we actually have a case to make whereas they have a real problem because they do not have a case to make. The case is against them, because when we compare the Liberal-National government of the 1990s with the Labor government of this century we know, and country Victorian communities know, that we are really

keen to deliver and we are very keen to make sure that those communities continue to thrive into the future. I congratulate the minister and the government on this great product, *Ready for Tomorrow — A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: review of the findings and recommendations of the Auditor-General's reports 2008

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I would like to make some comments on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report dated May 2010, which is the committee's 93rd report to Parliament, entitled *Review of the Findings and Recommendations of the Auditor-General's Reports 2008*. I am delighted that the PAEC has provided the Parliament with the opportunity to address some of the issues that have been raised in the Auditor-General's reports to this Parliament. In particular this report covers the April 2008 Auditor-General's report entitled *Planning for Water Infrastructure in Victoria*. Indeed in our last sitting week the Auditor-General tabled another report on irrigation, and that will undoubtedly be the subject of another PAEC report, which will be able to be debated more fulsomely during the current program of parliamentary business. That report, like the first report covered by this PAEC report, indicates the government's abject failure in water policy. I refer to page 4 of the PAEC report, which says:

The Auditor-General advised the committee that, in his view, the most critical recommendations related to the key issues identified in the report, namely —

and the one I want to draw the house's attention to is —

the inadequate levels of rigour applied to estimate the costs, benefits and risks of some of the projects within the Victorian water plan.

Of course that is the Auditor-General's fundamental premise, and indeed I note that this Labor-dominated committee puts forward some recommendations for where the government could improve in due course.

I also want to refer to page 24 of the report which refers to the demand for water. My comment would be that in terms of metropolitan Melbourne this has been the government's sole policy. Its sole policy has been, 'You cut back your demand for water, and we won't do too much about supply'. Indeed the report refers to the fact that the government introduced water restrictions in Melbourne in 2002 as part of its policy of demand reduction. I clearly recall that in 2002 the then Premier,

Stephen Bracks, said that water was going to be the no. 1 issue and he appointed a dedicated minister for water. The fact of the matter is that even though restrictions were first introduced in 2002 and the previous Premier said water was the no. 1 issue, the government did absolutely nothing about supply until it made an announcement in 2007. That, of course, is the basis of the opposition's criticism of the government.

I also want to refer members to page 30 of the PAEC report, which is on the north-south pipeline and specifically refers to it at point 4.3, entitled 'Central region sustainable water strategy and other regional sustainable water strategies'. In that strategy the government made it clear that it would not pipe water from north of the Great Dividing Range to south of the Divide. It abandoned that commitment, and we are now seeing the end result of that flawed policy. As I said earlier, a second report on water from the Auditor-General — which I am sure will be the subject of future reports — again has pointed out the lack of rigour associated with that particular project, on top of the comments relating to the lack of rigour discussed in this report.

Also in terms of reporting I refer members to page 37, under the heading 'Public information and disclosure', which states:

The audit report acknowledged that the development of the Victorian water plan as an emergency response did not allow for the formulation of a rigorous cost estimate for all the plan projects but that this should have been compensated for by providing more explanation about the level of development to allow stakeholders and the wider community to assess whether all relevant issues had been considered and addressed prior to the projects' implementation.

I also refer members to recommendation 3 on page 42, where the committee determined that the Department of Sustainability and Environment should:

determine an appropriate time frame for the public release of accurate and reliable information relating to major water infrastructure projects and activities to ensure that the Parliament and the public is informed in a more timely manner and to allow for meaningful input and feedback.

I refer members to this very good report.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee: people trafficking for sex work

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I rise to speak on the report by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee on its inquiry into people trafficking for sex work, which was tabled in Parliament in the last sitting week. In doing so, firstly, I pay tribute to the members of the committee who have made my job as chair very

easy. I formally thank the committee members for all their work: the member for Mornington, David Morris, the member for Lowan, Hugh Delahunty, and the member for Yuroke, Liz Beattie, who are all in this house; and also a member for Southern Metropolitan Region, Andrea Coote, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, Shaun Leane, and a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, Jenny Mikakos, who are all in the upper house. They all worked extremely well together and ended up producing a report that is a very worthwhile result.

I also thank the staff of the committee: the executive officer, Sandy Cook, the research officer, Cheryl Hercus, and the administrative officer, Stephanie Amir. I particularly thank Pete Johnston, the committee's senior legal research officer, who did most of the research work for this report and made it very easy for us to review the information provided to us and to make recommendations.

The issue of sex trafficking is quite controversial in some ways, and during our proceedings we heard some quite different views from academics and those who actually work in the sex industry or work with workers in the sex industry. That is not a bad thing in itself; however, I was a little surprised to read an article in the *Age* on Monday, 21 June, from two academics, Seagrave and Pickering, from Monash University who wrote about the report.

After reading the article I was a little bemused because it seemed to me they were either getting it confused with some other report or had not read the report, because the statements they made in that article were, frankly, untrue and certainly did not appear in the report. I was surprised by that, because I think we all welcome discussion about issues of importance but would expect them to be based on a truthful account of what appears in the report. The comments in the article were academically flawed, and we were all probably very disappointed about the article especially as at least one of these women had appeared before the committee during its hearings and therefore knew exactly what the committee was attempting to achieve and knew about the guidelines given to the committee by the minister.

In referring to these academics I suppose I can say that at least they made some small contribution, and even though their work was academically flawed, they brought the issue before the public. That was one of the wishes of the committee, because it is an issue that is very rarely discussed and we found during our hearings that it is an issue that is not very well known in the community. In Victoria we have had at least two prosecutions of people trafficking women into Victoria

for sex work in metropolitan Melbourne, but it is sometimes difficult for people to accept that prosecutions are actually helping in our society because most of us are absolutely appalled by the way in which women can be treated.

What we recommend in this report is really quite a new approach. At the moment public servants, non-government organisations and the people who work with women in the sex industry work extremely hard, but it is very difficult if you have a broad area to understand to be able to work with women who are trafficked here. Often they are very unwilling victims. However badly they may be treated here, if they are found they are often immediately returned to the country from which they came, and that has happened particularly in the past. That is the last outcome many of them want.

In order to deal with these women and try to find out where they may be or whether they are being abused, we need a very specialised unit that has the time to get to know the industry, can talk to the people in the industry, has access to sex workers and brothels and can really get to understand the difficulties of the women and the way they are treated and, in some cases, terrorised by the people who employ them. These women have often been trafficked here by people in the country from which they have come. It was identified through the evidence given to the committee that a significant number of women have come from Thailand and South Korea.

One of the problems for future investigations is that we now have mobile brothels, so there is no physical location and a lot of organising work is done by internet and mobile phones. That will be a real problem right across the sex industry in the future and is an area that needs more investigation.

The other thing raised by the committee is the increasing numbers involved in human trafficking in other areas. We have made a strong recommendation that in the next Parliament a further reference should be given to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee on that much broader issue, because evidence was given to us not only in relation to people being brought in to work in agricultural areas and the hospitality industry but also some concerns were raised about arranged marriages and the treatment many women endure.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee: people trafficking for sex work

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I also rise to speak on the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee report

on its inquiry into people trafficking for sex work. Like the member for Essendon, I thank the members of the committee and also the very hardworking staff members who put together a very worthwhile and interesting report. The staff are Sandy Cook, the executive officer; Pete Johnston, the senior legal research officer, who did an enormous amount of work; Dr Cheryl Hercus, the research officer; and Stephanie Amir, the administrative officer and a delightful person. I also thank the witnesses, because when I started this inquiry it was not clear where we were going to go in our investigations, but we have had a lot of input from non-government organisations, individuals, people with an interest in the issue and also government agencies and departments.

It was a difficult inquiry, because there is a limited understanding of sex trafficking in Victoria and mostly the situation is misunderstood. This is mainly because there is a distinct lack of data and research. There are also polarised positions in the community in relation to sex work, regulation and sex trafficking in general. As the member for Essendon said, the most difficult part of this problem is that a lot of the victims out there — and we know from strong anecdotal evidence there are many of them — are unwilling to speak. To highlight the importance of this I refer to an article that appeared in the *Herald Sun* of Friday, 18 June, headed ‘Report slams Australia — sex trade shames us’. When I read it I wondered whether it was talking about our report, which had just been tabled; however, it was not. This article states:

Australia has been named and shamed by the US state department as a destination for human trafficking for sexual servitude and forced labour.

The report refers to the preamble of the report, in which USA Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described human trafficking as ‘modern-day slavery’ and a ‘global scourge’. We would all have to agree with that.

This report backs up the suggestion that more work needs to be done and makes 30 strong recommendations. I will quote the first one because it is a key one. Recommendation 1 is that:

... the government should establish a whole-of-government sex industry regulation policy and coordination unit. The office should be located under the responsibility of the Attorney-General in the Department of Justice.

We all agree that there is a clear and close connection between sex trafficking and the illegal, unregulated sex industry.

The other one I want to talk about is recommendation 7, which reads, in part:

... that sanctions against brothel owners who intentionally, knowingly or recklessly allowed trafficked women to work in their premises be introduced in Victoria.

They are two key recommendations of the 30 recommendations. As we know, since the tabling of this report there have been many newspaper articles about this issue. Most of them are positive. The member for Essendon spoke about one that is negative, and I would have to agree with her comments. One ABC News report is headed ‘Calls for new unit to combat sex trafficking’. Another is headed ‘Sex workers opposed to trafficking recommendations’, but I can tell members that many people who work in the industry were strongly supportive of the report. Another article that appeared in the *Herald Sun* is headed ‘Sex trafficking battle’. The most significant report that I read appeared in the *Age* of 9 June under the heading ‘Human trafficking not just for sex’. It reports that:

The committee noted there had been growing concern in the community that the illicit trade of women for sexual services was increasing, including in Melbourne brothels.

It also cited anecdotal evidence that the numbers of trafficked women entering the country on student visas might be quite large.

As a result of the evidence we received I have grave concerns, particularly around the student visa area. We also know that Project Respect, an important group in our community, has documented about 110 cases of trafficked women in Victoria. The problem is out there, and we need to address it.

As we know, immigration comes under federal jurisdiction, but the people in this industry here in Victoria rely on the support of the Victorian community and the government for protection in relation to the work they do.

I strongly agree that we need this specialist unit in the Department of Justice to work on the sex industry, particularly on the trafficking of women.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member for Lowan’s time has expired.

Road Safety Committee: pedestrian safety in car parks

Mr EREN (Lara) — I rise today to speak on the Road Safety Committee’s report on pedestrian safety in car parks, which I tabled recently as the chair of the Road Safety Committee. I would like to start by thanking the members and the dedicated staff for their efforts in producing this report — namely, the executive officer, Alexandra Douglas; principal research officer, Jason Boulter; research officer, Nathan

Bunt; and administrative officers, Kate Woodland and Christianne Castro.

As I asked in my foreword, how important are car parks in our daily lives? More importantly, is there a real and present danger to our safety or our loved ones' safety in car parks? From the data and statistics that have been made available to us there certainly is an indication that there is a real and present danger to us and our loved ones in that fatalities and serious injuries occur in car parks. With Victoria's growing population we fear that this situation could worsen if car park safety is not at best practice levels.

I am pleased to say that the Road Safety Committee has made a number of recommendations that would significantly improve pedestrian safety in car parks. The committee believes Victorian planning provisions should be amended to encourage the developers, designers and operators of car parks to achieve best practice in pedestrian car park safety. Our municipalities need to be able to point to these best practices when assessing plans for new sites. This is just one of the recommendations that would assist in significantly reducing the dangers for pedestrians in car parks.

Let us not forget that the driver and the pedestrian are one and the same in that a driver, once having parked and exited the car, is then a pedestrian. People should think about that when considering this report.

It is also unfortunate that those opposite seem to think this issue is not one of concern. The opposition has written a minority report, which is attached to this report. It is rare to see minority reports of this important committee, which normally enjoys bipartisan support. It is unfortunate that the opposition is not concerned that some eight people have died in car parks. Indeed more than 80 pedestrians present at hospitals annually as a result of injuries caused in car parks. That is not to mention the many people who have been injured but have not required hospitalisation.

Do we simply say that these people do not matter because the injury occurred in a car park and not on a highway or a road? The motto of our Road Safety Committee is 'One death is one too many', and as the chair of the Road Safety Committee that is certainly a belief of mine, regardless of whether the incident occurred on a freeway, a highway, a residential street, a driveway or a car park. Sadly the report shows that the most vulnerable people are the elderly, people with disabilities and small children.

I would like to refer to an article that appeared in the *Geelong Advertiser* of Thursday, 27 May entitled 'Speed kills, even when in a car park'. It reports that Mandy Hickman, a forensic pathologist working at the St John of God Hospital in Geelong, witnessed a fatal car park accident involving a baby. This article reports that Ms Hickman endorses the Road Safety Committee's recommendations to make our car parks safer and protect vulnerable pedestrians. Ms Hickman said:

I see a lot in the trauma ward and speed kills. If the cars drive slower, the better vision they have and there's more of a chance to look around and see if anyone's in the way.

I've seen a mum put a bassinet down to put the groceries in the boot and a car backed over it. It killed the baby, it was horrible.

This story is one of the most distressing and heartbreaking I have ever heard. If this committee can do something here and now to make sure something like this can be avoided in the future, I for one would support it. Unlike the opposition, I do not believe this report is a waste of time and resources.

I would like to point out that a lot of good constructive work has gone towards the making of this report and into the recommendations to make our car parks safer, such as controlling speed through engineered methods, separating pedestrians from vehicles and loading zones, providing appropriate sight lines and lighting and providing shared zones for small and medium car parks. These measures would ensure that pedestrian safety is taken into consideration when we create or upgrade — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee: sustainable development of agribusiness in outer suburban Melbourne

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I would like to thank the committee for the work that it did on this report, which was tabled in May. The report highlights many of the issues faced by councils in areas such as the Yarra Ranges. Recommendation 34 refers to dogs wandering onto agricultural properties and farms being able to be identified through their microchips et cetera and suggests that the Department of Primary Industries and local councils should actively enforce the strongest penalties for dog owners who do not comply and organise compensation for damage or loss of livestock to be paid.

Yarra Ranges council has been very proactive in catching stray dogs. It has certainly put a lot of effort into it and have been fairly successful in many areas, but there are still areas where dogs are allowed to roam, and they attack other animals. In an intensely urban area adjacent to rural land this problem escalates.

Recommendation 37 of the committee's report is:

That the Environment Protection Authority change its guidelines on frost fans to ensure that acceptable noise limits in the green wedges are consistent with farming zones throughout Victoria.

In areas such as the Yarra Ranges frosts can damage a whole year's crops, and frost fans are used only very occasionally and only at certain times of the year. The grape industry is lobbying to be able to use fans more frequently during the short period of time between September and early December, but it is extremely difficult to get permits to use them through council.

At the moment there is also a requirement for primary producers to obtain planning permits to install netting. Recommendation 39 of the committee's report is:

That the Victorian government, in consultation with local government, remove the requirement for primary producers to obtain a planning permit to install netting, providing that applicable building safety standards are met.

It is a huge problem in Yarra Ranges, and for some reason the council has brought in a regulation that growers can only cover 60 per cent of their crop with netting, which is absolutely ridiculous, because in this time of climate change the netting not only prevents hail damaging the crop but also adds to the value of the crop in that the produce is less damaged. Producers are finding that hailstorms are becoming more frequent and that crops under netting need less water, are less damaged by winds and are protected from birds and bats. It is utterly ridiculous that people are only allowed to cover 60 per cent of their crop so that only 60 per cent of their crop is protected from hail or from birds, bats and other things that damage those crops. Netting provides crops with protection and creates a microclimate, and it should be encouraged. I urge the government to accept the committee's recommendation 39.

The committee's report also talks the need for value adding at farm gates so that farm-gate sales can include value-added products. Recommendation 65 of the report is:

That the Victorian government ease restrictions on farm shops in the green wedge zones.

This would encourage farmers to sell value-added product at their farm gates. It is quite interesting that wine is the only product where people can pick a crop, make the product, put it into a bottle and sell it at cellar door or farm gate. Often wine is bottled off the premises because it is not economical for every winery to have its own bottling plant. It is different for strawberry growers, for example, because they can grow strawberries, but they cannot make strawberry jam and sell the jars of jam at their farm gates in the same way that wineries sell their wine. It seems to be an impractical way of doing things, and changing regulations would encourage more investment into agricultural pursuits in green wedge areas and would add to the area's attractiveness for tourists, and the flow-on effects would benefit operators of bed and breakfast establishments and restaurants and create employment. This value-adding would generate some more employment in areas where employment rates can be very low.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee: people trafficking for sex work

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — It is great to be able to make a brief contribution on an excellent report by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee on its inquiry into people trafficking for sex work. I congratulate the members of the committees — in this place, the members for Essendon, Mornington, Lowan and Yuroke — and Andrea Coote, Jenny Mikakos and Shaun Leane in the Council. I also congratulate the committee's staff — Sandy Cook, Pete Johnson, Dr Cheryl Hercus and Stephanie Amir.

In 2009 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime explicitly considered the trafficking of human beings to be one of the most serious human rights violations. The office noted that human trafficking infringes upon the rights of people to freedom, autonomy and human dignity. My view is that it is human dignity above all else that disappears when people are put into slavery or put to work as sex workers or whatever the case may be. The trafficking of human beings is definitely exploitation and shows total disregard for people's individual dignity and worth as human beings. If I had my way I would love to strangle some of the people who perpetrate these crimes upon others, but of course we live in a democracy and I cannot perpetrate such crimes on these criminals; however, it angers me greatly that a human being can treat another human being in that way by putting them into servitude or slavery or using them for sexual purposes.

As the inquiry notes, the trafficking of women for sexual purposes involves the treatment of women as

commodities. They are in effect considered as products to be bought and sold, and this lucrative business is second only to drug trafficking in terms of profitability and the like. Relative to other areas in the Asia-Pacific region the incidence of sex trafficking in Australia is low; however, as circumstances change this will probably vary over time. Victoria has a role to play in addressing the crime of sex trafficking.

I note the report indicates there is a need to set up a specific unit for this purpose in the Department of Justice. I think the committee has recommended that the Department of Justice monitor, manage and set up policies to address this issue head-on. This needs to be coordinated with policy development and any action taken by government against the terrible activity of sex trafficking.

The committee's report further notes that more research needs to be undertaken to formulate these strategies. Obviously there is a need for substantial coordination with the federal government in relation to this matter, particularly with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The report concludes that sexual servitude debases and cheapens the very worth of a human beings, as I have previously mentioned. It is important that any strategy designed to prevent the trafficking of people actively assists the victims. As the member for Essendon said earlier, sexual slavery is a terrible crime, but sometimes the victims themselves feel it is worth staying in Australia under those circumstances rather than returning home, which is a terrible tragedy in itself.

We all need to have empathy with the victims of human trafficking and understand the circumstances these people find themselves in, which are terrible. Recently I watched a documentary — I think it was on the ABC — about how the young daughters of poverty-stricken families in the highlands of Thailand are being sold. The program was very difficult to watch, but it was important to watch it to at least gain an understanding of how terrible the circumstances are in those countries. Some people cannot feed themselves, and some families think it is easier to sell their daughters into slavery than to find other work. Not all of them believe their daughters are being sold as sexual slaves — some are sold as domestic servants — but nevertheless they are terrible situations. Above all else while setting up new policies we need to have understanding of and empathy for the victims of these situations.

WATER AMENDMENT (VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL WATER HOLDER) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 26 May; motion of Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water).

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I rise to lead the Liberal-Nationals coalition's contribution to the debate on the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill. The purpose of this legislation is to establish the Victorian Environmental Water Holder as a body corporate responsible for managing Victoria's environmental water holdings, to provide for the role of waterway managers — that is, authorities that have water management districts in environmental water management — to otherwise improve the management of environmental water in the state and to make further provision as to rights and entitlements to water under that act.

In doing that the environmental water holder must manage any environmental entitlements allocated to the water holder, any interests in water shares held by the water holder, any licences to take and use water under section 51 of the Water Act held by the water holder, any other rights under the Water Act held by the water holder, any agreements between the water holder and any other person to supply water to the water holder and any bulk entitlement that is taken to be granted to the water holder by the operation of schedule 4 to the bill.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition supports this legislation. We believe the setting up of a single legal entity that controls environmental water in Victoria is a good idea in principle. Later in my contribution I will address some of the issues where we disagree with the detail relating to the implementation of this legislation, but in principle we think having a single legal entity in Victoria to manage environmental water is a good concept.

If the government thinks this legislation will actually win it back some support for its environmental credentials in the water industry, it is kidding itself. The history of this government over the last four years when it comes to managing environmental water in Victoria is appalling, and people know that. If you look back to 2006, and in particular to early 2007 when John Thwaites was the Minister for Water, you see that he made substantial promises before the 2006 election, and some after that election, about giving environmental allocations to various rivers in Victoria.

He promised extra environmental allocations to the Yarra River and to the Thomson River, and he promised some other things around the state that supposedly were going to put this government in a good light coming up to and post the 2006 election. But on every promise John Thwaites made the current Minister for Water has qualified the rights and effectively taken water away from the environment in nearly every catchment in Victoria. From my recollection I do not think any of the extra environmental allocation promised to the Yarra River has ever been delivered — until recently, when some of that water was made available to the Yarra, supposedly on the back of the water coming down the north–south pipeline. The promise of the extra allocation for the Thomson River was also qualified and the allocation has not been delivered.

One river that is not well known to a lot of members in this place is the Moorabool River. I constantly have people from Moorabool coming to me and saying, ‘What was promised has never been delivered; that promise has always been qualified and the water has been taken away from us’ — and the list goes on. If, by setting up this environmental water holder, which we support, the government believes it is going to win back some environmental credibility, it will find that in reality it has a long way to go when it comes to management of environmental water in Victoria.

The Acting Speaker would well know from personal experience about some of the issues around the Snowy River. That is not something I will go into at the moment, but a lot of promises have been made about the Snowy since this government was elected in 1999 and have not necessarily been kept.

The environmental water holder in Victoria, as I said, will be a legal entity, and division 3 of new part 3AA that will be inserted in the Water Act under this legislation sets out the arrangements for its governance. It will consist of one full-time or part-time commissioner who will be its chairperson and at least two full-time or part-time commissioners, one of whom will be its deputy chair. In the briefing on this bill we were informed that it is intended to keep the bureaucracy of the environmental water holder as small and as cost-effective as possible; I think that is the best way of putting it. History would again say that that might be the intent of this government when it is starting out, but over time its bureaucracies tend to blossom and grow and not necessarily be the most efficient in the world. We accept the intent of the government and hope that is the reality.

The other thing I would like to say about the group that is going to in effect make up the commission of the environmental water holder is that it will be critical to make sure we select people with the appropriate skills and that it is not just a case of jobs for the boys. If you look at the water authorities around the state now, particularly the boards of a lot of the catchment management authorities, you see they have effectively become jobs for the boys. People are being appointed to those positions based more on their connections within the Labor Party and their mates rather than on their skills or abilities to perform in those particular jobs. I emphasise that, given that it is going to be a small commission, it is important to have people with the skills, the drive and the commitment to make sure they do a good job. The environmental water holder is going to hold a significant asset. Not only is the water vital to the environment but it is also a high-value asset in the sense that that water will be worth a lot of money, so I emphasise that we need to make sure that the commissioners understand what is going on in the role, not just in relation to managing the environment and the water but also in relation to their business management skills.

I will come back to this later, but the environmental water holder has the power to trade water both temporarily and permanently, so potentially a major asset will be changing hands in any given year, and it is important to ensure that that asset is managed well. If you look at history — and it is always useful to look at history when we talk about these pieces of legislation — you see that the food bowl project and the associated north–south pipeline is a project in which something like \$1.75 billion of Victorian taxpayers money is invested at this stage. If you look at the planning, the management and the governance of that project — and all you have to do is read the Auditor-General’s report of a couple of weeks ago — you can see that it has not been very well managed.

Let us make sure the environmental water holder in Victoria is better planned and managed and has better governance arrangements than the likes of the food bowl project or, if you go to the Sunraysia, the project that has been planned up there to upgrade the Sunraysia irrigation system. Again, that is something I do not think is necessarily being well managed. The government does not have a good history of managing water projects in this state, so let us hope the environmental water holder’s planning and governance arrangements are better.

Division 3 of the bill sets out the power for the environmental water holder to engage consultants. Again, if you look at the range of consultants who have

worked in the water industry here in Victoria over the last decade, some would question how objective and independent the advice that has been given by some of them is.

I have often heard it said in the water industry in Victoria that quite a few consultants and consultancy businesses have what is called 'financial dependency' on the Victorian state government. They are financially dependent on the state government for their large businesses with many employees. If they give advice to the government that the government does not necessarily like, will they get work in the future? Water is a contentious issue because of the last decade of drought. How do you get industry consultants that you are sure will give you frank and fearless advice if they have this financial dependency issue? With the environmental water holder having the power to engage consultants let us make sure the commissioners are very careful about how they choose their consultants.

As I understand it, in preparing his recent report the Auditor-General had to go interstate to get people to help with some of the investigations for the report because the majority of consultants in Victoria were doing work on water for the government in one form or another. If the Auditor-General wanted someone who was totally independent of the issue of the potential of financial dependency on the government he had to go interstate to get consultants, so let us issue a caution there.

Under the governance arrangements all moneys received as a result of the trading of rights or entitlements in the water holdings by the water holder will have to be held in the water holder's trust account. As I understand it that is about making sure that, as I said before — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! Now is an appropriate time for the lunch break. The member for Swan Hill will have the call when the matter is back before the house.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Premier's office: complaint

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the claims of Mr Jim Bond, who has stated in court documents that he was left shaking and intimidated after being

screamed and yelled at by people in the Premier's office when he approached them about the problems faced by people like himself who are suffering from dyslexia, and I ask: will the Premier apologise to Mr Bond for this abuse and intimidation or is this abuse and intimidation just typical of the Premier and his office?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I understand in relation to this matter that the individual concerned has approached the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to deal with this matter, so it is before the courts and I do not propose to comment.

Water: regional and rural initiatives

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the Premier update the house on the actions the government is taking to provide secure water supplies for regional and rural Victoria?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for his question. Earlier today, with the Minister for Water, I was in Ballarat at the White Swan Reservoir. I remember being at the White Swan Reservoir just on two years ago in April 2008 with the member for Ballarat East, the member for Ballarat West and the Minister for Water when we turned on the super-pipe to see water flow into what was literally a puddle in the reservoir after the 10 years of lowest rainfall in the history of Ballarat. I could see the benefits of our investment in the super-pipe running down and filling up the White Swan Reservoir.

We invested \$180 million in that super-pipe. When we made that investment we made the right long-term decision for Victoria and for Ballarat, because we were prepared to make the hard decision and the right decision for Ballarat's future. Not everybody agreed with that decision. There were plenty of people who were vehemently opposed to us making that investment and securing the water needs of the people of Ballarat.

Mr Eren interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Lara will not interject in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — On the opposition side of politics they lined up one after another to bag this project. They lined up one after another to oppose it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier not to debate the question.

Mr BRUMBY — One commentator said:

We believed there were better options for Ballarat's water supply than the goldfields super-pipe ...

That was the Deputy Leader of The Nationals, the member for Swan Hill. History will show that this was a profoundly embarrassing policy of the opposition.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier not to debate the question.

Mr BRUMBY — History will show that if those policies had been implemented, as suggested by those opposite, Ballarat would have run out of water.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Bass not to interject in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — Today, with the board of Central Highlands Water and its chair, John Barnes — —

Dr Napthine — A Labor mate.

Mr BRUMBY — He has done a good job for Ballarat; he has done a good job.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for South-West Coast not to interject across the table, I ask the Premier not to respond to interjections, and I ask the member for Narre Warren North not to interject in the manner in which he has been.

Mr BRUMBY — Today there was the announcement, with Central Highlands Water, that from 1 August this year Ballarat will go on to stage 1 water restrictions. This is possible because of the goldfields super-pipe and the extraordinary effort of the Ballarat community in saving and conserving water through what have been unbelievably difficult times, and indeed in setting a great example for the rest of the state. From 1 August this year parks and gardens in Ballarat will move on to stage 1 water restrictions.

In addition, the minister and I then went to turn the first sod for the pipeline which will pump water from the Ballarat bore into Lake Wendouree. That will start pumping water — 5 million litres a day — from September this year. That will see the water flowing into Lake Wendouree later this year, filling the lake next year and bringing back all those wonderful recreational activities, tourism and all the life, including the wildlife, around the lake. We announced that

project just a few weeks ago and provided \$1.3 million towards it.

The announcement we made today in Ballarat confirms the rightness, correctness and appropriateness of the decisions we have made in relation to water. Across the state we are seeing the benefits of the investments that we have made in water. In Ararat, last year stage 4; this year stage 1. In Hamilton, last year stage 4; this year stage 2. In Horsham, last year — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members to stop interjecting. I remind the Premier that he has been speaking for — —

Mr Baillieu interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition. I remind the Premier that he has been speaking for some time and should conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — Last year in Horsham they were on stage 4 with exemptions; this year they are on stage 1. In Mildura, last year stage 3; this year stage 1. In Shepparton, last year stage 1; this year permanent water saving rules. All the things that have been put in across the state — whether it be the super-pipe, the food bowl modernisation or the desalination plant — are about securing our water future.

I will conclude with a short quote from the *Shepparton News* about the policies of the state government. It says in its editorial:

What we have is a gutless local leadership happy to watch the state government do the heavy lifting, in the knowledge that they —

that is, the local leadership —

will never need to expend their own political capital for the long-term good of the region.

That says it all.

Thomastown Secondary College: principal

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to claims by Mr Shane Burke, a member of the Thomastown Secondary College council, that he was bullied and intimidated by the office of Mr Peter Batchelor, the member for Thomastown, over the forced merger of his school, and I ask: will the Premier apologise to Mr Burke and the Thomastown Secondary College council for this bullying and intimidation?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — The government has made it absolutely clear that, unlike the previous government in this state, we do not force schools to close.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Health! I ask the member for Malvern and the Minister for Education not to interject in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — Our policy on this matter is absolutely clear.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for South-West Coast.

Mr BRUMBY — It has never been and it never will be the practice under our government to force schools to close.

Mr Wells interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Scoresby!

Mr BRUMBY — What taxes are you cutting today, Kim? Another \$500 million?

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier once again not to respond to interjections from across the table.

Mr BRUMBY — In relation to the specific matter that has been raised by the Leader of The Nationals — and I have commented on this earlier today — the language that was used by the electorate officer in question was not appropriate.

Mr Mulder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth is warned.

Mr BRUMBY — The electorate officer in question has been counselled.

Mr Andrews interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Minister for Health once again to cease interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — What I want to do today is seek the leave of the house to table an article from the *Melbourne Age* which lists for sale by public tender 48 school and education centre sites.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I seek leave. Lost for words?

Mr Mulder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth has been warned.

Mr BRUMBY — These are ones that are already sold. These are for sale. I am seeking leave.

The SPEAKER — Order! Leave has been denied.

Mr BRUMBY — Leave is denied?

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the point. Instead of pulling stunts, I ask him to apologise to Mr Burke.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr BRUMBY — As I have indicated to the house, I commented on this matter earlier today. I have reiterated that in the house. As for more general government policy, as I said, it has never been and never will be our policy to force schools to close.

Seniors: regional and rural initiatives

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — My question is to the Minister for Senior Victorians. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister outline to the house the features of the regional blueprint that will benefit senior Victorians living in regional Victoria and any alternative approaches?

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Senior Victorians) — I thank the member for Geelong for his question. The Brumby government, unlike some people, stands up for senior Victorians in our community and particularly our seniors in regional Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to hold on for just one moment. While I accept that we are all very keen soccer supporters, I ask that the cheering and jeering be left for tomorrow morning. The minister will not be shouted down.

Ms NEVILLE — As I was saying, the Brumby government stands up for seniors in our community, particularly those in regional Victoria because we know the projected rate of growth of numbers of older people

in regional areas is greater than that in metropolitan Melbourne. That is why the Brumby government's regional blueprint will deliver investments which will make regional Victoria a better place to age.

Our improving livability for older people initiative will provide grants to rural and regional councils for a range of practical projects to make our regional towns more age-friendly and improve the quality of life of seniors. There will be projects to help seniors get involved in the local community through seniors festivals and local volunteering opportunities, to make neighbourhoods more accessible by improving walking paths and providing rest points, and to ensure access to important local information that meets their needs.

The blueprint's \$99 million investment in programs to create jobs, boost regional industries and help small businesses will provide new opportunities for mature-age workers in regional areas to remain in the workforce. That blueprint, which does deliver for seniors, can be compared to another regional document which I saw recently which was launched by a member of this house who was elected to represent a regional electorate. This document contains not one reference to seniors, not one initiative for seniors and not one new idea for seniors. By contrast, the \$203 million in our blueprint for infrastructure works will benefit all Victorians and regional areas, and the investment in transport development, affordable housing and bus service expansion will be particularly beneficial for seniors.

Those job-creating infrastructure works come on top of the 46 capital projects we have already funded to upgrade residential aged care in rural and regional areas. Unfortunately not everyone supports public sector residential aged care. We all have long memories of those members of this house who were silent and compliant and who did not stand up for regional Victoria when aged-care services in Bairnsdale, Paynesville, Warrnambool and Mildura were privatised by the last Liberal government.

We are upgrading residential aged care, creating jobs and improving the quality of care for seniors in regional Victoria. That is what you do when you believe in regional Victoria and care about seniors. It stands in stark contrast to the attitude of those who were cooking up plans to privatise a further 1800 beds before they lost office.

I was also pleased to launch today a new Brumby Labor government initiative that will support carers in our community. We know that many seniors are also carers; they are caring for parents, they are caring for

their children and they are caring for their grandchildren. The launch of our Carer Card will provide 140 000 Victorians with discounts at over 600 businesses across Victoria, as well as free Sunday travel on metropolitan public transport and buses in regional centres and cheaper access to some of Victoria's best arts, sporting and cultural centres. The card has been embraced by a range of small businesses and large corporations right across Victoria, including Harvey Norman, Ultra Tune, Australia Post, Intrepid Travel and GIO. I want to thank the business community for getting behind a great Brumby government initiative.

The Carer Card and the investments we are making through the regional blueprint come on top of the 55 new men's sheds we have funded in regional Victoria. They come on top of the 12 new community registers we have funded in regional Victoria. They come on top of the home and community care program we fund to support over 102 000 seniors in regional Victoria. They also come on top of the 24-hour assistance and peace of mind that we provide to over 7200 seniors in regional Victoria through Personal Alert Victoria alarms.

Importantly, we are growing all these programs because we believe in standing up for senior Victorians living in regional Victoria. That is in stark contrast to those who prefer to stay silent, sack staff, cut funds and privatise the very services that seniors rely on in regional Victoria.

Government contracts: disclosure

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Auditor-General's report tabled today, which found widespread failure by the government to disclose contracts over \$10 million, as well as its deleting of crucial information from other contracts, and I ask: is it not a fact that the Premier has presided over the cover-up and concealment of key government contracts worth billions of dollars?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — That is another question that the Leader of the Opposition has got wrong. It is not a fact. The reality is that until we were elected to government and until we amended the legislation in October 2000 and again in 2005, absolutely none of the detail of any contracts under the former government was ever disclosed to the public — absolutely none.

Members with long memories will remember that in the 1990s when the former State Electricity Commission

was sold off and privatised none of the information, material or contracts were made available. In fact the only way that members in this house, members of the media or members of the public could get any information about those contracts was by doing a company search through the US computer registry system to find the information from US authorities. None of that information was available anywhere in this state.

All of the changes about more disclosure, about the disclosure of contracts in excess of \$100 000 or \$10 million, have occurred because of the legislation we put through in 2000 and 2005. So 90 per cent of the total value of all contracts is published on the contracts publishing system; that is 90 per cent more than was ever previously the case.

In relation to the recommendations that have been made by the Auditor-General, I understand they have been accepted by the government.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask both the member for Forest Hill and the member for Bass to stop the constant interjecting.

Locusts: control

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, to work and to raise a family, and I ask: can the minister inform the house of what action the Brumby government is taking to help our farmers respond to the predicted high locust numbers this spring?

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — Let me say at the outset that no member of this house and no member of the Victorian community should be under any delusion about the locust situation. Come spring the issue of locusts will be paramount in all our minds, and the impact of locusts has the potential to be very severe across the state. That is why on Friday, 11 June, the Brumby government announced a \$43.5 million package to combat and declare war on locusts, which it will undertake together with Victorian farmers and communities.

I want to point out some of the potential impacts of locusts if they were left unchecked. They could impact on our agricultural production to the tune of \$2 billion. They could disrupt regional airports and indeed airports throughout the state. They could, for example, impact on our Spring Racing Carnival — heaven forbid that

that should occur! I am sure the Minister for Racing would say that. The locusts have the potential to impact very significantly on recreational facilities and community amenity facilities right throughout regional and country Victoria.

If you look at all these impacts, it is no wonder that the Brumby government has come to the decision that it has to do everything possible to combat locusts come spring this year. The locust plague is a consequence of high rainfall in New South Wales and south-western Queensland, northerly winds which have blown locusts down to Victoria, and favourable conditions for locusts to lay eggs throughout Victoria, southern New South Wales and eastern South Australia. We estimate that there are 60 billion to 80 billion eggs spread over 2 million hectares of our state. You can imagine that if the hatching success rate is very high, it will have the potential to turn day into dusk in this state if those locusts were to swarm.

I know our efforts will ensure that farmers have the opportunity and potential to join us in the fight against locusts on the 1.4 million hectares of private land and the 600 000 hectares of public land that will be affected by locusts. We are putting together support for farmers to ensure that the locusts are tackled as effectively as possible. What the \$43.5 million package will ensure is that we have chemicals available at a 100 per cent subsidy to our farmers, that we have chemicals available for our public land and that we have 400 dedicated and professional staff from the Department of Primary Industries available to work with landowners and communities to join us in the fight to kill locusts right throughout the state.

Let me say that this is the sort of activity that can only be achieved and can only be successful if farmers, if communities and if government work together. That is why I was very pleased that the VFF (Victorian Farmers Federation) put out a media release immediately following the announcement by the Premier, which states:

Farmers have welcomed an announcement by Victorian Premier John Brumby of a \$43.5 million 'war on locusts' fund saying it is the right step to address the threat of a potential locust plague later this year.

VFF president Andrew Broad said farmers would be pleased the government had heeded their concerns and would fulfil the commitment made by agriculture minister Joe Helper to stand shoulder to shoulder with primary producers in a campaign against locusts.

I join with the VFF and with Victorian farmers to declare war on locusts, as the Premier announced on 11 June. Let us hope that we can cooperate and not treat

this as a partisan issue, to ensure that we have the opportunity to protect Victorian farmers and the Victorian community from locusts later this year.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the member for Gippsland East I warn the member for Kilsyth that interjections of that magnitude will not be tolerated. I warn the member for Bass that his constant interjecting will see him outside of the chamber.

Wild dogs: control

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Agriculture. On the back of declaring war on locusts I request that he declare war on wild dogs. As farmers throughout Gippsland and the north-east continue to suffer significant and increasing stock losses due to wild dog attacks, I ask: when will the government acknowledge that unless it increases resources and removes the current regulatory barriers the government will condemn many farmers and farming areas to continued and devastating stock losses due to wild dog attacks?

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. We should be very grateful that there are not indeed billions of wild dogs about and that wild dogs do not tend to swarm. Nevertheless I acknowledge, as the consequence of a number of visits and meetings with land-holders who are affected by wild dogs, that it is an extraordinarily serious issue and one that we have to constantly evolve our response to.

On a recent visit to East Gippsland I undertook to make a number of changes and to investigate how we can improve our wild dog management, as we are always seeking to do. Some of those measures include ensuring that the regulatory regime is commensurate with an effective response to wild dogs and ensuring that we communicate as best we possibly can with landowners in terms of the effort we are putting in so that it encourages them to report wild dog activity to the Department of Primary Industries and so that we can join together — government and landowners — to respond to wild dogs, which is as it should be.

The effort that has been put in by the Brumby government I think has been very significant. For example, the Future Farming strategy included \$1.1 million for wild dog management. That comes on top of our \$3.5 million annual response to wild dogs. That investment has significantly improved — it has doubled — since Labor came to office in 1999.

I assure the member for Gippsland East that the issue of wild dogs is something that I, my department and the government take very seriously, that we will always be open to suggestions to improve the response to wild dogs and that we will always be ready to work with landowners in the war on wild dogs, because their impact on individual landowners and on communities is devastating.

Sport: country football and netball funding

Mr EREN (Lara) — My question is to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister update the house on why the Brumby Labor government is continuing to rebuild local country football and netball clubs through the regional blueprint?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for Lara for his question. It gives me great pleasure to update the house that as part of the regional blueprint announced last week an additional \$9 million will be invested in the incredibly successful country football and netball program (CFNP). That will take the investment in this program to over \$20 million. Clubs in every corner of the state have been upgraded, rebuilt or revamped.

Mrs Fyffe interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the member for Evelyn wishes to ask a question, she should stand in her place at the appropriate time and I will call her. I should not have to call her for constantly interjecting.

Mr MERLINO — The program has contributed to the resurgence of our indigenous game, which is enjoying record crowds and increased participation, with many clubs and leagues at the healthiest they have ever been. In response to the regional blueprint, Victorian Country Football League CEO Glenn Scott said:

With this extension, the CFNP will leave an incredible legacy ... that will mean support of over \$20 million in grants will have been made to more than 500 separate projects that represent around \$60 million in total development.

Netball Victoria CEO Ms Leigh Russell is quoted as having said:

With more than 55 per cent of our members playing in regional Victoria, it goes without saying that we are absolutely delighted by this news of continued funding from the Brumby government.

The blueprint also contains \$1 million to bring Ballarat's Eureka Stadium up to AFL standard, enabling Ballarat to host AFL matches in the future. Bringing AFL to regional Victoria has been a hallmark of this program. Since 2003 Labor has helped AFL matches to be staged at Morwell, Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura and Yea — and as the member for Murray Valley well knows, this list will shortly include Wangaratta following a \$1.2 million Labor investment in the Wangaratta Showgrounds.

I was asked why the government was continuing this investment. This funding is a direct result of the parliamentary inquiry into country football in 2003. That followed grave concerns in rural and regional Victoria about the game's health in the preceding decade. To give context to the inquiry, in the 1990s dozens and dozens of clubs folded and many leagues disbanded. The Victorian Country Football League was an integral part of this inquiry. Its submission described the exodus of people out of regional Victoria as the key reason for extensive club amalgamations and closures.

No-one would be better placed to explain why this happened than the VCFL, and I will quote directly from the VCFL submission under the heading 'Causes'. It states:

Closure of hospitals, railway services, police stations, banks, other health and community services.

But the no. 1 cause for the decline of country football and netball was:

In almost every instance the closure of the local school comes first with the football club folding or amalgamating shortly after.

Who closed those schools? Labor will never take this approach. That side of the house ripped the guts out of regional and rural communities. We are delivering the transformation of country footy and netball from our smallest rural clubs to our regional cities. Only Labor is responsible and only Labor can be trusted to support families in rural and regional Victoria. Those opposite protest now, but when they were last in power they were sleeping dogs at the slippers of their Liberal masters.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will not debate the question.

Mr MERLINO — Only Labor can be trusted to ensure that country footy and netball clubs thrive into the future.

Schools: closures and mergers

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — My question is to the Minister for Education. Given that the minister has

already closed or merged 186 schools, can she now confirm that, together with her department, she has drawn up a secret hit list of up to 100 additional schools that will close or merge during the next four years?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — I thank the member for his question. This government has very high aspirations for education in this state. That is why we are rebuilding, renovating or modernising schools right across this state: in the city, in the country, in rural areas and in regional towns we are rebuilding, renovating or modernising our schools. Not only that, we are regenerating education. We are engaging local communities in conversations about how their schools can be better schools and can be even more effective educators for the young people within those communities.

Schools are embracing these conversations. They are excited about the new educational opportunities. They are enjoying the millions of dollars of extra funding that we are putting into our schools, and that is happening right across Victoria. The conversations that are happening within schools are robust and exciting and schools are very engaged.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr Eren interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Lara

The SPEAKER — Order! Under standing order 124 I ask the honourable member for Lara to vacate the chamber for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Lara withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Schools: closures and mergers

Questions resumed.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — The implication that school councils or school communities are not capable or strong enough to engage in these conversations is an absolute insult to them. We have every confidence that school councils can have robust conversations with their communities, that they can

look to what is best for their school communities and that they can weigh up the varying views and perspectives of their communities and make decisions in the best interests of their students. I have confidence in school councils, and that is why we allow them to have those conversations. That is why our approach is to embrace the dialogue rather than cutting short the conversation and forcibly closing schools. There is a big difference between encouraging schools to think about the very best for their school community and going in with the jackboots and forcibly closing schools.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Kew!

Ms PIKE — Speaker, 300 schools were closed, 9000 teachers were sacked — 9000 teachers were taken out of the education community.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to stop debating the question.

Ms PIKE — Our record has been one of continual investment and growth in education. Our record has been innovation, has been to modernise, to invest — —

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, I have a list of 186 schools this government has forced and bullied into mergers, and I am happy to table that document.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. Is the member seeking leave?

Mr McIntosh — I am seeking leave to table that document about 186 schools being closed.

The SPEAKER — Order! Leave is not granted, and there is no point of order.

Mr McIntosh — But I am seeking leave to table that document.

The SPEAKER — Order! Leave is not granted, and there is no point of order. Leave has been denied. I warn the members for Malvern and Kew.

Ms PIKE — I have a list of 48 schools and education sites that are under instruction for sale by public tender — some that were not even opened, actually and some that were planned to be opened.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to stop debating the question.

Ms PIKE — This government has the passion, the plan and the commitment to continually improve our education system. I am proud of our record, and I have confidence that school councils are quite able, when they are enabled to do so, to make good decisions about the future of their school communities.

Regional and rural Victoria: government initiatives

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — My question is to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister inform the house of recent actions the Brumby government is taking to improve infrastructure and connections for regional and rural Victoria?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I thank the member for Seymour for his question. The member was one of the members of the Brumby government who was in Ballarat last Tuesday for the launch of Ready for Tomorrow. As we have heard already this afternoon in the house, this is our government's — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Bass

The SPEAKER — Order! Under standing order 124 I ask the honourable member for Bass to vacate the chamber for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Bass withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Regional and rural Victoria: government initiatives

Questions resumed.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — As we have already heard this afternoon in the house, Ready for Tomorrow is our government's \$631 million blueprint that is all about addressing the key priority areas that were identified by communities right across regional and rural Victoria.

We must remember that this builds on the very strong foundations that are already in place particularly as a result of the hard work that our government has done in partnership with local communities to attract more jobs, with 120 000 new jobs in regional Victoria, and more investment, with over \$11 billion of new investment in regional Victoria.

It is important to note that this rebuilding and reinvestment was vital and came just in the nick of time, I would suggest. It came just as the shutters were being rapidly pulled down on regional Victoria by a previous administration through its program of cuts and closures. We have been rebuilding and reinvesting, and central to our efforts has been our very strong focus on investing in infrastructure that has made such a difference to our regions.

One of the key elements of Ready for Tomorrow is a massive \$260 million boost to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. It is the single biggest injection to the fund and takes the total of this fund to \$871 million. I am very pleased to advise the house that to date this fund has already committed \$591 million to 382 projects, but most importantly, that has leveraged over \$1.58 billion in new investment. It is new investment over and above what we do in education, health and rail, and it is new investment for regional Victoria.

Ready for Tomorrow also includes other infrastructure priorities that were identified by communities as important to them. That is why there is a \$60 million Better Roads package; that is why there is a \$11.4 million bus package to support improved bus services; and that is why there is a \$7 million fund to help students access tertiary education by public transport.

Ready for Tomorrow also includes two new rail initiatives. We are a government that loves rail. We absolutely love investing in rail, whether it be the regional rail program, whether it be the investment in rail freight or whether it be the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link project. We build rail lines, not close them down. Ready for Tomorrow includes two new key rail projects.

The member for Ripon is thrilled, as is the Clunes community, about the \$7 million to reopen the Clunes railway station and thereby enable the people of Clunes to catch the train when the Maryborough line reopens later in the year.

Mr Hulls — Ah, Maryborough!

Ms ALLAN — That is right. Then there is a further \$12 million to upgrade the north-west rail freight corridor as well. But speaking about Maryborough, its community is very excited about the imminent return of passenger rail, and there is a lot of work going on at the station. We were there last week and saw building work going on; there is a lot of activity and a lot of excitement. But I think it is fair to ask why we needed to do this work, why we needed to make this investment in Maryborough and Clunes. Of course the Maryborough line was closed in 1993, and that closure really pulled the rug out from under the community. You can imagine my surprise when someone central to that decision returned to the scene of the crime on the very day we were launching Ready for Tomorrow and attempted to gatecrash our event at the Maryborough railway station.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister not to debate the question.

Ms ALLAN — I think you could say that the Maryborough railway station is symbolic of our government's investment in regional Victoria and the restoration of services. We are reopening the rail line; we are investing in the railway stations, particularly at Clunes.

Something else was said in this place in 1993 about the closure of rail lines, and that was that the then Minister for Public Transport had achieved extraordinary success. We are talking about cuts to public transport, and at that time it was said that the Minister for Public Transport had achieved extraordinary success. Who is it who thinks that cutting services to regional communities is an extraordinary success? Who is it who gatecrashed the event last week at the Maryborough railway station?

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will come back to government business. I suggest that she has been speaking for some time and needs to conclude her answer.

Ms ALLAN — We are going to continue to invest in railway services, whether it be opening the Maryborough rail line or whether it be about supporting the Clunes station. I can say that we reject the approach of those opposite, particularly that of the Leader of The Nationals, who shut the railway lines, supported the railway lines and then tried to gatecrash the event last week.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister knows better. The time set aside for questions has expired.

WATER AMENDMENT (VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL WATER HOLDER) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — Before we adjourned for lunch I was making a contribution on the environmental water holder bill. At that stage we had been talking about division 3 of proposed part 3AA, which deals with the issue of governance. I would like to go back to division 2, which deals with the objectives, functions and powers of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. It says in the explanatory memorandum:

While “other uses that depend on environmental condition” allows water in the water holdings to be used or applied for recreational, social or cultural purposes, the water holder will only use or apply water for such purposes where that other use is not inconsistent with the overarching objective of improving the environmental values and health of water ecosystems.

The issue in that particular paragraph which comes to the fore is making sure — as I said before lunch — that the commissioners who run the environmental water holder are focused on getting good environmental outcomes from the water they apply. Having that environmental water holder commission and the plan it will have to prepare, which we will talk about in a minute, will hopefully send a strong message to those who see the environmental water being used that there are some measurable outcomes from that water being applied. Several years ago in my particular area of the state there was quite a bit of environmental water put into Lake Cullen. That was in what was probably the worst year of this particular drought. When I wrote to the department and asked what environmental outcome it expected from applying that water the department was not able to articulate what was expected to be achieved with that water. When we subsequently wrote to it again a year later asking what environmental outcomes were achieved from applying that water, obviously because no objective was set it could not measure what the environmental outcomes were. One of the disciplines that I hope will come out of this whole process is that clear objectives will be set as to what will be achieved from environmental watering and, most importantly, that some measurement of the outcomes will be achieved when that is done.

I turn to division 4 and the issue of accountability. The minister may give a written ministerial direction to the environmental water holder in relation to its

performance, functions, powers and duties, but the minister cannot give particular directions as to the application of water use or the exercise of water rights by the environmental holder and cannot give specific directions to the water holder about the acquisition or purchase of a right or entitlement or the particular disposal of a right or entitlement. The minister can give certain directions to the environmental holder but cannot specifically tell the environmental water holder where it should apply a particular amount of water to or what it should do by way of water trade.

Going back to the accountability issue, one of the important parts of the bill is division 5, which deals with the planning by the environmental water holder. The explanatory memorandum states:

New section 33DV requires the water holder to prepare a corporate plan prior to the start of each financial year. The corporate plan will plan for that financial year and the three subsequent financial years.

New section 33DW allows the variation of the corporate plan during its operation by the water holder or upon the direction of the environment minister.

New section 33DX into the act provides for the water holder to make a seasonal watering plan for each water season.

That is one of the critical issues that a lot of people will watch with interest as to that particular watering plan. It also states that:

A seasonal watering plan will include forecasts of climatic conditions for the water season and the water holder’s priorities for the performance of its functions during the water season.

A seasonal watering plan must take into consideration any relevant seasonal watering proposals prepared by a waterway manager.

The issue with that particular clause is that the minister in the second-reading speech said that one of the reasons for setting up the environmental water holder in Victoria is to centralise all the environmental water in Victoria so that as the commonwealth becomes a major player in environmental water in the Murray-Darling Basin both in Victoria and interstate we will have a single entity here in Victoria that can deal with the commonwealth. We dearly hope those two organisations will work closely together to make sure some synergies are achieved in how Victoria’s environmental water entitlement is used and how that will complement the use of the commonwealth environmental water entitlement so we can get the best outcome possible from those two lots of water and so we do not find that over time there is a divergence of views and a conflict between how the two different groups use their environmental water. Taking into

account the relevant seasonal water proposals prepared by other waterway managers, I would consider that, while it will not be a manager, one of the other major water entitlement holders will be the commonwealth. We want to make sure that those two bodies work closely together.

In preparing that business plan or watering plan there is a requirement on the environmental water holder to have the plan made available at its place of business or to have it on its website. In the legislation there is an 'or' between those two particular things it has to do. I would personally like to see that it is made publicly available at the place of business and placed on the website so we can make sure that those people who do not have the opportunity to go to the environmental water holder's office and get a hard copy can always gain access to it from its website. If the minister could take up that issue in his summing up and provide a commitment that it will be available both in hard copy and on the website, it would be a useful addition to what we are talking about. That business plan must be sent to the minister two months before the start of the financial year. Nothing in the legislation refers to the time frame during which it must be made publicly available or when any amendments to that business plan or watering plan must be made publicly available.

It would be useful to have some time frame so that people would know there would be an expectation that the business plan and the watering plan would be made public at certain times of the year. I understand that quite often it is very hard to get information from the current government about watering plans and business plans. We have spent something like two years and a lot of time and money in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal trying to get a copy of the food bowl plan. I would hate to think that when the environmental water plan and the annual watering plan are being prepared that we would have to rely on freedom of information requests to get this sort of information. There is a requirement for that information to be put up, but I would like to know the time frame. I would like a response from the minister in his summing up on how that will be done.

Looking through the legislation I note that no discussion of environmental water in Victoria and the management of that water could escape this place without people talking about where that environmental water is going to come from. A substantial amount of it will come from the food bowl 1 and food bowl 2 projects. Only a couple of weeks ago the Auditor-General's report on irrigation efficiency programs was tabled in this place. Of all the Auditor-General's reports that I have read, that report

would be probably the most damning. The report damns the government. It details how the government is going about spending \$1.75 billion of Victorian taxpayers money. In effect the project was started on the back of a lobby group's ideas. No proper business case was prepared and there was no validation of whether the saving expectations were real. The Premier stood in this place and continually said that there are 900 000 megalitres of losses in the irrigation system in northern Victoria, yet when you look at the hard numbers supplied by Goulburn-Murray Water, the managing authority, in recent years there have been fewer than 400 000 megalitres of losses in that system. The Premier sticks to his lines very diligently, but we all know that they are not true.

Another matter has come to light in recent times. After months of making FOI requests it has come to light in correspondence between the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts in Canberra; Campbell Fitzpatrick, the executive director of water entitlement and strategies in Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment; and Denis Flett, a consultant in an auditing capacity, that when this government has been talking about taking water from the Eildon water quality reserve down the north-south pipeline to Melbourne, 10 000 megalitres of the environmental water quality reserve in Eildon is regarded as a saving. Somehow or other this government has taken an environmental water reserve and turned it into a saving, which defies logic.

You might ask the question: how can you turn an environmental reserve into a saving? You do it by preparing a water quality strategy. You develop the Goulburn Broken catchment strategy on the river and you prepare a strategy that says, 'We will have less nutrient inflow so we do not need environmental water', and all of a sudden that becomes a saving. How can anyone believe this government when it comes to environmental water? It defies logic to believe the government, particularly when water is set aside as a priority. Every year water is set aside in the Eildon water quality reserve in case there is a blue-green algae outbreak or fish die in the Goulburn River. Every year this water is set aside as priority water, but lo and behold the government has prepared a strategy on the Goulburn Broken catchment which claims that 10 000 megalitres of that water is a saving.

No-one in the department could read the newspaper, because 1000 kilometres of the Murray River — quite a bit downstream from where the Goulburn River runs into the Murray — was effectively shut down this year because of a blue-green algae outbreak. Every year water is set aside in case there is a blue-green algae

outbreak, but all of a sudden that water has become a water saving and cannot be used to prevent a blue-green algae outbreak and 1000 kilometres of the Murray is shut down because of a blue-green algae outbreak.

I return to where I started. Putting this bill in place will not improve this government's environmental credentials and how the government manages environmental water, because every time members of this government give something with one hand, they take away double with the other hand. Now the government is setting up the environmental water holder, a measure supported by the coalition — we think the principle of single management of water is a good idea — but on the other hand, through sleight of hand in this instance, government members are taking 10 000 megalitres away from the water quality reserve in Eildon. Some 10 000 megalitres has been called a saving. The government is taking one-third of the total amount of water from the Eildon water quality reserve and counting it as a water saving. Another third will go to Melbourne and the other third will go to the environment. The environment will again be short-changed by this government.

Clause 6 of the bill makes some changes to the ministerial rules. The minister has some powers in how he can direct the authority. One of the things I find interesting in this process is the setting up of the powers for the environmental water holder to be able to trade water either temporarily or permanently. I can understand why the environmental water holder may want to trade water temporarily. In years of low water allocation it may be in the environmental water holder's interest to sell some water while the prices are high, which would either provide money to buy an additional amount of water in a more secure allocation year when water is cheaper or give the body some money for some particular capital works that it might want to complete.

However, I cannot understand why powers would be put in this legislation that would allow the environmental water holder to permanently trade water. A lot of effort, huge amounts of money and quite a bit of community pain are being put into making sure the environment gets a secure allocation in Victoria. Why would anyone turn around and let the environmental water holder permanently trade water? Members of the coalition asked this question at the briefing, and the answer we were given was that such a measure may allow the environmental water holder to rebalance its portfolio so that if it has what it believes is a reasonable amount of water or surplus water in one particular catchment and not much environmental water in another catchment, then the water in one could be sold to enable the environmental water holder to buy water

in the other. Having listened to people from the environmental movement and from groups wanting to save our rivers, I know that there can never be enough environmental water in a particular catchment. I find it interesting that the environmental water holder would be given powers to permanently trade water. As I said, I can fully understand why the water holder would be in the temporary market, where there are some opportunities not only for the environmental water holder's benefit but which would most likely benefit food producers as well, but the issue of permanent trade should be treated with great caution.

The last question I would like to ask is: who is going to fund the environmental water holder? The cost of running the environmental water holder is going to be met out of the environmental contributions levy, a levy brought in by this government on all the water authorities in Victoria — 5 per cent on the gross income of the urban water businesses and 2 per cent on the gross income of the rural businesses. Let me refresh the memories of those who were in this place in the last Parliament when we debated that particular piece of legislation by reminding them that the environmental contribution levy was brought in to replace the catchment levy introduced by the Kennett government. The Kennett government set up a catchment levy whereby everyone was making a small contribution to the catchment. I think the principle was good, because it meant that everyone took an interest in whole-of-catchment management.

That levy was in place, but the then opposition leader, the current Premier, argued very strongly against that levy and said Labor would take it away if it was elected to government. He said he would fund catchment management out of consolidated revenue and that there was no need for this levy in Victoria. He said that these sorts of issues should be funded out of consolidated revenue. Only a small amount of money was raised by that catchment levy, but within two or three years a new supertax had been imposed on the water businesses in Victoria — as I said, 5 per cent of the gross income from levies on the urban businesses and 2 per cent from the rural businesses. It started by raising \$60 million a year, and it is now raising something like \$80 million a year as it has been indexed upwards.

We had the current Premier saying, 'We do not need a tax like this; we should fund this out of consolidated revenue'. We now have this massive tax on water businesses which is going to be used to fund the environmental water holder. This body, according to what this government has said previously, should have been funded out of consolidated revenue but it is now being funded out of the environmental water levy

contribution. That contribution has been raided by this government on numerous occasions to address what could be considered non-core environmental issues. This has included taking \$25 million out of that fund to put into the Shepparton modernisation project. Again this government broke its own rules. It said that money would be used for the environment but instead it has actually gone towards propping up some of the irrigation modernisation this government has committed to which should have been paid for out of its consolidated revenue.

The coalition supports this legislation. We firmly believe that having an overarching body to manage environmental water in this state is a good idea for a number of reasons, including the fact that with the commonwealth having a large environmental water entitlement we need that critical mass in Victoria to make sure there is planning between the two governments. Having the environmental water holder prepare a corporate plan and subsequently a three-year business case is also a good idea. There are some issues about when and how that plan will be made public, but the idea is good. The most important issue is that it will prepare an annual water plan and that when that is made public the people of Victoria will be able to see where environmental water is being used. Hopefully a clear outcome will be expected of the environmental water holder and there will be auditing of that outcome so that people know that environmental water is being put to good use.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill. I am following the member for Swan Hill, and I am delighted that he is supporting the bill. He has come a long way. Either he or other members of his party have had a road-to-Damascus conversion on environmental water. It was not that long ago that environmental water was frowned upon and criticised; elements within The Nationals have made considerable criticisms about the use of environmental water.

We are still in drought, but in the area around Hattah, which I have visited on a number of occasions — and I note that the members for Richmond and Northcote have also been there — I have seen the benefits of environmental water. This has been one of the areas about which The Nationals have been highly critical. In a stressed environment where irrigators were not receiving allocations they were targeting environmental water, so it is wonderful that they have marched down that road to conversion on the value of environmental water because it is a critical need. The environment has

as much need as agriculture for potable water. That is the area — —

Mr Walsh interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — The member for Swan Hill seems to be congratulating the government on the food bowl modernisation. He is acknowledging that there are savings. The 225 gegalitres is there, and we have indicated quite strongly that water savings will be equally shared between potable water for use in Melbourne, environmental use and agricultural use. Some of the opposition's supporters were saying that every single drop of whatever water savings are made should go to the irrigators; that we should not worry about the environment and that the water should be used for agriculture in years of drought. The trouble with that proposition is that the water is never returned. We can see that happening in New South Wales and in Queensland in particular, where overallocations are rampant. Again The Nationals' view is that crops like cotton and rice should benefit over and above environmental flows.

I welcome the support of The Nationals for this bill to establish the environmental water holder, which fulfils our commitment to establish this entity by 2011. That commitment was outlined quite extensively in the national rivers sustainable water strategy and in the 2010 annual statement of government intentions. This legislation is of significance in respect of that commitment.

I talked about the food bowl modernisation and in question time we talked about the savings from the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. Completed recovery projects since 2004 have resulted in new low-reliability and high-reliability environmental water entitlements that provide a long-term average of 350 gegalitres a year across the state — and there is a lot more to come. There are a couple of concerns in my patch about rivers that will become stressed and potentially have their environmental flows taken away. One of those is the Gellibrand River. Rather than looking at making water savings from projects like the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline and the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project, there are members of the Liberal Party who want to dam the Gellibrand River. That is a similar theme and a similar project to the project The Nationals talk about for down Gippsland way — I note that the member for East Gippsland is in the chamber — where they propose the idea of putting a whopping great dam on the Mitchell River or its tributaries with a massive impact on environmental flows and the health of those rivers. I will be interested to hear whether members of the Liberal Party are supporting that proposal, because

their view on environmental flows is that you put a whopping great dam there and release water when and if the river requires it.

In terms of the Moorabool River, which is a significantly stressed river, the Liberal Party previously talked about giving the allocation to Ballarat and also opposed the super-pipe through to Ballarat. I do not know what the heck Ballarat would have done for water without the super-pipe, but the Moorabool River would have been in an even more parlous state than it is now. We are working very closely with both Central Highlands Water and Barwon Water and the surrounding community groups, particularly in Meredith. I have travelled the length of that river with the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, and we are working hard to restore more environmental flows in the future.

I am proud of the work I have done with the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority in respect of Adelaide Brighton Cement. There were councils, supported by the Liberal Party, that wanted to take the water and allocate it to some winegrowers. Thankfully the catchment management authority has worked tirelessly, and I congratulate it, to ensure the bulk entitlements return to the lower reaches of the Moorabool River, where they should be. It is the conservative view that if water is there we should continue to rip it out of the system and use it. If it is above ground we use it, but if it is below ground we put in bores all over the joint.

This is a very pleasing development which has been policy driven and is consistent with the *Our Water Our Future* white paper. It is consistent with the Victorian-Commonwealth bilateral agreement for the food bowl, and it is certainly consistent with the national water initiative and with the *Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change* green paper.

The bill is to be reviewed in the future to see if the institutional arrangements are in order, particularly with changes in the federal area. Let us hope those changes continue, because clearly more water needs to be allocated to environmental flows in the Murray-Darling Basin. The bill is very strong on partnerships, which is something the Brumby Labor government does very well. It is about looking at the catchment management authorities, especially the large ones, and about their priorities.

The water holder will work closely with the catchment managers to see what is the highest priority use for those environmental flows. Thankfully with the grid system the Brumby government has put in place we can

shift high priority environmental flows to areas of greatest need. It may be at Hattah or it may be at Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands, which is another area I have been to, and there are other Living Murray iconic sites that are identified.

I believe the bill gives more certainty for future governments of whatever colour to ensure environmental flows because they are critical to and indeed the lifeblood of our communities. Thankfully The Nationals' short-term ideas, which seem to have disappeared, should never reappear because those small communities including at Barmah, where I have been, or the other small communities in the north rely on the river not just for their agricultural return but also for a return from recreation and tourism activities along that water, whether it be fishing or birdwatching, both of which I do, or shooting, which I do not do. It is one of the most popular recreational camping areas along the river. The Brumby government has recently proclaimed the red gum national parks and announced further surety about water — and certainly we need more water flows in the Murray River, particularly for these iconic sites and for our beloved red gums.

The bill segues very nicely with our other environmental commitments around the north. Importantly, this is a Victorian commitment that will fit in very closely and in a coordinated way as a single statutory body and is independent of this Parliament and individual influences. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I am pleased to speak on the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010. The management of our water, whether for environmental purposes, irrigation or consumption, is of utmost importance to the coalition. Sadly, more than a decade of Labor government mismanagement and neglect, combined with a drier climate, has left Victoria's rivers and wetlands in a nightmarish state. Once fertile and vibrant, Victoria's river systems are now described as being on the brink of collapse. Native birds and fish are disappearing and native fauna are virtually dying of thirst. The dire state of our rivers is the legacy of this government; 10 years of Labor's poor planning and negligent policies have resulted in the deterioration of our riparian habitat and ecology.

The coalition supports this bill because if it works effectively the environmental water holder will establish accountable management of Victoria's environmental water entitlement. The main function of the legislation is to establish the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. The water holder will

operate as an independent statutory body and provide a new framework for managing environmental water in Victoria.

As mentioned by the member for Swan Hill, the new body will hold and manage all Victorian environmental water entitlements. In doing so it will plan and report on the application of that water, working with waterway managers to plan for and deliver environmental water to priority sites. In 2007 the previous federal coalition government established the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to ensure that national environmental water objectives were being met.

This bill establishes a coordinated decision-making structure in the form of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder in contrast to our current system, which is quite confusing, with many bodies involved, such as Melbourne Water and Barwon Water, the various catchment management authorities and the Minister for Water. As a single entity, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder will be much better positioned to work with the commonwealth to ensure the best outcomes for environmental water use. As a single entity, the office of the water holder will consist of at least three full-time or part-time commissioners. The appointment of these commissioners will be at the discretion of the minister, and it is therefore very important that they are equipped with the expertise and knowledge needed to make decisions on sustainable water management and ecological management. All environmental water entitlements that were previously held by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change will be transferred to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, who, as the member for Swan Hill said, will be able to trade water both in the temporary water market on a seasonal basis and on the permanent water market to achieve environmental outcomes.

At this stage it is important to look at the state of our rivers in the context of establishing an overarching body to manage our environmental flows. Almost 80 per cent of our rivers and tributaries in Victoria are in poor or very poor condition. In 2006, in the lead-up to the last state election, the government made a commitment to significantly improve the health of Victoria's rivers by 2010. Despite this commitment many of our rivers are now drier and less healthy than when the Labor Party first made that commitment. Environmental flows that were promised to rivers such as the Moorabool, the Yarra, the Thomson and the Snowy have not been delivered; instead the government has taken more water out of these stressed river systems.

The Yarra River provides up to 70 per cent of Melbourne's drinking water. In October 2006 the government promised to release 17 000 megalitres of water back into the Yarra. Months later, Labor qualified this commitment, promising that the water would be allocated after the lifting of level 2 water restrictions. Not only have these flows not been delivered, but the Brumby government has since reduced the existing environmental flows in the Yarra to 200 megalitres a day.

The Thomson River has also endured a similar fate. In 2006 we saw the government promise to release 8000 megalitres of environmental water into the stressed Thomson. We are now four years on: the flows have still not been delivered and the Thomson River continues to struggle. The government's failure to deliver on these commitments has had a profound impact on the health of the river, on native habitat and on local communities that are dependent on the river and its tributaries. Earlier this year the government announced it would deliver 7000 megalitres back into the Yarra and 3000 megalitres back into the Thomson, but this will not even restore the volume of water that has since been extracted out of these rivers, let alone meet the government's 2006 commitments.

In northern Victoria the Goulburn River is in the worst condition of all rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray River red gum forests are another area under threat due to a chronic lack of water. The government has promised to protect them, but we are still waiting. It is my hope that this legislation will finally put in place a better framework that will ensure environmental water is better managed and creates better and more sustainable outcomes for our environment.

There are a couple of points of contention, and in the consultation we undertook some issues were raised that I would like to put on the record. In 2005 the government introduced the environmental water reserve, which provides improved management of water for environmental purposes. The environmental water reserve plays an important role in protecting biodiversity, water quality and the health of our water ecosystems. The vast bulk of water in the reserve — 94 per cent — consists of passing flows, above-cap water and reservoir spills. The remaining 6 per cent consists of actual water entitlements in storage. This bill transfers that 6 per cent into the control of the environmental water holder.

The Environment Defenders Office and Environment Victoria have both expressed concern that the vast majority of the environmental water reserve remains outside the scope of the Victorian Environmental Water

Holder (EWH). Because above-cap water remains outside the control of the water holder, the Environment Defenders Office maintains that:

... the bill will do very little to improve the management or delivery of the environmental water reserve as the EWH will only be responsible for a very small portion of it ...

Similarly, Environment Victoria stated that it would:

... like to see the EWH at least report on (if not manage) all aspects of the —

— environmental water reserve,

including rules-based water and above-cap water.

The Environment Defenders Office called for:

... all water in the environmental water reserve to come under the control or management of the environmental water holder to the maximum extent possible.

While the government has declared that the environmental water holder will operate as an independent body, this claim has been disputed by some in the environment sector. The Environment Defenders Office has labelled the water holder a 'quasi-independent position'. The fact is that most of the operations of the environmental water holder will be governed by a set of rules made by the minister. Many of the decisions made by the environmental water holder will be based on ministerial direction, and even the development of a corporate plan will be directed by the minister. The concern is that the active involvement of the minister in the decisions and operations of the environmental water holder could significantly constrain its effective operation.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition supports the establishment of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder position. From an environment perspective, it establishes the environment as a recognised and important consumer of water. Over the last few years reduced rainfall has meant that households, farmers and rivers have all had to reduce their consumption of water. However, a decade of Labor's poor water management has left the environment feeling the vast brunt of the impact. Over the years this government has harvested water from our rivers and aquifers leaving them stressed and unhealthy. The *State of the Environment* report 2008 found that this resulted in a loss of habitat connectivity, increased water pollution such as blue-green algal blooms and increased salinity.

Overall, I am very pleased the coalition is in a position, as outlined by the member for Swan Hill, to support the new position of the environmental water holder, because we believe it will improve the management

and the condition of environmental water. I am pleased to support the bill and recommend its speedy passage through the house.

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — I am very pleased to rise to speak in support of the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill. It builds on Labor's commitment to protect our water resources and recognises that without proper management of our water systems our environment suffers and our community as a whole pays a price. As we heard in question time today, our investment in water infrastructure projects has delivered for rural and regional communities. Town after town was listed as having had a reduction in its water restriction levels. This is great news for people across rural and regional Victoria and is an endorsement of Labor's plans to preserve and deliver this precious resource to where it is needed.

Our commitment does not end there. We recognise that our environment needs proper management, and our water environment also needs proper management. The science repeatedly tells us that the more you take a holistic view or manage the resources for all, including the environment, the more likely it is that you will be able to meet the challenges ahead. In short, healthy environments deliver better resource outcomes, and this is precisely the intention of the bill before the house.

Today I enjoyed listening, as did the member for South Barwon, to the member for Swan Hill talking for the very first time about the importance of environmental flows to our river systems. As the member for South Barwon said, time and again we have heard publicly and in this place arguments put forward — quite irresponsibly, in my view — by members opposite that the last thing you should do is consider the environment and the importance of environmental flows. I welcome the flip-flop we have seen today. It is never too late to change, but given all we have seen in recent times and the public statements made by members opposite, not for one moment do I honestly think they are going to hold to the view they outlined today.

I would also like to refer to the member for Doncaster's contribution today. Yet again we have heard an ongoing commentary, and as with her colleagues, there is no detailed plan about what she would do to secure this precious resource into the future.

The bill before the house recognises the importance of environmental flows and, in light of climate change, recognises the need to better manage our resource. It builds on our ongoing commitment to improve our river system. The bill establishes the Victorian

Environmental Water Holder, which will be a new statutory independent body responsible for managing environmental water in Victoria. Water entitlements for the environment were established in the document *Our Water Our Future*, which was released in 2004, but since that time there have been significant changes in the context of environmental water management in our state.

We have seen an extended period of drought, one of the harshest drought periods on record. This heightens the need to manage our precious resource more effectively. Water recovery from our massive investment in infrastructure projects across the state has provided an opportunity to deliver more flow back into our river systems. The access to the water grid and the market mechanisms that have been put in place have also enabled environmental water to be moved to where it is needed the most. Of course the commonwealth government now has the potential to hold large volumes of environmental water, resulting in a need for coordination to maximise the benefits for the environment and those who rely on the resource.

These changes over recent times have presented us with new challenges and new opportunities in environmental management which require a revised approach to how we manage environmental water in this state. It is precisely within this context that the new environmental water holder will be established and will deliver significant benefits for our environment. It is for these reasons and more that I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — The principle that we need to provide water for environmental flows is common ground certainly in this Parliament and also in the community, but inevitably there will be some tensions surrounding the process of determining what is a reasonable or necessary environmental flow. There will be tension surrounding who else in the catchment should have an entitlement to make demands on the system, and of course in times of drought that tension will certainly escalate. If the projections for lower overall rainfall are fulfilled, we will have lower stream flows. If that is correct, then the tension is likely to continue to increase.

Consideration of likely future rainfall patterns and the impact on the level of sustainable diversions is a discussion that needs to be had by the community; the community needs to have considerable debate on it. If rainfall in a particular catchment were to decline by 50 per cent over the next century — these are purely arbitrary figures — would it be reasonable to argue that diversions should be reduced by such an amount as would retain a sustainable flow that was determined as

of today's date? Should there be an acceptance over time that there needs to be change and therefore the proportion of diversion would perhaps remain constant — in other words, that the level of water available for environmental flows would decline.

Should we be saying that our baseline data, whether it be from 1990 or 2000 or whenever, is the line that we draw in the sand and therefore we need to maintain, even 100 years later, that level of environmental flow? Are we going to try to force an adaptation, which perhaps might become degradation; who knows? That is the debate the community needs to be having. I am sure there will be views at both ends of the spectrum and all points in between from the no change or even no diversion argument at one extreme end to the other end perhaps saying, 'No. We will keep the diversions going and we will not worry about the environmental flows at all'. That is the debate the community has to have.

It is a subject that is going to be on the radar for some time, and of course it has been on the radar for some time already in terms of the Murray-Darling system. The pressures and passions that that particular debate has aroused were evident in recent weeks when the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists produced a report titled *Sustainable Diversions in the Murray-Darling Basin* which suggested that on average a two-thirds natural flow in all catchments of the basin would be an appropriate flow regime and that to achieve that the cap on diversions would need to be increased by 4400 gigalitres.

Without going through the detail of that — because many of the tributaries are in Queensland and New South Wales — the major impact would be borne by the Murray, with an identified necessary reduction of 39 per cent, and by the Murrumbidgee, with a reduction of 65 per cent. That translates into significant economic impact, estimated by the Wentworth group to be a reduction of 12 per cent of profits for the Murray catchment and 26 per cent of profits for the Murrumbidgee catchment, which obviously would result in a substantial amount of money being taken out of local economies.

That report led to some immediate, some may say knee-jerk, reactions. An Australian Associated Press article says:

Murrumbidgee Irrigation was quick to reject the report ...

...

The National Farmers Federation slammed the 'cavalier' report ...

Natural resource manager Deb Kerr said the valuation of regions was based on old data, and overlooked the technologies used to make water go further.

And so on. You would expect that sort of reaction, but I think it indicates that we need to have a much broader community debate. Neither the Wentworth Group nor the National Farmers Federation could be characterised as extreme organisations, but these sorts of necessary discussions do inflame passions.

I understand that subsequent to the release of that report the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council met in Melbourne on 18 June and, following the meeting, met with authority members to receive a progress update on the developing basin plan. It is only when we get these plans into the public domain that we will be able to have that necessary full-on community debate about the future not only of environmental flows but also the industries that depend on the diversions.

In terms of the bill, I certainly welcome and support the proposals that have been put on the table, particularly the establishment of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. If the bill achieves its intended result, it will have the effect of ensuring that we are able to use environmental water in a genuine manner to protect environmental values. That would certainly be in stark contrast to the present situation where a recent Auditor-General's report has made it clear, despite the government's claims, that environmental water intended for our rivers, including the Murray, the Goulburn, the Snowy, the Thomson, the Yarra and others, is not being used to best effect, and that despite the talk, the spin and the constant media, three-quarters of Victoria's rivers are in fact degraded.

I want to talk about the structure of the bill. There are really just two aspects that I want to cover. One relates to the governance and the knowledge and experience requirements for commissioners of the water holder. The bill proposes that the environment minister may recommend a person for appointment if that person has knowledge and experience of one or more of the following fields: environmental management, sustainable water management, economics or public administration. I simply make the observation that I would hope the emphasis would be on the first two — that is, environmental management and sustainable water management. Experience in economics and public administration is certainly desirable, but I would hope there would not be a preponderance of that experience in the membership of the water holder. We need people with some considerable experience.

There are a couple of other concerns, including the potential for movement via the water grid of

environmental water between catchments. I know it will be of concern to quite a few people on face value. I do not share that concern, but I do appreciate that it is a matter that needs to be dealt with in a sensitive way.

The other issue is how this body may be able to relate to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. In an area like this, particularly with the Murray-Darling system, clearly this is necessarily a joint state and commonwealth exercise and the continued involvement of the state is critical to ensuring that the interests of Victorians are represented in this debate.

The proposals contained in this measure are certainly worthy of support, but the bottom line is that we will not achieve the full result until the government cuts out its posturing and puts some serious plans, particularly the Murray-Darling Basin plan, on the table so the community can have the full debate that it needs to have.

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010. The purpose of the bill is to establish the Victorian Environmental Water Holder as a body corporate responsible for managing Victoria's environmental water holdings. It is to provide for the role of waterway managers — that is, authorities that have waterway management districts — in environmental water management; to otherwise improve the management of environmental water in the state; and to make further provision as to the rights and entitlements to water under the act.

This is good legislation that is warranted in Victoria. This is another step in the right direction. It will progressively guarantee Victorians responsible water usage, and I think this is good sustainable policy and legislation that will take us into the future and make provision to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy the benefits of water.

I quote from the second-reading speech, which states:

The centrepiece of this framework is the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, a new, independent, statutory body, with the primary objective of using environmental water to protect environmental values and improve waterway health. The environmental water holder will be responsible for making decisions on the use of environmental water, from entitlements currently held by the environment minister. The bill amends the Water Act 1989 to create the environmental water holder and provide attendant powers and obligations to ensure the entity achieves its objective. The environmental water holder will consist of at least three commissioners, appointed by the Governor in Council.

I thought it was most useful and pertinent to quote that extract in this debate. As a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee I am happy to confirm that this bill raised no concerns in relation to the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

It is important that we use our environment and our water responsibly. It is the responsibility of all users to ensure that we use water responsibly. I am a good user, by the way, Acting Speaker, as I was told by the *Herald Sun* not long ago. It is important that those using water use it as efficiently as possible, and also that environmental managers use it responsibly. For that purpose they are given a range of tools that have been put in place for the purpose of improving the efficiency of environmental water use, including the establishment of an environmental water holder to coordinate delivery across the regions.

As you would know, Acting Speaker, there are increasing challenges and complex matters that need to be properly coordinated. The purpose of establishing the environmental water holder is to ensure that we are able to do that as efficiently and adequately as we can. This includes further structural works to deliver environmental water, carryover of water from one year to the next, the reuse of return flows and the use of consumptive water en route for environmental benefits.

These are all tools and measures that have been put in place to ensure that Victorians can benefit from the best system and regime that exists in the country. The establishment of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder is very important. As you know, Acting Speaker, the various sources of environmental water and entitlements are held by the Victorian and commonwealth governments. In the northern region environmental water can be supplied to connect the river systems that cross the boundaries of four catchment management authorities, and to maximise the benefits of environmental water its use must be coordinated across the regions. So it is important to establish the environmental water holder.

It is also important that we do so for the purpose of optimising the delivery of environmental water and direct it to its highest value use so that when there is limited water, as we have experienced in Australia and indeed in Victoria, we use it in the best way, that we do so responsibly and use it where it is required the most.

The environmental water holder will be able to identify where the priorities are, having regard to catchment management authority water and proposals, and to ensure that critical drought refuges across the region are

protected. It is interesting to note that in literature related to this subject and the bill, and indeed in our discussions and conversations today, we are talking about drought refuges. I recall when I first came to Victoria some three decades ago that we used to be the green state and we would never talk about subjects of this kind. In fact I think the vehicle number plates used to carry a slogan like 'the green state' or some words to that effect.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LANGUILLER — 'Victoria — The Garden State'. I thank the member for reminding me. Unfortunately we have come a long way in the wrong direction. There are environmental and climatic challenges not only in Victoria and Australia but around the world. Therefore I think it is important that the government put into place these new arrangements, which will ensure that the use and management of water by the responsible water authorities are overseen.

It is important to establish that the water holder will make decisions on the best use of environmental water independently from ministers. These are not political decisions; decisions in relation to the use of water will not be political decisions or directions given by ministers. These are matters which will be determined independently of the executive, independently of the minister; they will very much be determined scientifically, so to speak, by experts in the field. The use of water will be determined according to need and according to priorities. These important decisions on the allocation, use and management of environmental water will be made as locally as possible, and the respective roles and responsibilities of catchment management authorities, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the water holder must be absolutely clear.

The Victorian environmental water holder, as I said, will be an independent statutory body that will be responsible for making these decisions. As I understand, this water holder body will come into operation in July 2011. The government is establishing it because the challenges of water management are indeed complex. The challenges are greater and the opportunities are bigger than ever before. We need to make sure that we can address extreme and unpredictable climatic conditions which are associated with the ongoing drought and climate change. We need to make sure that we coordinate the authorities — the catchment authorities, the state governments and various authorities — with the commonwealth government to ensure that we do this efficiently and to ensure that we can deliver the potential for large

volumes of environmental water. We will maximise that if we do it in a coordinated way. We need to do this to continue investment in water recovery projects by our government which will result in significant volumes of environmental water entitlement.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder was created under a commonwealth act of 2007. The commonwealth water holder has a similar role and similar functions to those of the Victorian water holder. The expectation of the Victorian government is that under this legislation and indeed under this policy base these bodies will coordinate their activities efficiently so we can deliver the best use of water to Victorians. I commend this legislation. I think it is good legislation; I think it is visionary legislation. It is responsible and sustainable legislation that will look after Australian generations into the future.

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to contribute to the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010. I wish to indicate that I will be supporting the bill along with my Liberal-National coalition colleagues, because water is so important to all Victorians and the proper management of water for both consumptive use — —

Mr Lim — What about plugging the pipe? No more?

Dr SYKES — I will ignore that call for me to call for the plugging of the pipe at this stage. I will at a later stage in my speech call for the pipe to be plugged.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! I ask the member to ignore interjections.

Dr SYKES — I will ignore the interjections. I think I heard the previous speaker, the member for Derrimut, whom I respect, saying that the management of water does not involve political decisions. I have to declare that the management of water is fundamentally politically driven and that the appalling decisions and appalling actions that were taken by the Brumby Labor government back in 2006 and 2007 had one objective in mind, which was to get back into power in November 2010. What it has done to country Victorians is absolutely shameful. The government should watch what country Victorians and many other Victorians say at the polling booths on 27 November 2010.

Today the house heard about the politicisation of water when the Premier, in response to a Dorothy Dixier at question time, claimed that the improvement in water availability in a number of communities was a consequence of action taken by this government in

relation to putting in a water grid and other activities. The one thing the Premier failed to mention was that it has rained. If it rains, you have more water. Water is very much a politicised subject.

If we look at the issue of the management of environmental water — —

Mr Ingram interjected.

Dr SYKES — We heard a chip there from the member for Gippsland East. He is the man who helped put this Brumby Labor government into power. He is the man who thought he was going to get water flowing down the Snowy River as a result of Lake Mokoan being drained, and he has not got one drop, but Mokoan is as dry as a — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! I ask the member to ignore interjections.

Dr SYKES — Thank you, Acting Speaker. You can see that water is a passionate subject for me. It is because we in northern Victoria have been without water for the past 12 years, and if you have gone without it for that long, then you hurt like hell and you want to make sure that a lot of other people appreciate how much it hurts. To see water being stolen for the rest of our time under this Labor government is an appalling situation to be in.

Let us look at the issue of environmental management, which is what this bill is about, as an indicator. We support the proposition to have in place a management structure for the environmental water that is obtained, but the government's track record on the environmental management of water is appalling, and that is why it is important to have a better system of management in place. For example, in relation to the food bowl modernisation project one of the water saving strategies is to reduce the outflows from the end of channels and claim 100 per cent of that outflow reduction as a saving. Conveniently the Brumby government — the devious, dishonest Brumby Labor government — fails to recognise that a significant proportion of those end-of-channel outflows flows into another waterway for the benefit of downstream consumptive use, downstream communities and the downstream environment. That example alone raises questions about the government's ability and honesty in managing environmental water.

If we look at a subject very near and dear to my heart, Lake Mokoan, we see that in decommissioning that lake the government has claimed it is going to create a world-class wetland. I tell members right now that it is a weed-infested swamp and a jungle that caught on fire

in January this year because of lack of environmental management of weeds and rubbish. In creating this world-class wetland, this environmental gem, the government is destroying a Ramsar-quality wetland that is there now. We have a combination of permanent water and seasonal water there, and in the process of decommissioning Lake Mokoan thousands or tens of thousands of an endangered species called the Murray cod have met their death. We had whoppers that died as a result of the callous disregard for the environment by the Brumby government.

I am not sure whether the member for Swan Hill mentioned the other issue — that is, we seem to have a little bit of naughtiness in relation to the claiming of water savings in environmental reserves in Lake Eildon. The government is claiming that the non-use of those environmental reserves constitutes water savings. I would say that is a fraction naughty and may even constitute another Labor lie.

Then there is the north–south pipeline, on which I am not going to spend much time — I will save that for another day — but which is fundamentally flawed from an environmental point of view because it is taking water from the stressed northern Victorian area, specifically from the Goulburn River, which is one of the most stressed rivers in northern Victoria and in Australia. Water is being plundered from it to be piped to Melbourne when Melbourne's water needs can be met by other means. The Minister for Water spruiked that the health of the Yarra River is going to be improved because environmental water will be taken from northern Victoria and pushed into the Yarra for environmental water purposes. That is nothing more than environmental vandalism.

If we look at business management skills, and hence the need for a proper management of environmental water, then we need look only at the Auditor-General's report which was released in recent weeks in relation to the management of irrigation efficiency programs. I just want to pick one of many paragraphs that form what is the most damning report on this government's activities in my time in the Parliament, which is now approaching seven and a half years. The paragraph states:

Evidence that the DSE secretary gave under oath —

the reason the secretary gave his evidence under oath in July 2009 was that he refused to respond to the Auditor-General's request to provide information —

indicates that the need for the FMP and the Sugarloaf pipeline was influenced by the desire to invest in water infrastructure. He said that to meet this need to invest in large scale augmentation, DSE 'created' a set of water inflow forecasts in 2007 using the years 2004–06, rather than the last 10 years as

had been used in the 2006 central region sustainable water strategy. He also said that had DSE used the 10-year forecasts, the need to invest in these large projects would not have been established.

How outrageously deceitful is that on the part of the government? If we look at the government's management of projects today, we see that there have been further failings, as is noted in the Auditor-General's report. The report outlines that in respect of many projects with a value in excess of \$10 million, government departments, particularly the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Sustainability and Environment, have failed to fulfil basic auditing and accountability responsibilities.

I will just touch briefly on the continuing need to protect environmental flows in the Murray-Darling Basin. A recent report by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists suggests that water extracted from the basin should be reduced by a further 30 per cent to ensure its long-term health. That report recognises that if you are going to address the community impact, the cost of taking this water back is going to be substantially more than the cost of simply buying it on the market. It is going to be of the order of \$9 billion, because that is how much the community is impacted by the loss of water. For this government to have operated the way it has — to have put in place a north–south pipeline to plunder water from the environment and from the communities and irrigators of northern Victoria and to pipe it to Melbourne at great expense to meet Melbourne's burgeoning water requirements that can be met by other means — is shameful, disgraceful, appalling —

Mr Lim interjected.

Dr SYKES — There we have a member of the city-centric government talking about Victorians. He should come to northern Victoria and see what it is like to do without water. I close by saying one more time: plug the pipe.

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I am delighted to be taking part in this debate as I rise to support the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010. I think from the outset it should be put very clearly that no government has done as much for water as the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments. It is refreshing that at least we now have a consensus and support from the other side. Opposition members have been carrying on and talking about building a dam, but they do not even know where they are going to put it. That is just one small example of the opposition opposing for the sake of opposing. Opposition

members have been complaining and whingeing but for seven years have done nothing. This government, however, is forging ahead and cares about the water needs of all Victorians — not just people in Melbourne or in other cities but people throughout the regions and the whole of Victoria.

Let me come to the substance of the bill. We all know that here in Victoria a lot of the wellbeing of our regional economy and community depends on river and wetland health because in turn they provide quality-assured water, which is basic to tourist services and recreation facilities.

The Brumby government has put in a great amount of effort to improve river and wetland health with the aim of benefiting our environment and the community wellbeing in the long term. We have a vision to ensure that, going back to the Our Water Our Future policy, we put in place a whole range of programs and infrastructure to secure water for all Victorians. Furthermore, there are places of iconic or historic importance that need to be well preserved such as the Barmah and Gunbower forests, which we as a community hold dear.

Environmental water holdings are deemed crucial to the ongoing management and improvement of the health project for statewide river estuaries and wetlands. When faced with ever-worsening water scarcity and climate change, it is particularly important to continue to improve the environmental situation so that Victoria can benefit economically, socially and recreationally.

Some effective areas of the current agreements will be kept and consolidated, including the provision that it is still the waterway manager's responsibility to guarantee that environmental water is delivered under the whole integrated river and wetland management project. The framework of an environmental policy is drawn by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, who is responsible to represent the community in Parliament.

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder will be established as a new statutory agency that is also independent and a decision-maker for facilitating Victorian environmental waters. Since recovering water for burdened river systems has been at the core of the government's investment program, the establishment of the VEWH will provide crucial improvement in building sustainable water management. Greater accountability for large environmental water assets under the government's investment is another area that needed to be addressed, and examples include the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline and the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project. The new change will also

strengthen accountability in making use of the large quantity of water generated by the abovementioned projects.

This bill will assist to maximise the Victorian government's significant investment to deliver extra water for rivers, estuaries and wetlands. To achieve optimal results from the investment has become especially critical since the Our Water Our Future program was introduced, as I mentioned earlier, and as droughts continue and scarcity of water increases. With this bill, opportunistic rainfall and flow events can be capitalised on and greater efficiency can be achieved by improving responsiveness in environmental water management. By setting up a single integrated framework, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, all efforts to make use of Victorian and commonwealth environmental water will be coordinated and channelled towards achieving priorities in planning.

Implementing the government's commitment to establish the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, this bill amends the Water Act 1989 and establishes this new environmental water holder which will consist of at least three commissions. The holder's legislative conditions are guidelines for the daily operation of the environmental water holder. In addition, the environment minister and general government policy related to environmental water management are also responsible to provide the execution framework.

An integrated and coordinated foundation for management of the environmental waters in Victoria will be enhanced by this bill, which can provide sustainable, economical, social and environmental benefits for all Victorians. As I commend this bill to the house I also commend the minister for taking the lead on this issue.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010. From the outset I say that we in this state and this nation have done incredible long-term damage to our river systems, waterways and wetlands, and for a range of reasons. We have used and abused them, turned river systems into drains and straightened, desnagged and done a whole range of things to them that have caused, in some cases, almost irreversible damage to many of those river systems.

In Gippsland East we have some of the best rivers and the most natural river systems, and we also have some with significant environmental damage and challenges. As many members would know, my electorate contains

rivers like the Snowy River; it also contains the headwaters of the Murray River, which are the most pristine upper reaches of the Murray River; and it has almost the entire Gippsland Lakes catchment, including the Thomson River, from which comes a large portion of Melbourne's water.

I was elected to this place with a strong passion and commitment to improving the health of our rivers. I encourage members to look at a document called the *State of the Rivers* report, which is well over 25 years old. This was really the benchmark start to the debate about the improvement of our river systems and what we have done to them.

This bill sets up the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and builds on a similar Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, and it makes changes to improve environmental flows, rehabilitation and national agreements. In my view it is a positive step forward to establish an independent body to manage water entitlements.

There are still some challenges with the legislation and a lot of work that we need to do. It is only applicable to the regulated systems — that bucket of water that can be managed, not the base-level flows in our systems — but it is still an important step. The water holder needs to have the capacity to trade, buy, sell and receive water. That is what this legislation does: it sets up that independent body to receive advice from the catchment management authorities and the relevant experts to ensure that we can best manage the water.

I have a lot of understanding of this because it is similar to how the agreements for the Snowy River and other systems are supposedly managed. It is my view that there is one shortfall, and I will move a reasoned amendment because of that. I attempted drafting amendments to the legislation to overcome what I see as a shortcoming in the legislation, but it would have been fairly complex and potentially difficult to do. Therefore I have chosen to prepare a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place the words:

'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to provide that water held by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder be treated as borrowed water in the event that the minister qualifies environmental entitlements under the Water Act 1989, to ensure that when environmental flows, entitlements, water shares or water set aside for the environment is qualified and withheld for purposes other than at the direction of the water holder, the water is to be paid back within five years'.

That amendment is fairly wordy, but I have moved it because the problem with this bill is that the

environmental entitlements can still be qualified. We have seen on a number of occasions over recent years governments — for the right reasons; I know governments never take these decisions lightly — qualify the entitlements, which means that that water entitlement is not able to be delivered to the environment. What we see in that situation is that that water is not repaid.

If the amendment I am seeking is made to the legislation, we will see that governments will take the decision to qualify environmental water entitlements seriously because at some stage they will have to repay that water. I use as an example that Snowy Hydro Ltd sells water to irrigators above their entitlement from its above-allocation water and that water has to be repaid in subsequent years. Irrigators can make the decision to purchase the water, but they do so knowing that they will have to repay that water at some stage when the water entitlements get back to a higher level.

I moved this reasoned amendment because I strongly believe that over and above critical human needs the environment should be the most secure recipient of water, particularly because it requires only a small portion — the allocation of water we are returning to our rivers is still only a small portion of the original flows. In my view those entitlements should be some of the most secure. If you look at the provisions in the bill, you see that the environmental water holder could sell the entitlement to receive money in the years when water is short and then purchase additional water in other years when there is more water available. The amendment I have moved would achieve the same or a better outcome because it would mean that in the drought years when water is extremely scarce we could see water come back again.

There has been a major change in the debate on water allocation over the past decade. We have seen water allocations made to the Murray-Darling Basin, the Snowy River, the Gippsland Lakes, the Thomson River, the Macalister River, the Latrobe River and the Yarra River. I will take up one point: restoring natural systems must always be put above trying to protect or preserve man-made systems. The values of a natural system should always be what we are trying to preserve. To describe Lake Mokoan, which is an artificial, man-made lake system — while it is certainly based on an existing wetland — as having a higher value than a natural system like the Murray River or the Snowy River is quite extraordinary.

I have been in this place for a few years, and I have sat here and listened to members of The Nationals, the river killers of this Parliament, deriding environmental

flows time and again, saying they are a waste. The honourable member for Murray Valley got up in this place and said, 'As for putting more water down the Snowy River, that is an absolute disgrace to me'. They were his words; I remember them vividly because I was in the chair at the time and was listening to them and I could not interject, so I am sorry to have done the same to you, Acting Speaker, when speaking about Lake Mokoan! I use that comment in relation to the qualification of environmental flows.

We have seen what has happened with the Barren Box Swamp project where the environmental entitlements for the Snowy were qualified by the New South Wales government. Forty gigalitres of water — 20 gigalitres a year over two years — have been qualified. That water, which should be going down the Snowy this year, has been qualified because of the drought situation in New South Wales. We have seen similar issues with other Victorian rivers.

If you went back 15 years, you would not think that members on both sides of this Parliament would be supporting environmental flows and saying that this bill is a great outcome. This is something I did not think I would see. The debate has moved a long way, and that is a good thing, but we still have a fair way further to go to ensure that the environmental outcomes that we all hope to achieve through environmental entitlements are reached.

Mr R. Smith — For once we are all supporting a water bill, and he wants to withdraw it!

Mr INGRAM — The reasoned amendment I have moved is about highlighting what I see as some of the challenges. We have seen that the environmental entitlements for the Thomson River have been qualified. I initially asked what this meant, whether the water is borrowed and will be paid back next year. There is a lot of uncertainty around this. There needs to be more certainty about how strong those entitlements are, what they actually mean, whether the water is borrowed after entitlements are qualified or whether the water will remain there. The Thomson River is interesting because, as I understand it, the water was not used; it was actually held back in the Thomson Dam in case Melbourne's water was in short supply. As a matter of principle you would say, 'I do not necessarily agree with it entirely', but you would understand it. However, the water is still there. Theoretically, once the drought conditions eased, it should have been released to the environment. That is where I think the flaw in this legislation is.

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — It gives me pleasure to talk about the Water Amendment (Victorian Environment Water Holder) Bill 2010 and the reasoned amendment that has been moved by the member for Gippsland East, who never got his water down the Snowy River after he was promised it. He sold himself out during that period of time.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Dr Sykes) — Order! Without interjections! I ask members to let the member for Bass continue without baiting him.

Mr K. SMITH — What a great opportunity this is to give the member for Gippsland East a bit of a bagging for what he did. He put this government into office on the promise he was going to get more water down the Snowy River. He never got it, but he is still hanging in there hoping the government will help him get re-elected on 27 November. I can only say you have no chance, my friend, no chance.

I look at this issue as being interesting. I sat through question time today — or most of it, anyway — and heard the — —

Mr Ingram — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Bass was not speaking through the Chair. He is required to direct his remarks through the Chair.

On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, the comments about question time today clearly are not related to the subject of the bill, so my point of order is in relation to relevance to the bill. I ask you to bring the member back to the debate before the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Dr Sykes) — Order! I ask the member for Bass to address his comments through the Chair. However, he had not got to the point of discussing question time and his comments may well relate to the subject being debated now. I rule that there is no second point of order.

Mr K. SMITH — I am so grateful for that wonderful interpretation of what the member for Gippsland East said.

To be honest, I see that there is more of a conspiracy in this matter than the government is trying to get across to us. The government is proposing to set up a Victorian Environmental Water Holder, a body which will disperse environmental flows around Victoria. The body will be able to gather water from one place and direct it to another. Water will be able to be moved

from one dam to another and into reservoirs, rivers and streams.

On my little patch of ground we have something called the desalination plant. We have all seen the Premier stand time after time to talk about this huge plant as the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere — these projects always have to be the biggest — and about how great it is great and that it will produce somewhere between 150 and 200 gigalitres of water.

There was a question I wanted to ask at question time today. The Premier stood in this place and talked about the north–south pipeline and said how wonderful this government is because it put that pipeline in place. He talked about all the other water projects that this government has undertaken, including providing more water for Ballarat. He was talking about Lake Wendouree, which is now to be called Lake Mokoan, so the name has not disappeared entirely off the map.

This morning a Christian prayer breakfast was held in Parliament House. The Premier could well have been in there on his knees praying to God, saying, ‘Thank you, God, for sending this water down and relieving us of the pressure that was on this Victorian government, because we had not planned for the future’. I can hear the Premier now saying, ‘Lord! We never planned properly for the drought we had in Victoria, and you have sent down buckets of water in recent times, and we can only say thank you, Lord! Thank you very much! But, Lord, what am I going to do with the desalination plant when it starts pumping out 150 gigalitres of water? How am I going to get rid of it?’.

I can hear God saying, ‘Hey! You’ve got this Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill before the Parliament. Of course that will be a way out, because when that water is being pumped up and is going into some of the reservoirs, you’ll have reservoirs starting to overflow, because I’m sending natural water’ — this is God speaking — ‘and you’re going to find that there will be so much water that you don’t know what to do with it. I am setting up this group for you now that’s going to allow you to pump water everywhere without any disclosure of where the water is going, so they’ll be able to waste a lot of that water’.

It does not matter about the cost of shifting that water, because the government will not have to account for any of the cost. The truth about the cost is something that worries me. The Minister for Water has stood in this place on many occasions and said that the cost of water being delivered from the desalination plant will be \$1.37 per kilolitre — currently we pay \$1.00, \$1.05

or \$1.08 a kilolitre for water. I recently went to a function where Kenneth Davidson, the *Age* economist and writer, spoke. In the discussions Kenneth was trying to explain to people, including me, exactly how much this water is going to cost. On one side of the argument is the Minister for Water saying, ‘This is going to cost only \$1.37 per kilolitre, so there is only a slight increase in the cost of water’. However, Kenneth Davidson explained to the people at the function that by the time AquaSure, the company that is building the desalination plant, is in a position where it will get a return on this \$3.1 billion — or whatever it is; we have heard figures that go up to \$4.8 billion — AquaSure will have to get something like \$5.20 or \$5.30 per kilolitre back. For anyone \$5.30 per kilolitre is a lot different from \$1.37 per kilolitre. On top of that AquaSure will want to make a profit, which will put the price over \$6.00 per kilolitre — a long way over the \$1.37 talked of by this government. That is not to suggest that I believe the Minister for Water; I would not believe him if he were the last man on earth and he was telling me he was the last man on earth.

An honourable member — You wouldn’t be able to hear him.

Mr K. SMITH — That is probably true.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! On the bill! I remind the member for Bass to direct his comments to the bill.

Mr K. SMITH — I am, and what I am saying is very much to do with the bill. I believe what I have said is the reason for the Victorian Environmental Water Holder being set up. We have to be a little concerned about this and look to what will happen on 27 November. The desalination plant will not be completed by that stage. At some stage towards the end of the year 2012 the plant will be officially opened and launched. Premier Baillieu will be there, and I will be there. The present Minister for Water probably will not get invited to come along. The Liberal-Nationals coalition will have to carry some of the responsibility for this additional cost. I know that when those who are in government today are over on this side of the chamber they will be saying, ‘It is all because of the Baillieu government that the price of water has gone up’. I will refer them to what I am saying today and to what Kenneth Davidson said. I will ask them to have a look at why this water amendment bill was put before the house. It is being introduced to disperse water around the state of Victoria to protect the government from being caught out. The government will call it an environmental flow, and that water will be pumped down all the rivers. It might be good for the water to be

pumped down the rivers, but not at a price of over \$6 per kilolitre.

There will be no accountability for this new group — no accountability to the public and no accountability to the government. We only have to look at the Auditor-General's report on managing the requirements for disclosing private sector contracts, which was tabled today, to see how this government has managed that issue. One contract that was not disclosed concerned information about the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The report refers to 'specific excisions' related to details of the annual supply of water volume, so we will not know exactly how much water is coming out of the desalination plant and how much water is being pumped into the pipes to be dispersed around Victoria. Another excision was about compensation for relevant intervening events, which could be floods when our reservoirs are full. This mob will be pumping water everywhere and we will not know about it. This government is going to get away with murder.

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — It is a great pleasure to speak on the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill. It is disappointing to see that the member for Gippsland East has left the chamber. I note that in his contribution he said that the environment should come before irrigators. Does that mean that down in his area he supports the closing of the Maffra irrigation district? Does that mean that in his area he believes that the diverters on the Mitchell River and the vegetable growers down there should have no water? I think they would be very pleased to hear that he has signed the death warrant of the irrigators in Gippsland.

In his contribution the member for Clayton said we all love the Barmah and Gunbower forests. Both forests are in my electorate, and we all do love them. When the government proposed closing the forests and turning them into national parks, some of my colleagues from the coalition, including the members for Benalla and Warrandyte, came to my electorate to visit the forests. They took the time to come to the forests and see what the forests really need. Environmentalists were telling us that the forests needed a drink. So what did the government do? The government took 75 000 megalitres of the water to Melbourne. How will it help the Barmah and Gunbower forests to take that water to Melbourne?

There is no argument to be had; we should have a good environmental manager of the water. The arguments are always about how the water is used to benefit the environment. Many a misleading statement has been put about by the government on the amount of water

that can be saved. The last time Parliament sat the Auditor-General issued a report on irrigation efficiency programs, which identifies a few areas in which misleading statements have been made about the amount of water that could be saved. I have written to the Auditor-General saying that his report was too generous.

I refer to a figure 3A, a table at page 24 of the Auditor-General's report entitled *Irrigation Efficiency Programs*, in which it is estimated that 52.1 gicalitres of savings would be achieved from the Shepparton irrigation district. The problem is that in 2005–06, the last time there was a 100 per cent allocation in the Goulburn system, the Shepparton district lost only 62 000 megalitres from 219 000 megalitres of diversions. If you take away losses of 62 000 megalitres from 219 000 megalitres, and if you say you are going to save 52 000 megalitres out of that, you will have losses of only 10 000 megalitres. With only 10 000 megalitres lost from a total of 219 000 megalitres it means that the system ran at greater than 95 per cent efficiency — and we all know that the whole Melbourne pipe system runs at a less efficient rate than that. We all know that the general manager of the Office of Water, Mr Downie, has been reported in papers in northern Victoria as talking about how the government is going to get the system to 85 per cent efficiency, which is nowhere near 95 per cent.

Another problem the government has in relation to the Shepparton irrigation district is that in 2007–08 only 35 000 megalitres was lost from that area. Granted that was a dry year, but only 35 000 megalitres was lost and yet the government still claims it can save 52 000 megalitres. How you can save 52 000 megalitres when you have only 35 000 megalitres of losses has me bewildered.

Dr Sykes — They create new water.

Mr WELLER — As Dr Sykes says, they create new water. That is an interesting concept. The amount of water that would actually have been saved in that year would have been closer to 15 000 megalitres. If you take 15 000 from 52 000, it means that the government has raided 37 000 megalitres from the irrigator pool. That is what these savings are, and that is why people in northern Victoria are upset.

Going on to look further at the situation, there is a section in the northern Victorian sustainable water strategy that says that the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project can actually class any water it buys from farmers as savings. You might say that is no

saving — and it is not a saving. How the government justifies this is that when a channel is closed down — and this is not a renewal project in northern Victoria, it is a closure project — it takes the system from 100 per cent back down to 40 per cent. The government is saying that where farmers choose to close down channels it will buy the water rights from the farmer and will count the water right it has bought back from the farmer on those spurs it closes as a saving. That is not a saving; it is productive water that is being taken away and given to the environment.

What I suggest we need to do with environmental water is make it go further. I have been a great supporter of the environment. How do we make this water go further? Rather than insisting on over-the-bank floods, why do we not have engineering solutions where you take the water from higher up the river and have it flood the lower flood plain? We will not get 100 per cent of the flood plain but we may well get 80 per cent. This is what it is about: getting 80 per cent. Using the water and not decimating our communities at the same time is the way to go.

In 2005 in the Barmah forest we had what they call an Ovens River flood — a flood came down the Ovens. The unfortunate part was that the environmental managers at the time did not time the flood from the Hume Weir; they released environmental water to hit at the same time as the water that came down the Ovens. The result was that about 50 per cent of the Barmah forest was flooded for a long time, which was good. However, if we had got the timing right and got the environmental flow from the Hume Weir to hit at the same time as the Ovens River flood, we could have irrigated 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the forest, which would have been a far better environmental outcome. This is what we need and what we are supporting: having an environmental water holder so that we can get the environmental megalitres we have now to go further before we look at taking more water for the environment.

There is another interesting comment by the minister in the second-reading speech. He agrees with me. He said:

We must get maximum 'bang for our buck' — to reduce the need for additional water recovery and avoid potential community impacts.

The minister is there agreeing with me. What the minister needs to do is go and talk to Penny Wong.

Mr K. Smith — Who?

Mr WELLER — Penny Wong, the federal Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water. She

is about to bring down some sustainable diversion limits. If you read what the Wentworth group, an irrelevant group to my mind, has to say, you see that it wants to take back 40 per cent to 60 per cent of environmental water. It needs to be understood that if you take back 40 per cent or 60 per cent on top of the water that has been ripped out of our communities by the government through what it calls savings but is actually sleight of hand, there will be no water left. The communities of northern Victoria will be decimated. We will not need the port of Melbourne. The dairy industry is the biggest user of the port of Melbourne, but where will the water be for the dairy farmers in northern Victoria? Even though we have had the drought, northern Victoria is still responsible for one-third of the dairy production in this state.

The Victorian Minister for Water needs to talk to the federal minister and make sure she understands where he is coming from. I support his comment that we need to get more bang for our buck. The minister went on in the second-reading speech to say that the development of the water grid creates opportunities. The development of a water grid rips water out of northern Victoria! It takes environmental flows away from the Loddon River, away from the Campaspe River and away from the Goulburn River, and what for? It is so that we can have environmental flows in the Yarra River. If these are the decisions that are going to be made, we need an independent body so that we take the politics out of it. I support the establishment of an environmental water holder.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AMENDMENT BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 9 June; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I rise to speak on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. The coalition will not be opposing the bill. In saying that, a number of coalition members would have liked to contribute to debate on the bill, but because the government has put eight bills on the business program for this week the ability to have a fulsome debate on this bill is limited. If the government really believes its legislation is important, it should allow the opposition

to subject it to rigorous examination and debate. But because of the overloaded business program, members on this side of the house will have a limited time to speak on the bill, and I think the government's inability to structure a workable business program to allow all members to make contributions is an indictment of it.

Less than two months ago we debated the Child Employment Amendment Bill 2010, which made amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003 and the Working with Children Act 2006. The bill before us also makes amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003 and the Working with Children Act 2005, and a question has been asked about why the two bills could not have been introduced to the Parliament as one bill. I raised the issue with the department and was told that the matters in the two bills could not be amalgamated because of timing issues between the portfolios of the Attorney-General and the Minister for Industrial Relations, which shows that ministers are not really talking to each other when they should be and clearly one hand of government has no idea what the other hand is doing.

There are some different themes in the two bills. Regardless of what the government when it was in opposition said it would do, it does introduce plenty of omnibus bills into this place with disparate provisions, and there is certainly a view that these two bills could have been introduced as one.

During debate on the Child Employment Amendment Bill earlier this year, and indeed during debate on previous legislation surrounding working-with-children and child employment issues, government members said the opposition opposes this sort of legislation. In fact during the debate on the Child Employment Amendment Bill in May the member for Bundoora said it was shameful that we had previously opposed this sort of legislation. I think government members are being very selective in their approach when they say these things, because it is more correct to say that the coalition was opposed to the many unworkable provisions in these bills and to issues that lacked common sense; it was not opposed to protecting children.

As an example, during debate on the Child Employment Bill in 2003 there was a lot of debate about whether the definition of a 'closely related family' should be expanded to include aunts, uncles, siblings and those sorts of people. Indeed the opposition made no secret of the fact it thought that definition should be expanded. The members for Kew, Swan Hill, Polwarth, Shepparton, South-West Coast, Bulleen and Sandringham all raised the issue, but the government

refused to give the raising of that issue any sort of credence. However, only a few years later, when the Working with Children Act was enacted, the definition was expanded to include what the opposition members had spoken about.

Further, during debate on the Working with Children Bill in 2005 the Leader of The Nationals said his party believed the bill before the house was 'clumsy and invasive', it lacked common sense and The Nationals were concerned:

... that the government simply does not know how the bill will work in a practical, operative sense.

We now are seeing amendments in this bill that address some of the concerns raised during that debate. The Leader of The Nationals also raised the issue of two classes of card-holder in relation to the Working with Children Act. He said that on one hand there would be people who go through a police check to obtain cards as volunteers and on the other hand people who would go through the police check system and have a card issued to them on the basis of paid child-related work. This bill goes a little way towards addressing that by allowing a volunteer application to be disregarded if an application for a paid employment check is requested at the same time.

The Leader of The Nationals also said at the time that he was concerned that the government simply did not know how the legislation was going to work, and the government acknowledged that very point when it said it would commit to a review three years after the introduction of the Working with Children Act. In many cases the concerns of the coalition have been borne out as time has gone on, because subsequently the government has changed many of the unworkable provisions, including by amendments in this sort of legislation.

The bill has come about as a result of a three-year review following the introduction of the principal act. It is arguable that a number of the amendments could have been made prior to the review into the operation of the working-with-children legislation, not least because The Nationals and the Liberal Party raised some of the issues during previous debates. Through the departmental briefing the government said it did not want to amend the legislation in a piecemeal fashion but wanted to wait until the review had been completed so it could amend the various aspects at one time. The fact is, though, that in 2007 there was an opportunity to amend some of the clearer deficiencies when the first bill to amend the principal act was introduced to Parliament. I want to go through some of the

amendments that could have been made without the need for a fulsome review.

In clause 4 of this bill the definition of 'community services' is to be changed to bring it into line with the definition in the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The bill for that act was introduced into the Parliament just a few months after the Working with Children Bill was introduced, so it has been in operation for almost as long as the Working with Children Act, which means the definition of 'community services' in that act has been out of kilter with the defining act for almost five years. That is just another example of one minister not talking to another when the two bills were introduced into the Parliament back in 2005.

The issue of including denominational hospitals in section 9(3)(g) of the principal act is also a very simple amendment that could have been made in 2007. Clause 9 allows the secretary to consider an application withdrawn if information is not supplied under the provisions of section 10 of the principal act where previously the secretary was only permitted to withdraw an application if information was not supplied under section 11(1)(d). I think that could have been raised at an earlier time.

Another amendment deals with the introduction of the Australian Federal Police as an exempt profession in line with Victoria Police. In 2005 it was deemed by the government that AFP officers would not have that much to do with children in the course of discharging their duties. I find that quite interesting. Given the AFP has a wide range of duties, including investigating missing children, and the fact that one of its main duties is to raise awareness and investigate the illegal use of the internet in relation to children, and on top of that the fact that it operates National Youth Week, it seems odd that the government would assume that AFP officers would not have a great deal of contact with children. It is good that the AFP is being brought into line with Victoria Police, but I feel it could have been done somewhat earlier.

A further clause relates to the sharing with other states and territories information gleaned from working-with-children checks. Victoria has been some way behind other states in the sharing of that information. I think there was an opportunity to bring Victoria into line with the other states much earlier than now and certainly before the review was done. If the government had taken the opportunity to include that amendment in the 2007 amending bill, it would have worked well. It is all very well for the Attorney-General to say he was waiting for the outcome of the three-year

review, but other changes were made to the act almost three years ago without the need for the review to be completed, and the need for the amendments I have discussed should have been reasonably clear even at that time.

I want to go through some of the other clauses, and I will start with clause 5. This clause deals with the issue of incomplete applications being received. This circumstance is not a particularly common one. Only around 0.5 per cent of applications received are incomplete, and this clause is intended to allow the secretary to issue an assessment notice even when all the information required is not available due to the applicant simply not having the information. The example given is of an elderly person who might not possess photo identification or something of that sort.

The intent of the clause is to allow less information to be given at the secretary's discretion under certain circumstances, but as the clause is written it will allow the secretary to ask for somewhat more information than is usually required. For that reason I am not entirely sure why the statement of compatibility does not address the privacy issues raised by clause 5(1). The Attorney-General thought it was necessary to consider the remainder of the clause in the statement of compatibility but not necessary to address the particular point raised in clause 5(1).

The clause also allows for those who wish to continue to work with children after an assessment notice expires at 5 years and 3 months to apply for an extension to 10 years without providing the identification and information that had previously been supplied during the initial assessment, providing that the applicant's circumstances have not changed. After 10 years all the information and identification that was required at the initial assessment will need to be supplied again. The final part of clause 5 allows the secretary to show any changes that are made to the required information to be published on the internet. The changes required to accommodate the new assessment regime for extending assessment notices beyond the 5 years and 3 months to 10 years will be required to be published under this provision.

Clause 7 allows for an application notice that has been applied for to be considered withdrawn if a subsequent one is applied for. If an applicant holds an assessment notice for a volunteer position, then the subsequently applied for assessment notice can be withdrawn if that second one is for paid work. This provision will allow the secretary to consider simultaneous applications more efficiently, and that is a very sensible approach.

Clause 10 of the bill deals with the provisions surrounding the process of application for an assessment notice by a category 1 applicant. The Working with Children Act has three categories of applicants to which the secretary must apply different standards. Category 3 applicants are those who have committed offences under the Working with Children Act or against whom a prescribed body has made an adverse finding. The bill also adds to this category a health practitioner or student whose work is regulated by a professional registration body and whose right to work has been suspended or cancelled as a result of a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ruling.

Category 2 applicants are those who have been found guilty of a serious violent drug or sexual offence but where the victim was not a child or in cases where both the offender and the victim were children, or applicants who have been found guilty of certain other serious offences as listed in the act.

Category 1 applicants are people who are subject to reporting obligations under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, those who are subject to extensive supervision orders under the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act 2005 or those who have as adults been found guilty of serious violent drug or sexual offences against a child. The principal act currently allows for an applicant who has been deemed a category 1 applicant to work with children for a period of time. An applicant is able to work with children on the basis that he or she holds a receipt from having paid for a working-with-children check.

If the applicant receives notification from the secretary that they have been classified as a category 1 applicant and, further, if the secretary has notified the applicant that they will receive a negative notice, the applicant currently has 28 days to make a submission refuting that decision. This is so that a victim of mistaken identity — someone who may be incorrectly classified as a category 1 applicant — is afforded the opportunity to establish their true circumstances and proper credentials. I stress that the applicant may continue working with children during that submission period. This bill intends to shorten that submission period from 28 days to 14 days. The explanatory notes that accompany this bill say that the period in which a submission against a category 1 ruling can be made has been shortened because category 1 people should not be working with children for very long. I agree with that, but I have to ask the question: why are these people working with children at all?

Upon paying for a working-with-children check an applicant can work with children, using the receipt,

until a negative notice is issued, provided that person is not a registered sex offender but comes under a category 1 classification. If we take into account the three days for processing, a few days more until the applicant receives notification of a negative notice or a category 1 categorisation, then another 14 days for the making of a submission, a few more days before that submission is considered and a few more days until a negative notice is issued and received, we are coming up to about three or four weeks where a category 1 offender is actually working with children.

As a parent, the thought of a category 1 applicant working with my children for even one day, let alone three or four weeks, sends shivers up my spine. I ask the government to consider whether allowing a victim of mistaken identity who may have been incorrectly classified as a category 1 applicant to immediately work with children is a better option than keeping that person from children for a few weeks in order to categorically establish their suitability, and to consider whether a category 1 applicant should be with our children at all. It is an issue serious enough to warrant further debate and further consideration by this government.

Clause 11 and other clauses dealing with the same issue address the ability of the secretary when assessing an application to consider charges against the applicant that have been deemed to have been finally dealt with by the courts — that is, when those charges have been dismissed or withdrawn or when the person has been dismissed by the court. The initial legislation in 2005 did not give the secretary the right to consider these matters, but the obligation to consider the matters was given to the secretary in the 2007 amending bill. It is interesting to note that during the second reading of that 2007 bill the Attorney-General did not make any reference to this additional obligation. However, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee made reference to the provision in its report on the bill, saying that the provision was at odds with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and that the right of someone to be considered innocent unless proven guilty was encroached upon by the bill.

The Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee wrote to the Attorney-General in September 2007 asking for some explanation around its concerns. Having been a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, I have to say it was true to form that the Attorney-General did not reply straightaway; in fact he replied over six months later, after the bill had gone through both houses of Parliament. His response did very little to alleviate the concerns of the committee,

which said in its response to the Attorney-General's explanation:

The committee notes the Attorney-General's view that the charter's right to be presumed innocent does not apply outside of the context of criminal proceedings. The committee observes that this interpretation would mean that defendants would lose their right to be presumed innocent of the charges against them simply because those charges are dropped.

The committee goes on to say:

The committee therefore reiterates its view that these provisions may limit the charter's right to the presumption of innocence.

At the end of all that correspondence it seemed that the Attorney-General was sticking to his guns and supporting the added consideration obligation of the secretary and that in his view the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee was wrong. If we go forward to 2010 and this bill in front of us, we find that the provisions proposed by this bill again remove the obligations of the secretary to consider matters that have been finally dealt with by the courts.

We have a situation where the provisions were absent in the initial legislation in 2005, they were added by the Attorney-General in 2007 against the views of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and now in 2010 the Attorney-General tells us that he has taken the advice of the committee and removed the provisions. In the second-reading speech he actually tries to pretend that he has been very responsive to the committee's concerns, when in reality he argued stridently against the committee's position back in 2008, and that is shown in the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee *Alert Digest* No. 4 of 2008, which contains the following statement by the Attorney-General:

Taking into account proceedings for certain crimes in assessing an application for a WWC —

working-with-children check —

does not engage the right, as it is a process which occurs outside of the criminal process.

He has now decided that the same provisions are not necessary, that the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee was actually right all along, and he has removed them again. People could be forgiven for thinking the Attorney-General tosses a coin when he decides whether these provisions should be in or out of this particular piece of legislation.

Clause 15 of the bill inserts new section 20A, which provides that a holder of an assessment notice is obligated to inform the secretary if their agency or

employer changes within the same job. Clause 17 inserts new section 21A, which gives the secretary the ability to suspend notices as a mechanism to make applicants give full information where circumstances have changed. I support clauses 15 and 17, as well as clause 16. Clause 18 amends section 23 of the act, which gives the secretary further information-gathering powers.

I want to speak to clause 22 at more length. It inserts new section 39A, which makes applying for a working-with-children check by a registered sex offender an offence and prescribes a penalty for that offence. The provision states that:

A person who is any of the following must not apply for a working with children check under this Act —

and one of those who may not apply for that working-with-children check is —

... a registered sex offender within the meaning of section 67 of the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 ...

The penalty for that offence is 240 penalty units or two years imprisonment. I note that a similar offence provided for in the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004. Section 68 of that act states that 'A registered sex offender must not ... apply for ... employment that is child-related employment'. The penalty for that particular offence has recently been doubled by an amendment that became effective at the end of last month, with the effect that that penalty now mirrors the one outlined in the Working with Children Amendment Bill.

In my view these offences are extremely similar, in that a person who would seek to apply for child-related employment would almost certainly, by way of necessity, apply for a working-with-children check beforehand. The argument was put to me during the departmental briefing that these are two very separate offences and that should have two very different penalties. This argument is one I would have liked to pursue further. It is not one I necessarily agree with. I would have liked to have discussed it at greater length during the departmental briefing, and it is unfortunate that the Attorney-General's staffer saw fit to curtail the discussion I was having with the departmental representatives, who I want to stress were extremely helpful during the briefing.

Clause 25(1) of the Working with Children Amendment Bill inserts a subclause after section 19A(2)(d) of the Child Employment Act. This clause will cause the Child Employment Act to adopt the provisions from the Working with Children Act

relating to both reassessments and suspensions of assessment notices. It will also make it clear in relation to the supervision of children under the Child Employment Act that a person who has an interim negative notice does not have a current assessment notice.

Finally, I want to raise a matter that has been spoken about by a number of coalition members during previous debates surrounding the issues of child employment and working with children, and that is the issue of the government appointing an independent children's commissioner. We on this side of the house still question whether the Secretary of the Department of Justice is the ideal position to oversee the issues surrounding child employment and working with children.

We have had many issues surrounding children's wellbeing raised in recent times, particularly given the appalling record of the current Minister for Community Services. It is all very well to say that child employment legislation is designed to protect children, but when we are seeing report after report and review after review showing that the government is failing to do exactly that, we really should be considering a bit of independent oversight.

The government has often said it is only the opposition that wants to create this particular position. It was disingenuous of the Minister for Community Services to say that the coalition just wanted to appoint a Liberal stooge to this position. I think the matter is a bit too serious for the minister to dismiss it so callously. In any case it is certainly not the opposition alone that has called for the appointment of an independent child commissioner. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the Australian Childhood Foundation, the Law Institute of Victoria, the National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare have all called for this position to be established as well.

To show how out of step this government is with the rest of the nation I want to go through some of the descriptions of the other states' children's commissions and commissioners. On the web page of the Children and Young People Commissioner of the Australian Capital Territory it says:

The CYPC is an independent statutory office created under the Human Rights Commission Act 2005. This means that the CYPC is funded by the ACT government, but is independent from the government.

The website of the Commissioner for Children in Tasmania says:

The Commissioner for Children is an independent office responsible to the Parliament of Tasmania.

The website for the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia says:

The commissioner is the independent person who works closely with children and young people, their families, community and government to make WA a better place for kids.

...

... the commissioner reports to the WA Parliament through a parliamentary committee. This means the commissioner is independent.

On the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People website it says:

The commission is an independent organisation ...

The commission reports directly to the NSW Parliament ...

On the website for the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian in Queensland it says:

The commission's child guardian role provides an independent oversight function of the state's child protection system.

Certainly we would think that position would look at other matters too, including those relating to working with children and child employment. Victoria is clearly out of kilter with the rest of the nation on this issue, and it makes you wonder just how much evidence this government needs in order for it to understand the importance of independent oversight in these matters.

I also want to quote from a speech made by the Queensland Child Guardian, Elizabeth Fraser, in March this year, to further drive home the basic reason why an independent commissioner is so important. It says the commissioner's duties are carried out:

... by the Child Guardian as an independent statutory body. Our main objective is to promote and protect the rights, interests and wellbeing of Queensland's most vulnerable children. There is no other or any conflicting agenda.

It says 'no other or any conflicting agenda', and that is the key point. The commissioner should only have regard to the safety and wellbeing of children, and this should be carried out with a responsibility to the Parliament, not to the government.

The coalition has said that in government it will appoint such a commissioner. We have heard Labor stridently

oppose the creation of the role of an independent child commissioner, but in these pre-election months I guess we have learnt that the more passionately and vocally the government speaks against a stated coalition policy, the more likely it seems that it will introduce a similar one. We will wait with bated breath and with a hint of expectation to see whether the government will fall in line with the other states, and indeed with the opposition, and make a statement about such a role in the future.

This bill seeks to include a number of very sensible provisions, in some ways highlighting the inconsistencies in the manner in which the government formulates its legislation. Some of the amendments relating to working-with-children and child employment issues have already been flagged by opposition parties in previous debates. Instead of pretending and incorrectly painting coalition members as people who oppose the protection of children, which is patently absurd, it may be worthwhile for the government to listen to and consider some of the suggestions and amendments that come from this side of the house.

The opposition does not intend to oppose the passage of this bill through the Parliament.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I am very pleased to rise to support the bill before the house this afternoon. Most people in the community, especially those who are parents, would do anything to ensure the safety of children while they are growing up, and certainly the Working with Children Act introduced in 2005 was warmly welcomed by the majority of the community.

There was concern in some circles. A couple of people have rung my office because they have been asked to have a working-with-children check and have taken it in some way, as a slight on their credibility or honesty but once you explain to them why it is necessary to protect children they are very pleased to be part of it. Interestingly enough, over 600 000 people have now had working-with-children checks in Victoria.

I was a little surprised by the response from the member for Warrandyte, and it reminded me of my school motto, 'Factis non verbis', which means 'By deeds not words'. The member for Warrandyte complained at length that he had not had enough time to debate this matter because of the number of bills going through the house, yet I would have thought if you were really concerned about the Working with Children Act and you had received as many complaints as he provided for us this afternoon, you would have

had input into the operational review that was run last year. There were a number of consultations and submissions, but I assure the house there was no submission from the Liberal Party or The Nationals. It is difficult to understand why there is this sudden concern from the member for Warrandyte when certainly there was no input from the coalition parties when they had the opportunity to be part of the review.

If we cast our minds back to the earlier debate in 2005, we remember that some of the opposition members were quite strongly opposed to working-with-children checks for volunteers and other groups in the community.

Mr R. Smith interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — The member for Warrandyte might find it uncomfortable to be reminded of this, but it is good to look at the history of what actually occurred rather than at a precised version of what members of the Liberal Party might care to put before us.

If you look at the working-with-children amendments you will see the review has been done in a very timely manner. My other comment to the member for Warrandyte would be 'Process, process, process'. I would have thought most programs — and it is a fairly common and standard process that if one introduces a new system — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! I remind the member for Warrandyte and the Minister for Mental Health that if they want to have a conversation they can go outside.

Mrs MADDIGAN — If one reflects on the normal process when one introduces new policy, one finds that most of us are keen to see an evaluation over a period of time to decide if any changes should be made. I would have thought it would be most inappropriate to make constant changes to working-with-children measures in the time frame that the member for Warrandyte has suggested. The operation review was a very sensible way to go and has meant that the bill has been streamlined to ensure not only that the checks make the situation better for people and safer for children but also that those undergoing them do not have to endure such a long waiting period and go through the same process unless it is absolutely necessary, which is why the bill is extending the time frame to 10 years. It is these sorts of provisions that will make the legislation work better and therefore protect our children better in the future.

If you look at the provisions of the bill — the member for Warrandyte has gone through some of them — you see they are very sensible and practical changes to the operation of the act and therefore will be welcomed by the people involved. There was not only the capacity for people to make a submission through the operation review towards the end of 2009 but there was extensive consultation with key stakeholders, and they reveal that there is strong support for working-with-children checks and are keen to see some proposals that would make the checks even tighter.

The office of the child safety commissioner identified a number of recommendations for improving the act. These have been considered and largely incorporated into this bill. I think everybody in this house would have a very high regard for the child safety commissioner, who since his appointment has shown himself to be a great advocate for children in this state.

In addition, and I think the Victorian privacy commission was mentioned by the previous speaker, the member for Warrandyte, but the Office of the Victorian privacy commissioner raised some potential concerns in respect of the changes dealing with the exchange of relevant information such as charges against a person. This has been worked through with officers in the department, and I understand the privacy commissioner is now happy with and supportive of the changes made in this bill. Other bodies involved were Victoria Police and the Victorian Institute of Teaching. There was a significant amount of consultation with them in drawing up this bill.

As I said previously, people are very concerned about the welfare of children, particularly their own children, but also in their daily life. It was difficult when we introduced the first bill to know how many people it would cover, how many people work with children on a voluntary basis, at school, providing music lessons, out-of-school activities, through babysitting and in child-care institutions. A huge number of people work with children, and it is quite a big administrative job to conduct checks on people. As I said previously, already over half a million people have been through the process.

These are excellent provisions, and they will improve the act. I look forward to the bill passing through both houses of Parliament.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. It amends the Working with Children Act 2005 and makes some consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003. The

bill seeks to make a number of different provisions, which are not confined to but include changes to information required for some applications for an assessment notice and changes to expand the secretary's powers to gather that information.

The bill removes the obligation from the secretary to consider charges against a person that have been withdrawn, dismissed or otherwise finally dealt with. It also reduces the time allowable for a category 1 applicant to make a submission against the issuing of a negative notice. In addition it gives the secretary the ability to suspend an existing assessment notice during a reassessment period. It also provides that members of the Australian Federal Police will now be exempt from having to apply for a working-with-children check. It makes it an offence for registered sex offenders to apply for a working-with-children check. The bill also allows for information gathered during the check to be shared with officials from other states and territories, which is an important element of it.

Working-with-children checks commenced in 2006, and as stated in the second-reading speech, an amazing amount of applications have been received — some 613 000. There are various vocations and volunteer activities where a working-with-children check is required. I am sure all members of the house would agree that we should not understate the importance of working-with-children checks. Certainly as a parent of three children I know that the safety and security of children when they are in the care of others is paramount to parents.

Who needs to apply for a working-with-children check has always been an interesting issue. On various occasions people have come into my office and inquired whether they need a working-with-children check for whatever activity they are undertaking. There are 20 listed child-related occupational fields in which a working-with-children check is required. If you do volunteer work with children on a regular basis, if you have direct contact with children under 18 years of age and are not directly supervised, you are likely to need to apply for a check.

Occupational fields which require working-with-children checks are child protection services of course, educational institutions, community services, refuges and other residential facilities used by children, and paediatric wards of public or private hospitals, about which I want to raise a particular example later in my contribution.

It was interesting to note in reading through the second-reading speech that 422 people had been issued

with negative notices as at 30 April 2010. One would hope that what we are debating here today will ensure that that robust system will continue to pick up people who might be of some concern if working with children. A review of the system after three years was committed to at the time of its inception. This is the point we are now at.

I want to talk about some particular clauses and aspects of the bill. Clause 5 deals with the flexibility aspects of the bill. A couple of elements of that are the amending of section 10(2)(c) of the act to require an application form for a working-with-children check to include any identifying information of a kind approved by the secretary rather than the identifying information prescribed in the Working with Children Regulations 2006. This will enable the secretary more flexibility in assessing applications. Provisions in new sections 10(4) and 10(5) deal with that particular element as well.

In terms of information required from people reapplying for a working-with-children check, clause 5 states:

A person who wishes to continue working with children must apply for a new assessment notice within 5 years and 3 months of the previous assessment. For a full application, a person must provide at least three items of identifying information, totalling at least 100 points under the prescribed system.

The bill allows the secretary to exempt an applicant from providing some form of identifying information to reduce the burden of proof of identity that is required and to assist in the administration of the scheme. However, it is important that security be preserved, and after 10 years a full identity check will need to be conducted.

Clause 7 deals in part with exempt persons. I will talk a bit about exempt persons in a minute. Part 3 of the Working with Children Act 2005 sets out various occupations and situations in which people would be exempt from working-with-children checks. These are persons who might be working with a closely related child, with teachers and with police officers. I mentioned earlier the fact that federal police officers will be exempt under this legislation.

The member for Warrandyte spoke in his excellent contribution about clause 10, which provides for a reduction in the time allowed for an applicant who has committed a category 1 offence to make a submission against the issuing of a negative notice from 28 days to 14 days. The member for Warrandyte expressed some concern about that time frame. Given the time required to assess and mail out the relevant information to the applicant, it might be cutting it a bit fine to ensure that

that happens within 14 days. He also expressed some concern about the fact that a category 1 applicant could be working with children while their application was being assessed. He raised some very genuine concerns with respect to that part of the bill.

Clause 21 relates to the exemption for Australian Federal Police officers. Clause 22 inserts a new section 39A, which makes it an offence for certain categories of offenders, such as serious sex offenders, to apply for working-with-children checks in the first instance. One would have thought that would apply as a matter of course. The member for Warrandyte also raised some concerns about a similar offence under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004. There was some doubt over the difference in penalties that might apply under this bill and under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, but it is my understanding that has been resolved to the satisfaction of the member for Warrandyte, so that is a positive step.

Clause 23 inserts a new section which permits a person to disclose information relating to a working-with-children check if the information is given to a commonwealth, state or territory person or body. That is an important element of this legislation, as I have said, in that other jurisdictions are given the opportunity to know about persons who might be a risk if working with children.

I mentioned earlier in my contribution that there has been some concern from particular constituents of mine about working-with-children checks and how they operate. I had the example provided to me of a nurse who had a volunteer working-with-children certificate. As a nurse she was also required to apply for an employee working-with-children check. She had some concerns that nurses and health professionals in her situation were not exempt. We wrote to the Attorney-General in mid-July last year on this issue. Whilst the explanation from the Attorney-General was satisfactory, this demonstrates that there are some levels of concern in the community in relation to working-with-children checks for volunteers and employees. I understand why we have them; however, they need tightening up, and clarity around the application process would be beneficial. It is important for all of us in this house to ensure that we protect our children as best we can; it is our duty to do that.

The member for Warrandyte mentioned in his contribution that an independent children's commissioner is something that should be considered. That is certainly what the coalition has put forward. Anything we can do to protect our children in the future is something this Parliament should consider.

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It is a pleasure to speak today on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010, which is designed to improve our basic safeguards for children in regard to ensuring that employees and volunteers who are working with children in a substantive manner are subject to an authentication process to ensure that they are appropriate people, for the sake of both children and parents. It needs to be recognised, and perhaps it has not been recognised enough in our society, that this has been part of a substantial ongoing reform of protection of children in the workplace in relation to volunteers, sporting organisations et cetera. This process has gone on pretty continuously for many years now.

It is also part of what are clearly people's changed expectations and a heightened concern for the safety of young people. There has been a lot of adverse publicity over the years — there have been some horrendous cases of people working with children who should not have been, to the detriment of those children. Governments everywhere around the world are cracking down and trying to make sure that legislative provisions regulating people who work with children are as tight as they can be so that children have every bit of protection they can have. Certainly there has been a stream of legislation coming through this Parliament. A whole range of areas where people are employed or volunteer are subject to strengthened protections for children.

A lot of this has come about since 1999 as a direct result of this government's determination to improve working-with-children arrangements. I have spent a lot of time working with education providers, which is a crucial part of working-with-children protective regimes. It needs to be said that it is not just legislation that looks at the checking of individuals. There has also been legislation that ensures that various agencies that have joint responsibility work together to ensure that there are not cracks in the process that people can slip through. Just this year we passed legislation to ensure that the important work that the Victorian Institute of Teaching does in terms of ongoing checking of teachers against offences is assisted by a data matching system provided by Victoria Police. I think it works pretty much weekly, checking that people have not committed offences, that the system is robust and up to date and that teachers who should not be teaching children are picked up very quickly and efficiently and taken out of the system, or at least their potential is reviewed.

This is an important bill, and one that has come about because of a commitment from the government to review the operations, after three years, of the original 2005 act. It has been a substantial review. There has

been a lot of consultation, and the recommendations and amendments we see in this legislation have come principally from that consultation and from what we have picked up over the last three or four years about the operation of the principal act. A number of practical and technical issues are addressed in this bill. There are issues and amendments that have been considered in consultation with key stakeholders. There are amendments which have come from issues raised by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, and of course in dealing with these amendments we have been working very closely with the privacy commissioner to ensure that legitimate privacy concerns are addressed in the framing of the legislation.

That is not to say that the original legislation has not been successful; it has been highly successful. Since 2006 something like 613 000 applications have been received from people who want to work with children and who have undergone checks. As of April 2010 something like 422 people had been issued with negative notices preventing them from engaging in child-related work. That is 422 people who through this legislation have been deemed inappropriate to work with children and who without this legislation would have been working with children. That is a great, concrete example of the protection the legislation provides for young people in this state.

The bill streamlines application and assessment processes. It improves the operation of the working-with-children check and introduces a new regulatory regime. It enables a greater flow of information exchange between various agencies, and it creates additional offences, particularly in terms of sex offenders who may seek to work with children.

On that aspect, the additional protection from sex offenders who are registered under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, goes from the position of saying they are not allowed to apply for working-with-children registration to making it an offence for registered sex offenders to apply for working-with-children registration. That is a good thing because if there is any flaw or any administrative slip-up, it will be a formal legal offence for a registered sex offender to apply for a working-with-children registration check.

The bill also streamlines a number of arrangements. Originally whenever people had to renew their assessment notice they had to put in a lot of documentation about their identity and their range of activity. However, now that burden of renewing and going through the process — which for most people is not necessary because it is already there — will be replaced by a system where people can simply produce

their check card and that will provide the legitimacy of all the documentation that has already been lodged and has not changed.

The bill addresses a number of minor matters in terms of the secretary's capacity to deal with assessment notices involving employers and voluntary organisations to streamline the way some specific issues are dealt with. It brings some technical wording into line with that of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and changes the reference to 'community services' to 'out-of-home care services' so that the legislation is consistent.

There are other miscellaneous provisions in the bill in terms of members of the federal police being included as exempt persons under the act in a similar way to what happens with Victoria Police. The bill provides a range of penalties to cover the possibility of a police officer who should not be working with children.

I am delighted by this bill because I come from a position of having been a teacher, a year level coordinator and student coordinator and having held a range of positions in schools where there were very close working relationships with children. They were often children from the northern suburbs, and many children living in disadvantaged circumstances.

Whilst I cannot say I have ever witnessed any inappropriate behaviour or been aware of any people who were not suitable to teach children in the sense dealt with in this legislation, in my opinion, as a result of the working-with-children legislation the situation today is vastly superior to the one that applied when I was a teacher and there was very little protection for children in terms of the appropriateness of people to become teachers and to work with children.

When I think back to those days I realise conditions were incredibly slack then. There were no checks on people who may have had inappropriate pasts but could nevertheless go to teachers college and get into teaching, or if they were not teaching in the state system because there was an issue with them there, they could go across to the Catholic or independent systems. The range of safeguards that are in place now but did not exist must have led to inappropriate practices.

Since we have had the working-with-children legislation all that has been tightened up. The amendments in this bill will further improve the legislation so that in this state we can be sure that only the most qualified and appropriate people can work with children. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise on behalf of the Lowan electorate to speak on this very important bill, the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. As we know, the original legislation was introduced to the house in 2005 and commenced in 2006. This bill is before us after consultation and review which the government said it would carry out three years after the original legislation came into operation. I am pleased to see that there are some amendments to the original act which will hopefully streamline and improve the act because, after all, we are working with the most vulnerable people in our community, our children, who are also our greatest investment in the future.

This bill amends the Working with Children Act 2005 to make further provision for applications for working-with-children checks, for the revocation and suspension of assessment notices and offences under the act and to make consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003. As I said, this bill amends the 2005 act, introduces what I believe are sensible amendments and gives sensible power to the secretary to ensure that only suitable people can work with those important people in our community, our children.

The honourable member for Warrandyte, the shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, spoke about consultation. In my role as shadow minister for sport and recreation I sent the bill to various sporting clubs and groups. I also spoke to various youth groups involved with children and asked for their comments. I am pleased to say no concerns were expressed by any of the organisations that I spoke to or with whom I consulted.

Again, like the shadow minister, I am not opposed to this legislation. I think it is a very sensible progression in relation to protecting our children in the community. As I said, this bill covers a number of activities and again I say that our young people are our investment in the future. Supporting our youth is very important to me and my party and to the Liberal-Nationals coalition.

I will go through some of the amendments made by this bill. Clause 4 amends the example provided at the foot of section 9(2) in the act to clarify the term 'direct supervision' so that it extends to the supervision of volunteers. There are a lot of activities across Victoria, particularly in country Victoria, where not only is there direct supervision but volunteers also play an important role. I will come back to that later.

Clause 5 allows for the working-with-children check card to be used as a proof of identity for people who are renewing their assessment notice, given that the

proof-of-identity documentation was previously provided when they first applied for the assessment notice. This is a common-sense approach which will speed up the process and ensure that there is a good outcome but it will also take away some of the red-tape issues that are often discussed with us as members of Parliament, and I see that as an improvement.

Clause 19 requires the secretary to notify employers or volunteer organisations when a person surrenders their assessment notice. I have asked some questions but I have not been able to get answers from my research. What is the time line for the secretary to notify the employers or voluntary organisations? It is important that that happens quickly. I do not know whether it will be two weeks, two months or two years. It should be within a short period of time. Maybe the minister in his summing up can answer the question: what is the time line required for the secretary to notify these people?

The other provision I want to talk about is clause 21, which adds members of the Australian Federal Police to the category of exempt persons. That is a common-sense approach. After the state election there will be more police on the street because the Liberal-National coalition policy will ensure that that will happen. We also want to make sure that there is a good working relationship between the Australian Federal Police and the Victoria Police. Treating them the same is a common-sense approach.

Clause 23 provides for the secretary to share information about negative notice holders to assist other jurisdictions in their assessment of the suitability of people to work with children. As we know, the member for Murray Valley has always talked about border anomalies. Members representing areas along the Murray River in northern Victoria often talk about these cross-border issues. I experience problems with those issues along the border of South Australia in western Victoria, but not to the same extent as my colleagues representing towns like Wentworth and Mildura, Kerang and Cohuna and border towns such as Albury-Wodonga.

I know from talking with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria that this is one of the issues that it has raised. There needs to be greater transparency for the people working across borders. Also the authorities on both sides of the border should be able to share information to enable them to do the job that this bill provides for. The sharing of information, particularly about negative notice holders, is important to assist the organisations that deal with people across the borders. I know the member for Mildura will be in the chamber later to

talk about this bill, and I am sure he will go into greater depth about that.

In my role as shadow minister for youth affairs and as shadow minister for sport and recreation I know of many organisations that deal with our children, whether it be in the arts, whether it be in sport, whether it be in education or whether it be mentoring through justice programs and the like. Just the other day I observed the Wimmera Uniting Care group and others in my electorate assisting people to get licences. An enormous amount of work is done by community members, both in a paid role and in a voluntary role, to help our younger generation. This is the area I want to look at.

From the point of view of sport and recreation, we have many sporting clubs that are run by volunteers. A lot of the clubs have said to me that an enormous amount of work is done by voluntary efforts, whether the volunteers are in an administrative role, an umpiring role, a coaching role or just supporting their clubs and their players, and whether they are male or female. We need to make sure that we do not put up too many hurdles that will take away from that enormous input from volunteers. When the Working with Children Act was introduced there were some concerns about the red tape. None of us disagrees with the principle; it is about trying to minimise the barriers to allow the normal things to happen.

Since the implementation of the act there have been 613 000 applications for permits to work with children, and I am pleased to say that only 422 of those people have been given negative notices. The majority of applicants are decent and responsible people, but we are trying to protect children from the one or two people who do the wrong thing. We want to make sure that we do not put too many barriers in front of the volunteers and deter them from doing the work they do with our youth, particularly in the areas of sport and recreation, the arts and education.

The government has also introduced a new code of conduct for sport. Most sporting clubs have a code of conduct that they enforce well, but some of them need more support. I am talking particularly about some of the smaller sports that do not have the same horsepower that the football, netball and basketball clubs have, with the administrative support behind them to help in that process. There has been great support for reducing the level of violence against people both on the ground and off the ground. Antisocial behaviour is abhorrent to all of us, but it is about how we address that. This new code of conduct has some strong teeth in it, and if clubs do not implement it well, the government has

threatened to take away the cash handouts that support them.

There have been some negative comments about the implementation of legislation from some of the sporting clubs around Victoria. They have all received a video and notification, and they have all been told they have to comply with it. One person said to me, 'If there's a supporter on the boundary abusing some kids, what am I expected to do? Are we able to call a police officer to help, because often we can't get one?'. We need to make sure that we have the backup to support these volunteers who play an important role in helping our young people, whether it be in sport or in the arts. I am a supporter of the Working with Children Act. This bill is a progression in relation to the implementation of it. I do not oppose the legislation.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — It is a privilege to talk today on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. The original legislation forced people working with children to get a working-with-children check, which was a marvellous initiative to deal with the risk of people working with children in the community misusing their position and abusing them. It is an important check. The various local football and other clubs in my electorate have said it is a little bit of a nuisance, but at the end of the day it is important that children are able to feel comfortable within their football clubs and that the volunteers working with them have been checked and approved.

Significant amendments to the act are not required. The amendments are not about a change in policy but in relation to the application and assessment process, the notification provisions, the renewal of cards and the proof of identity and information exchange provisions. The main purposes of the bill are:

- (a) to amend the Working with Children Act 2005 to make further provisions for —
 - (i) applications for working with children checks; and
 - (ii) the issue, suspension and revocation of assessment notices; and
 - (iii) offences under the Act;
- (b) to make consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003.

This bill will improve the operations of the Working with Children Act by addressing the various practical and technical issues associated with the act which have been raised over recent years. As we are in the fourth year of the operation of the act — it was enacted in 2006 — it is now timely that there is a review of how

the act is operating and how it can be improved. Obviously the government is continuing its commitment to the protection of children, and the Attorney-General has introduced various measures in this bill to streamline the administration of the act. Some of these measures will provide additional protections for children.

The inclusion of additional offences will help strengthen the enforcement powers. Under the bill sex offenders registered under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and persons subject to extended supervision or detention orders will not be able to apply for an assessment under the Working with Children Act. Such people are currently banned from receiving a working-with-children card, and the bill has even tougher provisions, making it an offence for a sex offender to even apply for a working-with-children card. It continues the hard line of this government against sex offenders in our society. Children must be afforded the greatest protection against people who would do them harm.

The bill also provides the secretary with the power to suspend a card if the holder does not provide the requested information. It reduces the time a category 1 applicant has to challenge a decision of the secretary to not issue a card, limiting even further the potential for a sex offender working with children during the assessment process. The bill also streamlines the renewal process for an assessment notice so that the renewal process is less of a burden on the Victorian community and our many volunteer groups.

Starting in 2011 assessment notices will last for five years, and those seeking a renewal will be able to provide their working-with-children check card as identification when applying for a renewal provided that proof of identity documents were provided at the time of first receiving a working-with-children-check card.

The third important issue the bill deals with is the improvement of the sharing of information amongst agencies, which is so vital. Sometimes issues of privacy arise, but in this instance it is vital that all agencies share information on people of whom they have knowledge who are abusing children. Therefore this bill allows the secretary to share information regarding negative notice holders to aid in other jurisdictions' assessments of the suitability of those individuals to work with children.

The bill also expands the responsibility of the Chief Commissioner of Police to advise the secretary on a broader range of offences that present risk to children's

safety, ensuring that the secretary possesses the necessary information to determine whether or not to revoke an assessment notice.

This bill is an important improvement on the existing legislation. It goes further than we did the first time round. Child abuse is a terrible crime. My mother worked in child protection for 21 years and has recently retired. This legislation will hopefully limit the amount of work people like her have to do, because at the end of the day we would prefer to catch the perpetrators before they perpetrate their crimes on children. With that brief contribution, I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — It gives me pleasure to rise to contribute to the debate on the Working with Children Amendment Bill. I rise to contribute not only as a member of the coalition but on behalf of the residents of the Ferntree Gully electorate. The purpose of this bill is to provide for matters surrounding the issue, revocation and suspension of assessment notices.

This bill contains a number of provisions, including making changes to the information required for some applications for an assessment notice and expanding the secretary's power to gather that information. The bill also removes obligations from the secretary to consider charges against an applicant that have been withdrawn, dismissed or finally dealt with. The bill will also reduce the time allowable for a category 1 applicant to make a submission against the issuing of a negative notice and give the secretary the ability to suspend an existing assessment notice during a reassessment period. The bill also provides that members of the Australian Federal Police are exempt from having to apply for a working-with-children check, makes it an offence for registered sex offenders to apply for a working-with-children check and allows for information gathered during the check to be shared with officials from other states and territories.

This piece of legislation has proven to be beneficial. As has been mentioned by members who have spoken before me, including the member for Warrandyte in his contribution to the debate, the legislation has aided and assisted the protection of our most vulnerable. As the father of three young children, I understand the necessity of having systems in place that provide for appropriate checks and balances to protect young children.

As a resident of the city of Knox I know that the city prides itself on its community groups. We are privileged to have a number of organisations, including sporting organisations and a host of other organisations,

that provide for the interests of young people. In my electorate many residents are required to complete a working-with-children check.

At this juncture I would like to put on record some concerns that a particular resident of my electorate has raised with me over a period of time about the operation of a working-with-children check and the operation of a criminal record check through Victoria Police. I put on record that this person is a fine volunteer who has been recognised for their service to the city of Knox with an Australia Day award. This person is a credit to the community in the sense that they volunteer for a range of different community organisations. However, this person is frustrated that there is an ongoing requirement for them to complete a number of different forms with respect to their volunteer work. Firstly, regarding police checks, every time they volunteer for a different organisation they are required to undertake a separate police check, even though the information that has been gained by Victoria Police is identical to the information that has been provided on an identical basis to each organisation for which the volunteer work has been performed. Often the volunteer work that this person undertakes is done on a seasonal basis, so they have to complete these forms on an annual basis.

More importantly, we all understand that a working-with-children check has longevity; however, the person to whom I refer happens to undertake work which involves remuneration for a level of work undertaken over a two-week period. The amount of remuneration is very small, but this person is required to complete another working-with-children check because they are now an employee rather than a volunteer. The point my constituent has made is that they are happy to volunteer and to complete the forms, but they are being penalised by the sheer weight of paperwork for the work they are performing. Many people may take the view that volunteer work is not worth undertaking.

Another issue I would like to raise about a working-with-children check is that a working-with-children card is only as good as the information that is provided by the relevant authorities at the time the card is issued. As we know, it is incumbent upon an individual who holds a working-with-children card to advise of a change of status. Whilst we believe many in our community will take it upon themselves to advise authorities of a change of status regarding any prosecution that has been undertaken against them in relation to an offence against children, there are certainly some in our community who would choose not to take up that

obligation. Yes, it is an offence not to advise a change of status, but more importantly there is the potential for these people to be captured. I certainly believe that more will need to be done on this important issue into the future. In this era of modern technology one would have thought we could potentially look at having such things as notification of a person's change of status to relevant organisations or employers. These are matters that need to be examined.

In his contribution the member for Warrandyte highlighted the fact that there is a real need for the appointment of an independent children's commissioner. Those of us on this side of the house believe that is important. In fact it has been coalition policy to call for the creation of such a commissioner. As we all know, this government has not taken up the call to match our policy on the appointment of such an important person. One can only surmise that, given the flip-flop actions of this government on a range of coalition policies — be they police numbers, hoon cars, suspended sentences or the creation of an independent, broadbased anticorruption commission — we may yet see the Premier stand up in this house and acknowledge that there is a need for the creation of an independent children's commissioner. We await the Premier's response on that important issue.

In the small amount of time left to me I wish to also highlight that the bill makes changes to the powers afforded to the secretary to deal with matters that come before her that are of a criminal nature. Putting aside the merits of these changes, this clearly demonstrates that this a government that does not understand its policy detail and that again this is a government that has flip-flopped on this issue. When it originally introduced the legislation it was looking at the issue one way, but when it looked at it again a couple of years later it changed its view. Now all of a sudden it is changing its view again. Putting aside the merits of this provision, this is a clearly government that does not understand in which direction it is heading on these issues. This is symptomatic of a government that after 11 years is tired. It has run out of legs, it has run out of agenda, and it clearly does not know where it is heading on such an important issue.

I congratulate the volunteers on their work. I congratulate those in our community, both paid and volunteer workers, who take it upon themselves to educate young people and to provide sporting activities and a whole range of pursuits for young people. As members on both sides of the house have said, if we can protect one child, it is all worth it. However, we need to ensure that the legislation we put in place is the best legislation to deal with this important issue.

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — I rise to support the Working with Children Amendment Bill. Its purpose is to amend the Working with Children Act 2005 to make further provision for applications for working-with-children checks, for the suspension and revocation of assessment notices, and for offences under the act, and to make consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003.

The regime of working-with-children checks that the act seeks to amend has been operational since its commencement in 2006. From the second-reading speech for this bill I understand that over 613 000 applications have been received and only 422 persons have been issued with negative notices. To me this highlights two issues. Firstly, there is the fact that the scheme has been able to deal with over 600 000 applications, and secondly, there is the fact that only 422 persons have been issued with negative notices. As stated by the previous speaker, I, like other members, consider that if one child is protected by this regime, then it is worth putting 600 000 people through the trouble of making an application. The fact that as of 30 April this year 422 people have been rejected indicates to me that there are 422 people seeking to work with children whom the law states should not be working with children and that the system has ensured they are unable to secure working-with-children check cards.

I would like to touch upon the part of the bill which is of the most interest to me in making my contribution to the debate, and that is the part that deals with the creation of a new offence. Clause 22 of the bill inserts new section 39A into the Working with Children Act, which is entitled 'Sex offenders not to apply for assessment notice'. This proposed section reads:

A person who is any of the following must not apply for a working with children check under this Act —

- (a) a registered sex offender within the meaning of section 67 of the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004; or
- (b) a person subject to an extended supervision order or interim extended supervision order under the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act 2005; or
- (c) a person subject to a detention order or a supervision order.

The penalty for this new offence is 240 penalty units or imprisonment for two years, so this is a very serious offence, but frankly it is a serious offence for a registered sex offender to be making an application for a working-with-children check.

In preparing my contribution to the debate on this bill I examined what a registered sex offender is under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004. After leafing through several sections of that act I found that one of the definitions is someone who has committed a class 1 or class 2 offence under the act. Out of interest I sought out the definition of a class 1 offence under that act. It is a reprehensible crime which I am sure would meet with the condemnation of members of this house. It includes such offences as incest, sexual penetration of a child under 16, sexual penetration of a 16 or 17-year-old, and sexual penetration of a person with a cognitive impairment — a particularly reprehensible crime.

It is also defined as, and I want to touch on this because it is something I am aware of through assistance given to a charitable organisation, 'Any offence under a law of a foreign jurisdiction that, if it had been committed in Victoria, would have constituted an offence of the kind listed in this schedule'. The scourge of international sex tourism and related child sex slavery is one of the most reprehensible international crimes that exists in the world. I have had the honour — I would not say good fortune or good luck because it is a harrowing process to be involved in — of knowing someone from Victoria, Sotheary Ly, the executive director of a charity, who works to rescue women in Cambodia from sexual slavery and ensure their release and reintegration into the community.

Having visited the shelter the charity operates to house children after they have been rescued from sexual slavery and where they are given education, assistance with medical care and are helped to integrate back into their villages and their home communities, I consider that there is no more evil and reprehensible crime than child sex abuse, particularly abuse related to sexual slavery where a person's liberty is taken away and they are debilitatingly abused in child prostitution. There is literally no crime that is more reprehensible. Action which means that persons who commit and participate in such crimes are prevented from applying for working-with-children checks and which makes it an offence for such a person to apply for a check and provides for a penalty of up to two years jail is something I fully support.

Meeting children who have been sexually abused is a harrowing experience. I challenge any member of the house to meet with such children and have their life stories explained to them. I have had that experience, and it is truly harrowing. Any member of this house would be shocked and horrified by the stories they would hear. I have met with children who have been sexually abused and had their experiences described to me. As I said, the stories of people who have been

trapped in sexual slavery, people who were sold by family members into that slavery, and abused in the most horrible and heinous way would shock and horrify any member of this house.

This is an excellent bill that provides sensible amendments to the operation of the scheme for working with children in Victoria. I think it will provide greater protection to children, and I agree with other members who have said this will be an area where there will always be further laws passed by this Parliament to ensure children are given the most protection that is possible. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Working with Children Amendment Bill. The Nationals in coalition are not opposing the bill. Clause 1 sets out the purposes of the bill, which are:

- (a) amend the Working with Children Act 2005 to make further provision for:
 - (i) applications for working with children checks; and
 - (ii) the issue, suspension and revocation of assessment notices; and
 - (iii) offences under the Act;
- (b) to make consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003.

The bill makes changes to the information required from some applicants before an assessment notice is issued and expands the secretary's powers to gather that information. It removes the obligation on the secretary to consider charges against a person that have been withdrawn, dismissed or otherwise finally dealt with. It reduces the time allowable for a category 1 applicant to make a submission against the issuing of a negative notice. It gives the secretary the ability to suspend an existing assessment notice during a reassessment period. It provides that members of the Australian Federal Police are exempt from having to apply for a working-with-children check. Finally, the bill makes it an offence for registered sex offenders to apply for a working-with-children check and allows for information gathered during a such a check to be shared with officials from other states and territories.

There are also some definitions to further align the bill with other acts, particularly the Community Services Act. That is welcome, because we are dealing with a difficult area and those alignments are very necessary. The coalition had some concerns about the workability of the legislation, and those were well put by the member for Warrandyte in his presentation about where

we were when similar legislation was before the house not so long ago. It would have been an example of better governance if we had been able to get all of this tidied up in one stop, but here we are fixing it up again.

Other areas in which changes will occur include the relationship between volunteers and others, particularly those in paid employment, and how we deal with people who are both volunteers and in paid employment. Previously such people have had different working-with-children cards. The provisions in the bill provide a welcome improvement to the system. The current system has given rise to great difficulties, some of which have been presented to my office because people are confused by the system. The bill also tidies up the denominational hospitals issue, which was overdue.

Further, the Australian Federal Police will be exempted from requiring working-with-children checks. This was overlooked in the original legislation. In particular, the government did not expect members of the AFP to be working with children. However, when it comes to children who are missing interstate, our federal police have a great deal to do with them. The federal police also run National Youth Week.

There has always been a need for an independent children's commissioner. It is something the coalition has in its policy and strongly supports. Provision for such a body is not included in this legislation, but we would welcome its inclusion now or at a later date.

Clause 5 deals with the application process, and it is something everyone needs to be aware of. Although most people have the information that is required for their application, if someone makes an incomplete application, and small numbers of people do so for some reason or other, at the discretion of the secretary an application can be granted for them. The bill allows for information to be requested should the secretary so wish it; that is the balancing act.

Our side also has concerns about the time taken for assessments, particularly in relation to work that can be done while the assessment is taking place. Once someone has applied they can get a receipt and then work with children, particularly if they are a category 1 person. The process can take three to four weeks to finalise. I know that under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities this is important, but it is equally important that parents feel secure about someone who is a category 1 person who is working with their children. It is a matter of balance between allowing natural justice for an applicant but at the same time providing protection for children, between the

possibility of a mistaken identity and protecting against risk. In his speech the member for Preston outlined some of the risks, and how the process will work is of real concern to us.

The last area I want to comment on is the cross-border issue. We very much look forward to the bill speeding up our ability to work with other jurisdictions. It has been a long process, but in the past people who have lived interstate and moved to Victoria have had difficulty in getting a working-with-children check. People who for various reasons have found their employment frustrated have come to my office for help. One man in particular had a job as a bus driver but his history was interstate and it was taking too long for him to get his information assessed. I hope the bill addresses that issue, because believe it or not we are short of bus drivers and there was a great deal of pressure on the person to drive a bus. In particular he had a run picking up disabled people and taking them to our sheltered workshop. That was his designated job. Hopefully with this legislation we will see an end to those sorts of problems in my electorate. If not, I guess we will be back to amend the legislation again. With that I say that The Nationals in coalition are not opposing the legislation.

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — It is with great pleasure that I rise this evening to make a contribution to the debate on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. I will state at the outset that members on this side of the house are not opposing the bill. The excellent contribution made earlier this evening by the lead speaker, the member for Warrandyte, summed up the position of the coalition in relation to the bill. I thank the member for making the very excellent points he did. We hope members of the Labor Party were listening to his contribution. It is not often they listen to the community, but hopefully in this instance they will.

The provisions in the bill relate to the revocation and suspension of assessment notices. The main provisions have been outlined by a number of speakers. The bill makes changes to the information required for some applications for an assessment notice and expands the secretary's powers to gather that information. The bill removes the obligation from the secretary to consider charges against a person that have been withdrawn, dismissed or otherwise finally dealt with and reduces the time allowable for a category 1 applicant to make a submission against the issuing of a negative notice. It gives the secretary the ability to suspend an existing assessment notice during a reassessment period, and it provides that members of the Australian Federal Police are exempt from having to apply for a

working-with-children check. It makes it an offence for registered sex offenders to apply for a working-with-children check. Finally, the bill allows for information gathered during the check to be shared with officials from other states and territories.

There are a number of areas of concerns, and I wish to raise a couple of them in my contribution. The first is that the government had an opportunity to address the matter of the appointment of an independent children's commissioner, which has been announced as coalition policy. For the life of me I cannot understand why the Brumby government or the minister has not taken the opportunity to appoint such a commissioner. In all of the previous debates regarding child employment and working with children, coalition members have raised the need for such a commissioner. This raises the question of why the government has not taken the opportunity to appoint such a commissioner with the introduction of the Working with Children Amendment Bill, particularly when you think about the number of other policies it has stolen from the coalition, including the introduction of additional police to protect us on our streets. The government was also quick to jump on our Landcare policy, and the Premier did an enormous backflip and announced the introduction of a form of independent anticorruption commission.

Our policies on locusts, suspended sentences and hoon legislation have all been copied, and the list goes on; the count is up to about 60 policies that the Brumby government has copied from the coalition. Is it any wonder that the government wants us to announce all our policies in the lead-up to the election: is it so that it can jump on board and pinch each and every one of them? After 11 years in government the Brumby government is bereft of ideas and is looking to us, a fresh and energetic team, to come up with new ideas and policies for it to pinch and implement.

I diverted from the bill, and I will now return to it. Another area of concern is that it is mandatory for the secretary to refuse to issue an assessment notice for a person who is classified as a category 1 applicant — that is, someone convicted of a serious, violent, sexual or drug offence against a child. It is concerning that category 1 applicants who are not registered sex offenders may continue to work with a child during the time in which they may make a submission against that refusal. While acknowledging that this bill reduces that time from 28 days to 14 days, this is an area that both the minister and the Premier need to focus on. Again I refer to the excellent contribution from the member for Warrandyte, who made that point very succinctly, and hopefully the minister was listening.

Another area of concern is the right to privacy issues. From memory I think clause 5(1) raises those issues, whereby the secretary can seek any information that they desire in relation to the consideration of an assessment notice. While the statement of compatibility addresses similar issues in clause 5(2), references to the preceding clause are absent. That is another area for further discussion.

During the coalition's preparation of our position on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010 the shadow spokesperson invited comment from a number of organisations, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Child Care Centres Association of Victoria — a very important organisation — and the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce. I note that those organisations did not express any concerns or reservations about the bill.

In summary, the bill introduces some sensible powers for the secretary to ensure the suitability of those who wish to work with children, some of which should have been included in the principal act in 2005, or subsequently in the amending bill in 2007. The inclusion of exempting Australian Federal Police members from a working-with-children check is in line with the current exemption status of Victoria Police members, and that is a sensible outcome.

As I said, the bill does not address the issue of an independent children's commissioner, and I cannot understand that. Premier Brumby copies everything else we do, so I guess we will wait with bated breath as we move towards the election in November to see the announcement of an independent children's commissioner. No doubt that policy will come out, and it will be another one the government has copied. Whilst I am reluctant to support a bill which allows category 1 applicants to work with children for any length of time, the coalition is not opposing this bill; I wish it a speedy passage through the house.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010. I listened very closely to the wonderful contribution from the member for Kilsyth because he made a number of points which are very relevant to this bill. All members of the house would want to ensure that young people are safe in employment, and the bill goes some way towards achieving that aim. However, the bill fails to appoint an independent children's commissioner.

When I was the shadow minister for youth, every single stakeholder I spoke to called for an independent children's commissioner. It is happening everywhere else, but Victoria for some reason is very unwilling to establish an independent children's commissioner. I do not know what the government is afraid of. I do not know why it is not prepared to listen to the key stakeholders, who are there to look after the interests of our young people, especially in the workplace. A commissioner would go a long way towards ensuring the safety of young people in employment, and I cannot understand why this government is ignoring the pleas of all the key stakeholders in Victoria. All the minister has to do is go and visit the key stakeholders to find out for himself the need for the establishment of a children's commissioner.

The second issue I wish to raise is that with any changes, it is important that they are communicated to all Victorians, including Victorians from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. It is important that all Victorians understand and appreciate the changes and why they are being introduced. In terms of the ethnic media, the government has an opportunity to make sure all Victorians understand these changes. It promised that 5 per cent of its advertising budget will go towards ethnic media, but I understand the budget allocation for ethnic media has not been met for 11 years. It is important that this government makes sure that all Victorians understand the changes in the legislation, how it impacts on their lives and how it affects their children, because unless they know the laws they will not be able to adhere to them.

Sitting suspended 6.29 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

SUPPORTED RESIDENTIAL SERVICES (PRIVATE PROPRIETORS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 9 June; motion of Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Community Services).

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I am very pleased to be here today to speak on the very important Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010.

At the outset I have to say that this is an incredible missed opportunity. Accommodation for vulnerable

people in our community is a massive issue; there are chronic shortages. Many people are residing in inappropriate accommodation. In fact accommodation for people with disabilities or mental illness — and even accommodation for the frail aged — is in crisis.

It is not just me and the coalition that is saying this; it has been said by many important independent government watchdogs. The public advocate, community visitors, the coroner and the Ombudsman have repeatedly said how accommodation for people who are vulnerable is in very dire circumstances, and a broad and strategic approach is needed. What we needed here was a comprehensive review about accommodation for people who are vulnerable.

When the minister called for this review in response to a series of articles in the *Age* in 2007 she kept the review very narrow: she did a review of the legislation and the regulations. I have to say that at that point I immediately called for the minister to make it a comprehensive review, understanding the breadth and range of issues that were in place. Unfortunately it has been a limited review. We have taken three years; there has been broad consultation; there have been many people involved and it has taken an inordinate amount of time, but it has remained a review of the legislation and regulations rather than addressing some of the broader issues. I will come back to that later.

I think it is short-sighted that these bigger issues have not been tackled. The issues include such things as the viability of the SRS (supported residential service) sector, the appropriateness of the resident mix, and also the services that residents are receiving.

That said, what are SRSs? They are private accommodation that provides personal or special care. This assistance can involve showering, personal hygiene, toileting, dressing, meals and medication as well as physical and emotional support. The sector is divided into two types of SRS — pension level, which is defined by the government and where 80 per cent or more of the beds are charged at pension-level rates; and above-pension level, where the fees for accommodation can be significantly higher. Currently there are 178 SRSs with approximately 6000 residents right across the state. It is a model that is quite unique to Victoria.

In pension-level services the residents are predominantly male. They are younger than the SRS sector as a whole: 55 per cent of them are under the age of 60; 96 per cent of residents have a disability, with 62 per cent of residents having a psychiatric disability and 98 per cent of residents are considered permanent

residents. This is very much a home environment for the residents, particularly in the pension-level services.

This census was held two years ago in 2008. It showed a picture of services that were initially set up for the frail aged becoming a place where predominantly younger men with disabilities, particularly mental health issues, are now residing.

In its review of supported accommodation the Family and Community Development Committee also spent a fair bit of time looking at SRSs because of the interlinking of these types of accommodation — supported accommodation for people with a mental illness and people with a disability and the SRS sector. There are a number of different issues that were raised through our multi-year review. I would like to touch on some of those points and concerns about the sector as a whole.

Looking at a bigger picture, the Health and Community Services Union said that continuing problems with SRSs over time demonstrate that this is not a service model that warrants endorsement. There were fundamental concerns about the long-term viability of this model. Some of those concerns included: the types of supports that are able to be provided, the fact that the SRS proprietors often do not have the expertise to meet the support needs of residents and the high resident-to-staff ratios. Another issue raised by the Office of the Public Advocate was the importance of the capacity of staff to intervene effectively when residents display behaviours of concern. The Office of the Public Advocate believes that staff in pension-level SRSs are not equipped to manage these behaviours.

The census also showed that nearly half of all residents have behavioural issues of concern, so that is a dominant issue. As I said, the committee also found that many individuals living in pension-level SRSs have a mental illness but the staff do not have psychiatric training to meet these individual needs, and people are being discharged from acute services straight to these very under-resourced and unsophisticated support services.

I would like to quote Colleen Pearce, the public advocate, in relation to this issue. In an article she wrote for the *Age* of 25 September 2009 she said:

The revolving door syndrome under which people are discharged from mental health units to these homes and then cycle back to hospital is not only cruel but also inefficient. The cost of lives barely lived because people cannot get the help they need is a scourge on us all.

Those are very concerning words from the public advocate. The evidence given to the committee showed

that the needs of people with complex and challenging behaviours are not being met by these pension-level SRSs.

Another major issue was the affordability of accommodation. The cost of SRSs often rules out the ability for social inclusion for people with a disability or mental illness. The census showed that nearly half of all residents do not participate in any social activities outside the SRS and over 50 per cent of the residents either never had a visitor or had a visitor less than once a month. These are very isolated individuals. The cost of accommodation in an SRS often takes the vast majority of people's pensions, leaving them with very little with which to do additional activities.

Another big issue we found through doing the committee report was safety. Carers Victoria highlighted through the review concerns with the mix of residents, the gender of residents and residents with challenging behaviours. The organisation particularly highlighted some issues in relation to sexual assault and that the result of a diverse population living in SRSs is very concerning on the safety front. The Office of the Public Advocate also reported some situations it had observed where women had exchanged sexual favours for what they perceived as basic necessities, such as cigarettes and money.

Another issue that was raised is the lack of rights, particularly tenancy rights in SRSs, and also the lack of privacy. This ties in very closely to the issue of residents not feeling safe. The Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria argued that the lack of access to privacy has a considerable psychological impact on individuals who are already psychologically vulnerable.

The compatibility of residents is another area of concern, and frequently the gender of individuals, the ages of the residents and the different types of disabilities that people have affect the dynamic in a residential setting, sometimes with particularly catastrophic results.

The regulation of SRSs is another area that is quite challenging. The evidence suggests that there is a high variability in the operator standards and that inadequate facilities often continue to operate, sometimes without appropriate follow-up from the department.

This brings us to a broader question of the viability of the SRS sector as a whole. There have been some financial supports in relation to keeping the sector afloat, but these are coming to an end. The Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative is completing its funding, and there are some genuine

questions on the financial front. SRS proprietors told the Family and Community Development Committee that the regulatory requirements are extremely onerous for proprietors and that the quality standards set by Department of Human Services are too high and unachievable due to the work involved in running the service. Proprietors suggest that many of the residents come to them because there are no other forms of accommodation. Due to this shortage, proprietors believe that the government should be further supporting the facilities to make sure these people have at least somewhere to go.

There are a lot of concerns about the SRS sector, what its future is and what can be done to make sure it is viable in the future. This gives some context to the bill, because the bill does address a number of these issues, although there are a number that are not addressed. Overall the rights of the individual to a safe and secure place to live and the rights of other residents in terms of their home environment need to be balanced with the ability of the proprietors to be able to run their private business. This is a very hard balance to try to achieve.

It is a very positive position that this is a stand-alone bill which simplifies a lot of the complexities that were there when the provisions were included in the Health Services Act. There are a number of reforms. There is the strengthening of occupancy rights for greater protection of residents; statutory notice periods; circumstances under which a notice or intention to vacate can be issued, and this ranges from immediate, where there is serious risk, through to 60 days; and also statutory requirements for residents in terms of giving notice to the proprietor.

The bill also provides for the right of review of decisions to VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal). Another key theme of reform is the strengthening of financial protections. The bill provides for the statutory amounts that can be charged for security deposits and up-front payments and the repayment of that money. These financial issues were areas of great concern. The bill provides for the establishment of trust accounts to hold certain fees and safeguards for how those are managed, and once again it allows for any concerns in relation to payments to be taken to VCAT.

The bill enables additional staffing requirements to be met and provides for a mandatory police check for all new staff but not for existing staff. The bill requires the secretary to assess new day-to-day managers, and there will be a lot of responsibility contained in the regulations in relation to issues such as the requirement to employ people who have first-aid training, minimum

requirements for qualified staff, and requirements for such staff to be on site on the weekends for up to 7½ hours each day and ongoing training for personal care coordinators. There are additional enforcement mechanisms contained in the bill which will improve compliance. Proprietors and the Department of Health can now enter undertakings to fix less serious issues, but compliance notices will be issued where serious breaches occur, and there are appropriate penalties to sit alongside them.

The bill allows for the idea of cumulative non-compliance to be taken into account in the consideration of whether or not an administrator should be appointed. It strengthens incident reporting requirements, requiring the mandatory reporting of serious incidents and the keeping of central records. The bill amends the Crimes Act to make it an offence also for a person working in an SRS to engage in sexual activities with residents who have cognitive impairment. That will give some of the residents some protections and increase their safety.

The bill requires that a list of compliance notices must be publicly available and be able to be inspected. It also shifts to outcome-based standards, which creates a framework for residents that focuses on the outcomes that need to be achieved so that they can reflect individual needs rather than just having a standard process for everyone. Once again there is a lot of detail to come in the regulations in relation to these outcomes-based standards.

Finally, the bill streamlines administrative processes, reducing some of the red tape while not compromising, or trying not to compromise, residents' safety. It removes the annual registration renewal and associated fees, which will be an important cost saving for proprietors. The bill also continues the important work of the community visitors.

There is a lot in the bill that will lead to improvements in the way that the SRSs are run and the experience of the residents in that form of accommodation. On that basis the coalition will be supporting the bill, and it is very pleased to be able to do that. But coalition members believe that a number of issues have been left out. Members will not be surprised that I will spend a bit of time talking about what we think those issues are.

When you look at the history of the SRS bills — and I have had the pleasure of reading back through the debates on SRS bills over the past 10 years — you note that the bills continually look to improve the compliance regime, to increase the information available to residents and to increase the staff capacity.

A lot of the similar issues we are seeing here are the issues we have seen time and again in similar legislation.

The numbers I have available to me show that in 2003 there were 216 SRSs; now, in 2010, there are 178. There has been a loss of 38 SRSs, which is nearly 20 per cent of them. At the same time we had 7200 residents back in 2003; we have 6000 residents now, so there has been a loss of 1200 residents. There has been a significant reduction in the number of SRSs and therefore in the number of beds that are available to residents. There have clearly been some massive pressures on the industry over time. This is why we believe the sector's sustainability should have been considered more broadly than just in the legislative and regulatory context.

I would like to quote from a Department of Human Services document dated June 2006, which states:

The pension-level SRS sector has been in decline for the last decade, resulting in a significant loss of available beds. Low viability, linked to limited fee revenue and an increasingly complex resident group, has been an important factor in this decline.

There is a very clear understanding of the complexity and the pressure in the sector, but none of these issues was actually incorporated in the review process.

One area that I want to focus on, which I believe needs improving, is the complaints mechanism. Currently there is an avenue to complain to the secretary in relation to the exercise of the power of the authorised officer and a mechanism to complain to the proprietor if there is some issue about the premises. But what we do not have is an independent complaints mechanism. I have to say the complaints mechanism across the board in terms of accessing the supports and services that DHS provides is quite complex and is an area that residents have quite a bit of difficulty understanding. One of the limitations of this bill is that it does not create an independent complaints mechanism.

When the disability services commissioner made a submission to the SRS review he was very clear, and I quote from his submission:

The creation of an independent complaints arrangement and associated education strategies for both staff and residents of SRS would be an important step forward in protecting the rights of SRS residents. This will enable the residents of SRS to enjoy the same rights as people living in other forms of supported accommodation in both the aged and disability services sectors where access to independent complaint mechanisms is now standard.

We have not seen that in the bill, and I think that leaves a real gap. When you look at section 109 of the Disability Act you see that in fact any matter relating to the provision of services is able to be referred to the disability services commissioner. Here we are going back to the department, which already regulates, which already funds and which also has the complaints mechanism, which is not an approach that provides confidence for the individual consumer.

Another area of concern is the relationship between acute mental health facilities, disability service providers and the way people are discharged from care in those areas into the SRSs. The referrals are often not comprehensive, so residents arrive without the proprietors and their staff knowing about what sort of care and support they need. I think strengthening that process will protect vulnerable residents significantly. What we find also within SRSs is that other community programs are not generally accessible to many of the residents.

Another area of concern is resident safety. I have mentioned the issue of privacy and the mix of residents. Unfortunately some of those issues are not addressed by this bill. There are some mechanisms to improve the situation on the safety front, but certainly in relation to privacy something as simple as putting locks on doors could make a substantial difference.

Staffing is an area that has been addressed partially. It is a very concerning area, and it is a hard area because of the cost associated with it. But I have some concerns, and certainly some concerns have been raised with me by residents in the sector about where staffing has ended up. The SRS census showed that 14 per cent of pension-level SRSs only have between one and five staff, and 18 per cent of personal care workers are without qualifications.

The public advocate has said in her submission to the SRS review:

There is a strong case for raising the level of minimum qualifications of the personal care coordinator to at least a certificate IV.

Currently personal care coordinators only require a certificate III qualification. She also said:

... community visitors have also observed that minimum staffing ratios are inadequate given the complex needs of the residents ... Similarly, the requirement that one staff member be available overnight is not appropriate in the context of residents who often have high and complex health-care needs that require attendance.

I know there are a lot of staffing matters to be resolved in the regulations, but there needs to be more thorough

consideration given to having staffing levels that match the needs of the residents who are there and the increasingly complex needs they have, but at the same time making sure that the sector and the proprietors are able to continue to operate. It is certainly not an easy process.

Finally, the Office of the Public Advocate has also raised the issue of the amount of payment, as I mentioned earlier, and has recommended that a maximum of 75 per cent of the pension should be allowed to be paid in relation to SRS fees. Currently we hear stories of up to 90 to 95 per cent of the pension being taken, leaving people with very little disposable income.

There are a lot of concerns. Many of the issues I have raised were outlined in the preliminary themes from the public forums held in July and August 2008. The department's own document reflecting the early themes highlighted a number of these — the staffing issues, the safety issues, fabric issues in relation to the facilities and the relationship between the SRSs and the broader sector — but unfortunately we have not seen them reflected in the bill. Hopefully there will be some opportunities in the regulations to do that more broadly.

This bill started as a response to a series of articles in the *Age*. When you look back at the media stories over the last three years you see that unfortunately a lot of the complexities of those stories will not be resolved by the bill we are debating today. There are some more fundamental issues about the future and viability of the SRS sector, and we believe those issues need to be assessed, debated and thought about very thoroughly. As I have said previously, supporting accommodation for vulnerable Victorians initiative funding is now at the end of its cycle, and certainly the proprietors are saying they need additional support to be able to continue to run these absolutely critical services, because for the residents often there are no other places to go.

I believe that a number of the big issues have been avoided in this process. The review has been narrow. It was meant to take 18 months; it took three years. I also have to say, having made a number of FOI requests to try to understand the closures of SRSs across the state and what is really happening to the sector, what I have had substantially from the department in relation to getting SRS data is obfuscation. In one instance I had to revert to writing to the Ombudsman because the situation was so ridiculous in terms of them not providing the information requested.

I think it is a challenge for the Minister for Community Services, who has been a community visitor and who understands these issues, who has seen them, to be able to bring the broader issues in the many aspects of her portfolio, including disability services and mental health, to the forefront through debating them. I was very concerned to read a media article that said that since she has been minister she has not actually visited an SRS. Given they are such an important part of the accommodation system, if that is true, it is certainly very concerning. It is very important that the minister understands the reality of how dramatic these situations can be.

We believe these changes will improve things in SRSs, and we are happy to support this bill and the amendments it will bring about to the operation of SRSs, but there are a number of things that have been missed. Three years of consultation and engagement with the sector broadly has failed to grapple with these bigger issues that should have been considered. Having observed the cycle of these SRS bills through reading the debates, I note that we tend to see them every three or four years, in between which a significant review is done. I suspect we will be back in the same cycle again shortly, because the pressure on the accommodation system will be so significant that we will have to look at the issues holistically to make sure that the individuals who reside in SRSs are getting the accommodation and support they need.

The Victorian Council of Social Service submission to the SRS review also talked about these broader issues. I quote from the submission:

Several factors have exacerbated the use of pension-level SRS as an accommodation option in Victoria in recent years: the lack of investment in public housing, the decrease in rooming house accommodation, a shift away from residential psychiatric accommodation and insufficient investment in supported accommodation options for people with disability.

This submission encapsulated these broader pressures on the system which all end up focusing on SRSs, which I have described in the past as the melting pots, the end of the line for health services for individuals when there is nowhere else to go. We must have accommodation for people who are vulnerable, and unfortunately we repeatedly see failures on this front. Through the Family and Community Development Committee review and personally I have met many individuals and families for whom accommodation is the no. 1 issue. They are at their wits' end trying to work out either how they will access appropriate accommodation or how they manage for their child, often their adult child, who is in accommodation where they are not safe, where they are not settled, where they

are not helped in terms of their treatment and recovery, and where they are not able to see a positive future.

I believe the government is due to respond in the middle of July to the more than 100 recommendations from the Family and Community Development Committee. There were a number of recommendations on SRSs, including a comprehensive review and some of these broader issues I have discussed today that have not been touched in this bill. I certainly hope the government will support a comprehensive look at the accommodation issues now that this narrow review is out of the way.

We do support these improvements. We believe they will make a positive difference for residents in SRSs. We hope the system is viable for the future, but we believe there are broader issues that need to be debated, that need to be assessed, that need to be thought about strategically, because I think both sides of the house want the same objective, which is that people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged and who do not have other alternatives, who need care and support and accommodation, can find that care and support and accommodation where they need it. With that, I recommend the bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — It gives me pleasure to rise tonight in support of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010 and to follow the member for Doncaster, who has just indicated that the opposition will support the bill. We certainly welcome that.

From the outset, because there is a limited amount of time, let me say that I think this bill brings complex and important legislation before the Parliament. It strikes the right balance — indeed it is an important balance — between the rights of residents who live in an SRS (supported residential service) and those of proprietors. It makes important changes which, in my judgement, will contribute to the improvement of the kind of staff that SRSs employ and will employ in the future. It strikes the right balance. It is complex legislation and I believe we have come a long way. There is some way to go and I am confident that the very good work of the Minister for Community Services and the department will continue to be effective, particularly through the regulatory regime, in improving living conditions of residents and at the same time recognising the important rights of proprietors and improving the training and quality of staff that are employed in SRSs.

The Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010 provides for the regulation of

private supported residential services and prescribes minimum standards of accommodation and personal support for residents of private supported residential services.

The bill states that the purposes of the act are:

- (a) to provide for a registration regime for private supported residential services in Victoria;
- (b) to provide for minimum standards of accommodation and personal support provided to residents of private supported residential services for their care and wellbeing;
- (c) to provide appropriate enforcement mechanisms to give effect to the standards of accommodation and personal support, and obligations on proprietors, and the principles on which they are based;
- (d) to make consequential amendments to the Health Services Act 1988 and other acts —

which is the current regime that regulates SRSs. There are some 6000 people who choose to live in SRSs for a whole range of reasons. Their quality of life is critically important to the government so the government must make sure it does what it can to improve the quality of life of residents.

There are a variety of supported accommodation options. The SRS sector is one which is very diverse. The SRSs range in size, location, resident profile, fees charged and the range and focus of services that they provide. The government recognises that SRS residents can be vulnerable and that they rely very much on the proprietors, who provide both accommodation and support, and therefore it is important that their safety and wellbeing be protected.

The regulatory scheme is set out in the Health Services Act 1988 and supporting regulations. In 2008 a review of the regulatory scheme commenced to identify where changes might be necessary given the evolving nature of this sector. I will now place on record some important principles that are critical because they closely reflect the thinking of the government in terms of the framework for the new regime. As set out in the second-reading speech, five main principles guided this review process and the development of proposed reforms. They are:

... Effectiveness — the regulatory scheme should protect the safety and wellbeing of residents, ensure minimum standards and create certainty for all involved ...

... Fairness —

this is an important principle —

the regulatory scheme should maintain a balance between protecting the interests of residents and imposing obligations on people responsible for the provision of services to those residents.

... Accessibility — the regulatory scheme and associated documentation and decision-making processes should be open, clear and understandable to all involved.

... Flexibility —

this is another important principle that is part of the framework —

the regulatory scheme should be able to accommodate emerging issues and sector trends in a timely manner —

given that the sector is one with challenges and one which evolves —

... Efficiency — the resources expended and the costs imposed by the scheme should be justified in terms of the benefits to the Victorian community.

These are important matters that this bill deals with and, consequently, the bill will deliver important changes to the residents of SRSs in the state of Victoria. One of the important things that the government and the department picked up during the course of the consultation process — which was broad, but it needed to happen in that way; it was extensive and lengthy but I believe, having had some experience of the sector, that it takes time to get things done in this sector and to get it right you to have to do it properly — was that the changes proposed by this bill will strengthen occupancy rates of residents. This is an important matter which was brought to the attention of the government. It will strengthen financial protection of the residents — something that I am sure residents will welcome. It will improve the ability to increase staffing requirements via the regulations which will be drafted following the bill. Let me briefly address that because I and other government members raised issues of this kind which I am happy are now being delivered through the regulatory regime.

The bill will expand the range of enforcement mechanisms available to the department to ensure facilities meet required standards. It will also make it compulsory for proprietors to report serious incidents to the department. It will streamline administrative processes to ease the burden on proprietors, which will be welcomed by them, to allow them more time to focus on care and support of residents and less on administration. This is what the government will do to improve the occupancy of SRS residents. SRS residents are entitled to a safe, homelike environment, and proprietors have a duty to provide one.

The bill will require that residents be given proper notice, and that a proprietor have a legitimate reason to evict a resident. This is very welcome in this sector. Some would argue that it is long overdue, but it is fundamental. These are good provisions in good legislation that this government brings to the house. If a resident feels they have been asked to leave unfairly, they can review the notice through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and the period of notice required varies according to circumstances.

The other measure which I think is important and about which I have been concerned, as have the sector, residents and others, relates to the issue of staffing arrangements. Important reforms through regulation are being brought about and will be progressively improved over time. The adequacy and appropriateness of staff training and qualifications was an issue which was raised during the consultation and the review of the regulation of supported residential services, and in response the government has established the power to set minimum staffing requirements, which as I indicated will be set out in the regulations.

Subject to regulatory impact assessment, it is expected that the new requirements will include a staff member with first aid training qualifications to be available — an important requirement; a staff member with a minimum qualification of certificate III in a recognised area must be employed for a minimum of 7.5 hours on each day of the weekends; all personal-care coordinators are to complete approved training in specified areas every three years; mandatory police checks must be undertaken for all new SRS staff; and new day-to-day managers who are not the proprietor are to be assessed as part of the registration process or on appointment.

In short, the government is again delivering on improved quality of life for residents of SRSs. This legislation is absolutely on track and heading in the right direction. I am very confident that the regulations will be used as an important tool to continue to deliver mechanisms and provisions that will improve the quality of life for residents and keep in mind the rights of proprietors. It is an important and challenging sector.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I rise to make a contribution to the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010, and The Nationals in coalition are supporting this bill. The purpose of the bill is to provide for a registration regime for private supported residential services in Victoria; to provide for minimum standards for accommodation and personal support provided to residents of private supported residential services for their care and wellbeing; to

provide appropriate enforcement mechanisms to give effect to the standards of accommodation and personal support obligations on proprietors and the principle on which they are based; and to make consequential amendments to the Health Services Act.

Perhaps put more simply, the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill provides for regulation of private supported residential services and prescribes minimum standards of accommodation and personal support for residents of private supported residential services.

The bill does this through a number of provisions, and these provisions strengthen occupancy rights by having statutory notice periods for notices to leave and vacate and establishing a right of appeal through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal which is available to both providers and residents. The bill strengthens financial protections with statutory limits on charges and repayments and how these are managed. It also establishes trust accounts to hold certain fees; the right to go to VCAT to resolve disputes; greater regulation and background checks of staff, including police checks of new staff; additional enforcement measures; issuance of compliance notices and capacity to consider recurrent non-compliance; mandatory reporting of serious incidents; and an administrative change that strengthens the accommodation and supports the standards by abolishing registration and renewal of annual fees.

The bill is intended to strengthen protection for residents, reduce the administration burden and provide clarity around the regulations for proprietors while enhancing enforcement of the regulations.

There are a number of concerns which I think have been well dealt with by the member for Doncaster, but I will touch on a couple of those. There are the public reporting requirements around elements such as registered supported residential services and while they are currently published online, that is not mandated in legislation and the legislation does not specifically follow the recommendations of the Family and Community Development Committee, which recommended much broader reforms than the legislative arrangements covered in this bill.

The bill does not apply to community-based or not-for-profit organisations. However, in my community we have a not-for-profit body which provides individual support for people with a family member with a disability, and it has done that for 30 years. That has set the standard levels that will be required by the private operators that are out there

because we have got two distinct areas that we can consider.

Sunraysia Residential Services has won a number of awards in our local business excellence awards for the work it has done, mostly in the not-for-profit organisation areas. It provides services in an environment where people are treated with dignity, respect and fairness, and it recognises that each client is unique in developing their supported accommodation needs. It has got 250 clients in the Mildura area, so it is a sizeable organisation. It also promotes independent living for people who have got disabilities and there are a number of options. Some of it is in private rental, private homes or departmental housing facilities that are managed directly by Sunraysia Residential Services, but the key part is very much about the supported accommodation.

The supported accommodation provided sets a standard of 24 hours of support for people with a disability who have increasing needs for various reasons. With an ageing population, some of those needs can be caused by dementia. Sunraysia Residential Services purpose built some shared accommodation. I have visited the accommodation and it is really a wonderful achievement; however, the demand exceeds the supply. It also provides after-school and vacation care. It has just finished a great playground, and it is a joy for boys of all ages to have a look at that project. It provides respite care and examines dementia patients. The bar is set very high by our not-for-profit community groups within the sector.

The style of service that will be offered within the for-profit sector, which is what this legislation is about — as was pointed out by the member for Doncaster — will be determined according to a limit of 75 per cent of the pension; however, one wonders whether there will be pension-plus offerings out there in the market and how they will be accommodated. One also wonders about the private sector versus the smaller home-type environment and the like-for-like matchings that will be required.

The bill creates a framework for the private operators who are already operating in the sector. Because we are dealing with the private sector, much of the bill is to do with monitoring and penalties to protect those people who are the most vulnerable. It deals with the quality of service, the financial arrangements and community visitors. Community visitors are covered in part 9 of the bill, from clause 182 onwards. It sets out the terms and conditions for appointment of community visitors and a number of tasks that they need to undertake.

When choosing a community visitor you need to look for someone who has understanding, compassion, empathy and a knowledge of the system. It is going to be a matter of finding the right people to do this. On my reading the legislation does not deal with training the right people to meet all of those standards required to do this task. You cannot go in with a heavy hand because many of these people are living in a home environment. Finding the right people will be difficult. There may be a conflict of interest if the community visitor comes from the competing community sector, given that that sector is where you find most of the skills required of a community visitor. It is a task that has considerable responsibility, which is outlined in the legislation. If we are not able to get people from an area where there may be a conflict of interest, finding the right community visitor, particularly in country areas, is going to be a challenge, and that challenge will need to be met.

I want to pay tribute to those people and organisations in my electorate who made contributions to the inquiry into supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability or mental illness. That inquiry is the genesis of this legislation. Many people and organisations made contributions. Mallee Family Care, Murray Mallee Community Mental Health Service — and Cath Murphy from that organisation is someone I have worked with in Mildura — Sunraysia Residential Services, the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program and Annecto all went to the trouble of making a contribution to the inquiry. That inquiry was the spark that brought forward this particular legislation and some of the changes. I notice there is still more work to be done, particularly in dealing with the mental illness issues. Often people mistake those requiring supported residential services for those who have a physical or a mental handicap, but the mental illness issue is considerable. I know in Mildura we do not have adequate supported accommodation services to deal with mental health issues, and we are a long way away from any services. It is that step-up, step-down type of approach.

We are supporting this legislation. However, there are issues to do with community visitors that need to be thought through in the context of the more remote insular community areas. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) — I rise to support the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010. I happily speak in support of the bill because it provides a significant enhancement to the protections and rights afforded to residents of supported residential services.

The bill contains provisions that will assist the proprietors and managers of supported residential services in an environment that has the hallmark of good regulation. The bill is outcome focused and not merely regulation for regulation's sake. The bill sets out the management requirements which will enable proprietors to run supported residential services in a way that is safe, dignified and fair.

Some comment from the other side of the house has queried the application of the bill — whether it covers all SRSs or whether it deals with just above-pension facilities. I wish to clarify that the bill does apply to all privately run supported residential services, both above-pension and pension-level facilities.

It is worth remembering that residents of supported residential services are often vulnerable people who are not able to always clearly articulate their needs and assert their rights. Some residents will also have family members who will be seeking an assurance that the circumstances in which the residents live are safe and dignified and that they are not being exploited. The way in which this bill seeks to provide that assurance is effective. The evidence from the review process provided a compelling basis for government to have a regulatory mechanism for ensuring that due regard is paid to the social and economic circumstances of these residents.

Furthermore we always require a strong disincentive to any form of exploitation, and we need to have a system that maximises safety and wellbeing and that minimises serious incidents by requiring transparency and providing consequences when they occur. It is important to note that within this industry we have increasing corporatisation of supported residential service (SRS) ownership. Whilst we are ensuring that the safety and dignity of SRS residents are protected, we also need to ensure not only that the administrative and regulatory requirements of running and working in an SRS are crystal clear and easy to follow but that they do not act as a disincentive to operating an SRS. We should not lose sight of that point, given the demand for the provision of these types of services.

I would particularly like to commend the bill and all that has been done to achieve a balance between these objectives. I note that there has been extensive stakeholder involvement, and whilst a variety of views were expressed about the sorts of regulations and standards that should be in place, there was coherence in respect of one view — that is, that we should have one regulatory regime and not several obligations coming from several different schemes. It is important

to not lose sight of that progression from where we have been to where we are going.

One of the important features of the bill is the increased protection to ensure residents' money is secure. That is a substantial improvement. When it comes to residents having to make an up-front payment or provide a security deposit this bill will ensure that SRS residents understand that the money will be paid on entry and that they will have protections for the return of their money. They can be confident that their money will be safe because of the requirement in this bill for proprietors to put this money into a trust account, and they will know how they will be able to recover their money if they choose to leave the SRS. That is a significant improvement.

Similarly with regard to occupancy rights, the bill will introduce statutory occupancy rights for residents by establishing minimum notice periods and the right to have notices reviewed. I am certainly hopeful that this will reduce the risk of residents being unfairly made to leave and provide them with greater occupancy rights.

The bill also introduces a range of reforms to increase staff training and capability. That is a topic about which all of the speakers on the bill so far have spoken. Again we seem to have a coherence of views about staff capability.

In terms of safety, this bill introduces a requirement for there to be a mandatory police check for all new staff and a new assessment process for day-to-day managers as part of the registration process or when a new manager begins. Again, that is about increasing the capability and capacity around staffing.

I also note the bill establishes some powers for further regulations to be made. Those powers might be used to implement standards around the sorts of things that other speakers have spoken about as alleged deficiencies in the bill, but those powers could also be used to implement standards around first aid training, qualifications and an update of training for staff. I think that is a proper place for those issues to be addressed, therefore the powers could be exercised to update the regulations rather than requiring amendments to the act. It is important that we ensure that staff capacity is built in this industry and that staff are supported and cared for in the sector by being invested in with up-to-date knowledge and skills, and I feel confident that this regime will implement that.

This bill creates a framework for outcome-based standards, which are generally considered as the best regulatory model, and the details of these standards will

be prescribed in regulation. But again, if we look at some of the material that has been prepared as a prelude to the introduction of this bill, those regulations and those standards can focus on the important things such as resident lifestyle, food and nutrition, personal support and healthcare, and the physical environment.

On top of this, in terms of disincentives a range of specific offences have been retained in the bill. They go to circumstances where serious risks are posed to residents. They include major offences relating to medication issues or the failure to get additional health care or personal support for residents when needed. We have all heard horror stories about circumstances where there has been evidence and fear of such standards not being met, so I feel quite confident that the adoption of this regime will bring about a significant improvement in the quality of care and support that residents get.

I am hopeful that this regime will also support and enhance the right of residents to live in a dignified and supportive environment. That is why I am also very pleased the bill sets out a comprehensive monitoring and compliance regime that will be far more effective in securing compliance than the status quo. Currently there is a whole range of limited compliance options and prosecution of a matter takes time. A greater concern is that we need a monitoring and compliance process that is responsive should there ever be an allegation of maltreatment or substandard care.

In conclusion, I implore the house to reflect on the fact that we all need to accept responsibility for the fact that the culture, the environment and the care that we provide to people in supported residential services is in part a reflection of how much we care for vulnerable members of our community. In my view it is a whole-of-community responsibility. I want to commend all those people who participated in the review for having the courage to share their stories. I also commend the people from the department who have spent a great deal of time pulling this review together. I think they have developed a regulatory model that seeks to establish standards, practices and incentives that will go a significant way forward in ensuring a quality of life and dignity for SRS residents, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — It is important in accommodation settings that there be innovation and a range of flexible models and that those models are adaptable to change. In the area of supported residential services there have been examples in the past that have not met reasonable standards for the support of people who have required a residential setting to cater for their specific needs. In relation to the parliamentary inquiry

undertaken by the Family and Community Development Committee, the opposition notes that not all of the recommendations of that all-party parliamentary committee are being implemented by the bill before the house. Nevertheless, the inquiry into supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability and/or mental illness has underpinned aspects of the legislation before the house.

In passing I will comment that a wider review is being undertaken through the Productivity Commission in relation to support for people with a disability, which has interesting national implications. I commend the work of Mr Bruce Bonahady and people working alongside him for their advocacy work on support for people with long-term disability in the context of a national insurance scheme. It remains to be seen what the outcome of that particular inquiry will be.

Each member of this house would know of examples around the state of different levels of care. Within my own community there have been a range of supported residential services, including some that have been developed with best practice models in mind, that have been supported by independent committees of management that have had a focus upon innovation, best practice and adapting to future needs so there are best care options.

I will refer to an example cited on page 202 of the Family and Community Development Committee's report on its inquiry into supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability and/or mental illness. Under the heading 'One family carer's experience', the report states:

My son has had his illness for 25 years and has over the years steadily got worse; because of the lack of intervention or dare I say lack of hospital beds. I so admire my son, it takes great guts to live with his illness ...

Not taking care of himself is one of the signs he is becoming more unwell because he normally is so fastidious about his home and person ...

My son was admitted to hospital Boxing Day 06 by his case manager because he was so unwell. We had been promised a bed in the secure extended care unit early September 06 for a change of medication that required constant monitoring and still requires monitoring. It was his psychiatrist who wanted him admitted but still we had to wait, once again no hospital beds available, while my son suffered the effects of his illness in the community ...

It is known that the sooner an episode is treated, with change of medication and a safe environment for this to take place the better the outcome and that unless this happens the more engrained the paranoia becomes which is what has happened in my son's case.

The fact that we have only 25 acute care hospital beds 6 SECU beds and 2 adolescent beds a total of 33 beds in the whole of greater Gippsland dictates to the conditions they live in when they are unwell and unable to take care of themselves and I mean unable to care for themselves in an appropriate manner in the community with or without support ... this is why they need a safe place ...

During my time as a member of Parliament I have become aware of a young person with an acquired brain injury who was in an aged-care setting — an old people's home. This fellow had sound cognitive function across a number of areas, but the residential setting for his care was not suitable for his immediate needs. Some good people endeavoured to advocate on his behalf to develop another setting.

I will give another example of an independent care arrangement which came about as a result of community support where an outstanding setting has been provided with the appropriate spacing for the units. It is a custom-designed residential care setting which has appropriate pulleys and other fittings in place. It is the sort of place where the sort of people who might have been cared for in St Nicholas Hospital have been provided with the opportunity to have the best possible care in an independent living arrangement, one which the parents are very happy with and which provides 24-hour attendant care.

There are other examples where people are placed in inadequate settings that do not give them the independence that they may justifiably and reasonably require as adults. Such people seek to access a place to reside, but as a consequence of the shortfall of spaces and places available that level of support and housing opportunity is not available to them.

The main provisions of the bill before the house deals with six main areas. The bill strengthens occupancy rights by having statutory notice periods for notices to leave or vacate and establishes a right of appeal through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal which is available to both proprietors and residents. The bill strengthens financial protections with statutory limits on charges or repayments and how these are managed, and it also establishes trust accounts to hold certain fees and establishes a right to go to VCAT to resolve disputes. Often when people are dealing with residential care settings they may not have the immediate expertise to deal with the financial arrangements and any up-front payments and charges, including administration charges, and it is imperative that they be correctly managed. Again, there have been examples, and this would be the experience of most members in the chamber, where problems have arisen, and it can be an arduous process to resolve them. The

bill also sets some benchmarks for the financial protections to be provided to families.

Thirdly, there is a requirement for greater regulation and background checks of staff, including police checks for new staff. Here again examples have been reported in the press where there has been an abuse of people within care settings, either of a physical nature or where financial matters have not been conducted with due prudence and a sound accounting standard.

Fourthly, there are additional enforcement measures through the issuance of compliance notices and the capacity to consider recurrent non-compliance.

Fifthly, there is the mandatory reporting of serious incidents. In the media in the last day or so there was an example of an elderly person who was living in a different care setting and was advised by the proprietors of the home that their family member had had a fall but that everything was okay. When the daughter visited her mother she was concerned that she was writhing in pain. An ambulance was called and the lady's mother was found to have a broken bone in her hip, so there is an issue in relation to serious incidents and the way these matters are reasonably monitored in care settings.

The last matter relating to the main provisions of the bill concerns the administrative changes that strengthen accommodation support standards and the abolition of registration renewal and annual fees. The objects of the bill are to strengthen protections for residents, reduce administration and provide clarity around regulations for proprietors while enhancing the enforcement of regulations.

At this point I would like to pay tribute to the leadership within the Sandringham community of Lesley Falloon, a former mayor of the former City of Sandringham, who celebrated her 90th birthday today. Lesley was a pioneer in the field of local government and was also a pioneer in the establishment of a residential care setting in the Fairway Hostel, a state-of-the-art facility in the Sandringham area. While Fairway is a hostel that provides accommodation for more senior Victorians, it is also an example of the community, the local council and others working together to establish a best practice model of care that reflects the objectives I enumerated at the beginning of my contribution when I said that we need to develop models that display innovation and have flexibility, capability and capacity to adapt to change so that the levels of care and support provided in supported residential services accommodation settings meet world best practice.

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — I am very pleased to rise and speak in support of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill. This bill is the result of an extensive review of supported residential services under the Health Services Act 1988 and health service regulations. The review has been extremely thorough, commencing with the release of an initial discussion paper in 2008, which resulted in at least 70 individual submissions. That process has been complemented by two further sets of statewide consultations, which I understand involved several hundred participants, giving many people an opportunity to have a say.

According to its website, the Department of Health has been reviewing the regulation of supported residential services to make sure they suit a changing supported residential service (SRS) sector, to look at concerns raised about current arrangements and decide if reform is needed, and to make sure laws about SRSs fit well with government policy and other legislation, including the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the Labor Party's Reducing the Regulatory Burden initiative.

The 178 registered SRSs in Victoria are home to some 6000 Victorians. The facilities are privately owned and cater mainly for people who cannot live independently at home. They include older and frail people, together with other residents, including those who live with a physical or mental disability. The SRSs generally provide, or arrange, personal care services for residents such as meals and medication, showering and toileting assistance, together with physical and emotional support. All SRSs must be registered with the Department of Health, and the business owner must be approved to be the holder of a certificate of registration. SRSs are also required to employ a qualified personal care coordinator, and there must be at least 1 staff member for every 30 residents.

Given the vulnerability of many of the residents housed in the SRSs across the state of Victoria it is important that there are appropriate safeguards to protect those residents, but that objective needs to be balanced against a desire to limit unnecessary red tape for the proprietors. Addressing these two issues is really the focus of this bill, which proposes to separate SRS regulation from the Health Services Act to create stand-alone legislation.

The main reforms associated with this bill are strengthening statutory occupancy rights for residents; strengthening financial protections, particularly in terms of security deposits and up-front payments; establishing powers to build staff capacity and requirements;

introducing new enforcement mechanisms to deal with non-compliance by proprietors; strengthening the reporting of serious incidents; a move to outcome-based standards; and streamlining administration processes.

The first point I make about these reforms is that they are designed to strengthen the protections for residents. Residents will now be given greater security of tenancy with new statutory occupancy rights that will prevent them from being unfairly evicted. Security deposits and up-front payments will now be subject to monetary limits, and all moneys will be kept in trust funds. All new staff employed at SRSs will be subject to police checks, and new powers will be added to the regulations to strengthen staffing requirements.

Additional enforcement mechanisms will also be provided to the department to issue compliance notices or enter into statutory undertakings. In determining whether to take more serious action against the proprietors of SRSs the department will be able to take into account a pattern of non-compliance. There will also be a strengthening of reporting requirements for serious incidents, which again will assist the department to move quickly to protect residents. Residents will also benefit from a new framework for setting outcome-based standards in supported residential services.

In terms of proprietors, the main focus of these reforms has been about streamlining registration and administrative processes and cutting red tape. In particular the aim is to reduce the time and expense involved in applying for and maintaining registration as an SRS proprietor. The move to outcome-based standards should also make it easier for proprietors to understand their obligations and how compliance will be assessed.

The costs associated with upgrading the skills and qualifications of staff will be examined further as part of the regulatory impact statement process. Proprietors will also need to establish trust accounts in which to place security deposits and certain other payments for residents. Finally, proprietors will also have to establish systems to report serious incidents to the department, although as I understand it many already do this as a matter of practice.

Earlier this year the Family and Community Development Committee, of which I am a member — and I acknowledge the member for Shepparton is also a member of that committee — tabled a report entitled *Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and/or Mental Illness*. As I recall, we made a range of visits to accommodation providers

across Melbourne and country Victoria. One of the visits conducted by the committee was to Milford Hall, which is an SRS in Armadale. I think the member for Shepparton will concur that the staff were both friendly and welcoming. They provided us with a tour of their facilities, including an opportunity to view the apartments and common areas. As we observed it, the building was secure and staff were available 24 hours a day to provide care to the residents. All in all, I was left with the impression that Milford Hall seemed to be a comfortable, relaxed and homely place for its residents, who in general seemed to respect their surroundings and took a level of pride in their apartments.

The committee made a number of comments about the operations and role of SRSs in catering for the accommodation needs of people living with a disability and/or mental illness. It should be recognised that the report came out in the very late stages of the overall review the department had conducted, including the many submissions it had received. But the committee made some comments on SRSs on pages 325 to 329 of the report. The committee also made a couple of recommendations regarding SRSs.

Recommendation 11.2 of the report is quite extensive and states:

That through the review of the supported residential service (SRS) regulations, the Victorian government improves the SRS industry's capacity to respond to people with a disability and/or mental illness by:

increasing the availability of support from community service organisations in supported residential services, including individual support packages

increasing accountability and sanctions for non-compliance with regulations

improving discharge policies from both disability and mental health services into supported residential service accommodation

establishing a requirement for documented support plans for people with a mental illness who move into these facilities following their discharge

strengthening the safety of residents in supported residential services, particularly female residents

increasing the minimum level of qualifications of staff in supported residential services

strengthening the tenancy rights of residents in supported residential services.

I am pleased the government has responded positively to many of the committee's recommendations, particularly in areas such as strengthening the tenancy rights of residents and addressing staffing, most recently through the 2010 budget, which provides more

funding for individual support packages to assist people living with a disability or a mental illness to make more independent choices about their lives. Back in 2006 the Victorian government announced a five-year package of support worth \$40.4 million to assist the pension-level SRS sector.

The Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative provides a suite of assistance to the sector, including indirect facility cost relief, health and social assessments for residents and service coordination and support. The government has done that because it recognises that the pension-level SRS sector is a large and important supplier of affordable supported housing for people with complex needs. Importantly, this funding has supported more opportunities for social activity and participation among residents of SRSs.

In conclusion, I congratulate all of those people who have been involved in this most extensive review and in the formation of this bill. I particularly single out the Minister for Community Services for her work in responding to the needs of the SRS sector. These reforms will strengthen the protections for residents living in SRSs while streamlining the regulatory arrangements for proprietors. Importantly, for the first time the passage of this bill through the Parliament will result in a stand-alone legislative scheme for SRSs.

I certainly endorse the consultative approach taken in the review process and the resultant bill the house is now considering. This is yet another policy initiative of the Brumby Labor government's A Fairer Victoria platform, ensuring that our state is not only considered the best but also the fairest. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I am pleased to rise in support of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010. The Liberal Party and The Nationals do not oppose the bill; in fact we support it. This must be about the third piece of legislation on supported residential services that I have spoken on in this house since I came to Parliament, because it is such an important issue. The main purpose of the bill, even though it has a number of purposes, is to provide for the regulation of private supported residential services and prescribe minimum standards of accommodation and personal support for residents of private supported residential services.

I am a member of the Family and Community Development Committee, and I will talk about that later, but one of the issues that people spoke to us about when they were giving evidence was the introduction of

the Disability Act in 2006, which established in law the rights of people with a disability and the support they have a right to expect. They said that in fact it raised expectations, as you would hope it would, for people with a disability or a mental illness, but those expectations have not been met because of a lack of choices and a lack of some sorts of services. I mention particularly the issue of ageing parents. We heard from ageing parents who were looking for accommodation for their adult children so the parents could know that when they became more frail or more ill and could not look after their children, or in fact passed away, somebody else who cared about their adult children would be looking after them and that they would have quality of life.

The Family and Community Development Committee is an all-party committee, which tabled its report titled *An Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and/or Mental Illness* in December 2009. It was initiated by the member for Doncaster on behalf of the coalition, and then the Minister for Community Services called for the same inquiry. I understand a government review was going on at the same time, but the committee looked at both inquiries simultaneously, which in some instances made it a little difficult because the terms of reference were not quite the same. However, we believe we did a fine job.

I was disappointed that in the second-reading speech for this bill the Minister for Community Services did not acknowledge the great work of the committee, and I say 'great work' because as an all-party committee the recommendations were mainly supported. I think we were there as an all-party committee to do the right thing by people who are looking for an SRS (supported residential service) or for accommodation or the provision of services. I think we did that in a bipartisan way rather than trying to make it more difficult. I acknowledge the Assembly members of the committee, being the member for Williamstown, who has just spoken, as well as the members for Doncaster and Caulfield and the member for Cranbourne who is the chair of the committee. I have the honour of being the committee's deputy chair.

The bill addresses some of the committee's recommendations. The non-government members do not believe it goes far enough, but we believe it is a step in the right direction. I understand the government is going to give its response to our inquiry shortly, and I look forward to finding that it is going to accept a number of the recommendations.

There was significant interest in the inquiry into supported accommodation. As the member for Williamstown said, there were 12 public hearings right across Victoria in metropolitan areas and in country areas. In fact there was one in the Shepparton district. There were over 125 submissions, and we visited a number of supported residential services. We were impressed with the facilities and with the staff and their knowledge of the needs of their tenants. I think most of them shared a genuine belief that they were there for the interests of the client or the tenant, rather than just being paid to provide a service.

The committee heard a number of issues about the accommodation crisis, where demand is outstripping supply. There was evidence about safety issues for women in SRSs. Some were fearful because they were the only female there. I spoke to different people, some of whom talked to me off the record, about issues in SRSs. Some of those issues were as small as one tenant who had either lost their hearing aid battery or the hearing aid battery had gone flat. The provider of the service for that house was not able to keep up with the tenant's hearing aid problems, so that person became hard of hearing. The same issue applied to glasses. It may seem a small issue if reading glasses are not updated or upgraded, but the person cannot see properly and that can cause safety issues.

The committee heard a discussion about the lack of staff training. This is very important because staff are dealing with some tenants who have complex behaviours. There is a diverse group of tenants, some with psychological behaviours, and those tenants suffer from drug and alcohol problems. There was an issue and a concern raised about staff in those SRSs. It was not a criticism of the staff; it was saying that perhaps they needed to upgrade their skill levels because in some instances they needed to deal with very complex clients.

Privacy issues were raised. One person was quite upset about living in an SRS because people would just walk into their bedroom without knocking. You would think it was a normal thing for somebody to knock on a tenant's door, but this was the tenant's own private room. We raised the issue in the committee, and there was sympathy with the view that perhaps staff should be trained to respect the issue of privacy and first knock on a person's door.

A fear of complaining was raised, with some tenants saying they were worried about retribution, about some sort of abuse or neglect. Having an independent complaints mechanism, as the member for Doncaster spoke about, is important. The lack of staff was an issue

raised. We heard that some tenants were forced to go to work. They went into day programs because there were limited staff numbers during the day, with staff only there at night. These are the sorts of the issues that need to be addressed, and staffing and training levels can be addressed, and I hope they will be.

The non-government members on the committee prepared a minority report because we believed there were some deficiencies and a lack of urgency in the report. There were other issues which, if I have time later, I will touch on.

Because of a lack of supported accommodation and affordable housing there is a reliance on vulnerable people being housed in private accommodation, rooming houses, boarding houses and caravan parks. I am glad to see there are now some minimum standards for those sorts of places, because we heard evidence that in some places there was overcrowding, inappropriate bedrooms and inappropriate facilities. I am pleased that the bill contains provisions for minimum standards so that the people who live in these places are protected and looked after in an appropriate manner, as we would expect.

The bill also discusses police checks for new supported residential services staff and day-to-day managers who are not the proprietors. It establishes statutory limits on amounts that can be charged for security deposits, fees paid in advance, reservation and set-up fees, and a requirement for the repayment of these amounts. It provides that those deposits and other fees must be placed in trust accounts. Many people in SRSs are vulnerable and need that extra protection.

Some people will take advantage of those tenants, therefore community visitors are vitally important, particularly if they inspect the premises unannounced. If they alert the organisation or the private accommodation that they are coming, the place looks tidy, the meal is appropriate and all those situations are in hand. If community visitors come unannounced, then tenants may be getting just a sandwich and there may be something that the visitors can pick up on, perhaps to see that the tenants are not being provided with the best level of service that they need.

A number of people in SRSs are entitled to extra services. They need to make sure that the services they pay for are delivered by the people who are looking after them. There were issues where people who were entitled to have certain support services were not getting them. SRS proprietors must now report serious incidents to the Department of Human Services, which is important. People who live in these homes should not

be afraid to complain if they are not getting the appropriate level of service, but often this type of tenant is fearful of complaining because they might be put out on the street. I hope this bill is a step in the right direction, and the opposition supports it.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — It is a pleasure to follow the members for Williamstown and Shepparton, who know and understand this area very well and have given this Parliament the opportunity to hear a little of their great work on the Family and Community Development Committee. My interest in supported residential services developed some eight years ago and was heightened over the last six to seven years. I am particularly pleased to be a member of this Parliament, which has the opportunity to debate this legislation, and I look forward to seeing it passed.

We keep talking about supported residential services, and the members for Shepparton and Williamstown have talked about an SRS (supported residential service) as a home. We are not talking just about a label ‘SRS’, we are talking about a home, which is often just a room that enables a person to live. Without that home they could not get on with their life, they could not get on with their day program, they could not go to work and they could not engage with the community because they would be fearful about where they live. We need to continue to support increased work within government and within parliamentary committees to ensure that people’s homes are their castles. Whatever their home is, it is their home.

For me a safe home is one of the basic human goods required by every person in order for them to flourish. Many of us have people come into our electorate offices, who before they can address their children’s education needs, their employment opportunities and their health needs, have to know where they go home for rest, recreation and relaxation. For so many people in our community the SRSs are their homes.

We all need shelter, food, health care, a relationship with a significant other, a sense of spiritual wellbeing and recreation — those are basic human needs. Many members are quite privileged to have people they can share their birthdays and Christmas with. For many of the residents who live in SRSs, this is a luxury they cannot enjoy as readily as we do. But their supported residential service is where their luxury is: it is their home.

Many people require significant supports. The SRS legislation ensures that the reforms required in relation to their housing are maintained. There are new statutory occupancy rights for residents. There are new statutory

protections for security deposits and other up-front payments residents may make when entering their SRS.

How many of us have heard examples of people saying, ‘We put in our bond’ or, ‘We put in our security deposit’ but ‘I don’t know if I’ll get it back again’. The people whose home is an SRS are not people who are flush with cash. They need to know they are going to get their security deposit returned.

This reform also brings in statutory requirements for all new staff to have police checks and for day-to-day managers to be assessed, as well as providing powers to make additional regulations to strengthen staffing requirements. There are additional enforcement mechanisms that will broaden how the Department of Health deals with non-compliance by proprietors. As an aside, I know there are folk from the Department of Human Services who are conscious of this debate, and I beg them to undertake an enforcement regime that the SRS know is likely to occur.

I recall those wonderful WorkCover ads where the unsuspecting warehouse manager opens the door and is really glad that the person at the door is not the WorkCover inspector, only to find there is another knock and it is the WorkCover inspector. I hope the folk from the Department of Human Services use this legislation, because people whose homes are SRSs require their support. We will pass the legislation, but we cannot do the monitoring; that is their responsibility.

This legislation also strengthens reporting requirements for serious incidents. It has a shift to outcome-based standards with the details to be prescribed in regulation. I think all of us would say more power to those who want to make tough regulations. We are not talking about a business that is on its knees.

People who run an SRS can make a significant amount of money because they charge a significant fee for a very small area. It is incumbent upon them to ensure that the regulations are followed. They have the cash to enable them to follow the regulations, and with the folk from the Department of Health monitoring them, hopefully they will be following these regulations. If they do not want to go down the compliance path for all the right reasons, then it could be because they are going to be fined significantly afterwards.

I had dinner tonight with two very special people who happen to devote a significant part of their lives to helping refugees and some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. One of them described a lady who gave birth yesterday at Sunshine Hospital; I will not give any more details. Her husband looked at a

number of places, and he would not take his wife and new baby back to a supported residential service. I want to say thank you to a lady who has given her home to that young couple because the new father did not feel safe enough under the current regime to take a new baby and his wife to an SRS. I think tonight they are spending their first night in the home of a member of the public who has never met them. I trust these regulations will ensure that a man who collects his brand-new baby and his very proud wife from hospital will be able to take his new family back to the supported residential service.

The member for Shepparton talked briefly about the power imbalance. How true is that? All of us are aware of members of families who come to our electorate office to talk about the power imbalance in nursing homes, in body corporates, in on-site caravan parks and with landlords in commercial properties. Even members of Parliament sometimes talk about a certain property unit within this place. The great power imbalance and how people are treated is nothing compared with the power imbalance in SRSs. This legislation will help refocus the power to a resident whose home happens to be called an SRS.

I also want to place on the record my appreciation and congratulations to all those who were involved in developing the support package to enhance SRSs. That has made a huge difference to the lives of many people in our community and will continue to make a difference.

I wish the bill a speedy passage. I thank all of those people within the government departments, ministerial offices and the Family and Community Development Committee who have done such a great job to make this state far more livable as a result of their work.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — It gives me pleasure to rise to contribute to the debate on the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010. I am pleased to speak not only in my capacity as the member for Ferntree Gully but also as shadow parliamentary secretary for community services.

The bill provides for the regulation of private supported residential services and prescribes minimum standards of accommodation and personal support for residents of private supported residential services. As the member for Doncaster and others who have spoken before me have mentioned, this bill will not only be not opposed by the coalition but in fact it will be supported. We think it is an important step. Much more is needed in this space, but the bill is an important first step in

dealing with the concerns of residents of supported residential services.

In essence the bill deals with six major planks. It strengthens occupancy rights by providing for statutory notice periods for notices to leave and vacate, and it establishes a right of appeal through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which will be available to both proprietors and residents. It also strengthens financial protections by providing for statutory limits on charges and repayments and for the way these will be managed. It provides greater regulation and provides for background checks for staff, including police checks for new staff. It also provides additional enforcement measures and the capacity to consider recurrent non-compliance. It provides for mandatory reporting of serious incidents, as well as for dealing with administrative changes that strengthen accommodation and support standards, and it abolishes registration renewals and annual fees.

Like many members in this house, I have supported residential service (SRS) facilities in my electorate. I have visited those facilities and spoken to the residents. There are two things I wish to say. As the member for Pascoe Vale has mentioned, these are not just facilities; they are people's homes. They are an important resource for those within our community who require help and assistance, particularly those who are afflicted with a mental illness. However, I have heard harrowing tales, as I am sure other members have, of the lives of residents in these facilities. One resident came to my electorate office and put to me his plight in living in an SRS facility. He effectively said, 'Because I live in an SRS facility and because I am afflicted with a mental illness, I am really at the bottom of the barrel and nobody, particularly a member of Parliament, is going to be interested in my plight'. As you know, Acting Speaker, it behoves all members of Parliament to stand up for the rights of the residents in their electorates, regardless of where they live and regardless of their afflictions.

The challenge for this resident was that he was in a very difficult position. Speaking out might mean that he would potentially be removed from the facility. The greatest challenge he faced was that he knew the chances of his being able to be moved to another facility, particularly an SRS that might be able to provide the level of help and assistance he needed, were very thin on the ground. In fact he made the decision not to proceed with any action for fear of the potential ramifications. I trust and hope the provisions contained in this legislation will go some way towards helping to overcome problems which residents such as my constituent have identified.

There are, however, examples of accommodation throughout Victoria, particularly in my electorate, that are causing great concern to many people — that is, the operation of rooming houses or boarding houses. It has been of concern in the Ferntree Gully community and particularly in parts adjacent to Ferntree Gully station and Ferntree Gully village. As many members in this house will know, boarding houses are an unregulated form of accommodation. Anybody can establish a boarding house if they have premises with fewer than 10 habitable rooms. Some of these facilities have been operated by very respectable proprietors, but obviously the operation of others has been questionable. Regardless of the intentions of the proprietor, the reality is that many people who live in these facilities are the types of tenants — people who are afflicted with mental illness and people who are dealing with drug and alcohol problems — who would be more appropriately placed in an SRS, where they could have the necessary help and assistance.

Given that these facilities are unregulated, residents in them do not have access to specialist mental health services. These facilities do not provide assistance with respect to drug and alcohol issues or help and assistance through the law enforcement community. What you have is residents, many of whom are living at the margins, who have all been put together. There are individuals living in rooms next door to families, with people on one side who may be afflicted by drug problems and people on the other side who may be afflicted by mental illness, or a combination thereof. There are some harrowing tales about people living in these communities.

Organisations that are involved in the provision of crisis accommodation are loath to seek to close down these facilities because the closing down of a rooming house effectively takes away a large swag of accommodation from people who are vulnerable. Unfortunately, if we close down the boarding houses, many of these people will end up on the streets. In a modern society with a modern and robust economy, where we wish to provide accommodation for all Victorians, the challenge for the government is to ensure that it puts in place the appropriate steps to provide the necessary regulations to deal with boarding houses.

The members for Doncaster and Shepparton referred to the Family and Community Development Committee report into supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability and/or a mental illness. The member for Shepparton is a member of that committee. Naturally that committee looked at supported residential services and handed down a large swag of recommendations in its report. But in paragraph 11.3.3

the report also provides an analysis of the operation of rooming houses in this state. It certainly makes for stark reading when it talks about the fact that rooming houses are not regulated in the same way that SRSs are regulated. It states on page 366:

Rooming houses, however, are unregulated and do not have community visitors visiting these premises to discuss the standards and care received by residents.

Clause 184 of the bill before the house deals with community visitors and the role of community services and their functions. Whilst that is commendable in itself there are certainly issues that need to be addressed, such as those the member for Mildura talked about, as to the appropriate level of training and assistance that will be provided to those people. It is clear not only from the general experience of those who are living in boarding houses who have spoken to me but also from the report itself that more still needs to be done with respect to the operation of rooming houses. That the task is there for the government is obvious from previous reports, and the annual statement of government intentions has highlighted the fact that action would be taken with respect to rooming houses.

Despite the protestations of those opposite on this issue the reality is that there are still many people living in facilities that are clearly unregulated. My community is gravely concerned because people can operate these facilities, which are effectively deemed to be normal residential homes, in which up to 10 rooms can be rented out.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — It gives me great pleasure to rise to make a few brief comments in support of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010. I particularly want to note the valuable contributions — the bipartisan contributions, I might add — of the member for Williamstown and the member for Shepparton, which were measured, quite moving and powerful. I will give the member for Ferntree Gully a degree of latitude in my assessment of his contribution, because whilst he might be motivated by the best of intentions I think he might well also be confused in his blurring of the boundaries between the supported residential services component of the market, for want of a better phrase, and the more general notion of private boarding houses/rooming houses.

To respond to some of the comments that the honourable member made in closing his contribution, this government has been far from inactive in the more general area of boarding houses. With the indulgence of the Acting Speaker I might wander ever so briefly from the purpose of this bill to say that, having had the opportunity to chair the review by the Minister for

Housing and the Minister for Consumer Affairs on rooming house standards, which was initiated by the Premier, I know that panel did a significant amount of work, which is still well and truly under way. I might say that, sadly, from that review we learnt of many incidences of very poorly run private sector boarding houses such as the member for Ferntree Gully referred to. I am disappointed that he has left the chamber because I was going to point out that one of the most disturbing examples we managed to find was in his electorate. It was sad to note that the honourable member actively campaigned against rooming houses in that particular area rather than for the sorts of goals that he described to try to improve those standards. But having said that — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! I trust the honourable member will now return to the legislation before the house.

Mr FOLEY — Absolutely, Acting Speaker. It is with great pride that I do so, and I welcome the bipartisan nature of the house's support for this bill because that does not come easily, as we have seen. We have seen some very opportunistic moves by those opposite on very straightforward bills to oppose sensible reforms across a whole range of areas, so it was pleasing to see that the hard work of building consensus over time, through the important work of the parliamentary committee system, and extensive community consultation right across the state with some of our most vulnerable fellow citizens in supported residential services — indeed through a whole range of creative and innovative ways of engaging with some of our most vulnerable fellow citizens who need to operate and sustain their lives in the supported residential service (SRS) model — has paid off.

Although we have heard many harrowing stories in the reports of the parliamentary committee that have been referred to in some of the contributions here tonight, what this bill is really about and what the outcome of three years, if not more, of hard public policy development has been about is actually to try to bring some hope into the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens who eke out their existence in SRSs. As we are all well aware — and I have heard reference to this — some of those SRSs are actually quite decent places to live, and the object of the exercise is to bring them all up to best practice standards, to engender hope and expectations that even our most vulnerable citizens on low incomes with multiple and complex needs have the opportunity to live in affordable, secure and accessible housing. That is this government's strategic aim, whether that accommodation is SRSs, boarding

houses, caravan parks or anywhere else, and that is a position reflected in the Victorian integrated housing strategy. Indeed it has just one expression in this bill, and I look forward to it being expressed in a number of other bills that were forecast earlier this year in the government's statement of legislative intentions.

I will perhaps briefly focus on some of the aspects of this public policy approach that drive its effectiveness, which the minister referred to in her second-reading speech. The minister identified five main principles that shine through in all the contributions that honourable members have made here this evening. They are, firstly, to establish a regulatory scheme that is effective for this sector. We have heard many suggestions that there are more SRSs than there should be that escape the regulatory model. Perhaps more importantly, such a regulatory scheme needs to, to quote the minister:

...maintain a balance between protecting the interests of residents and imposing obligations on people responsible for the provision of services to those residents...

That is, to strike an effective and fair balance between the obligations of the private sector provider and these vulnerable citizens. The third principle the minister correctly identified is that of accessibility. Again, to quote her speech:

...the regulatory scheme and associated documentation and decision-making processes should be open, clear and understandable to all involved.

Finally, the regulations should not be rigid to the point of being difficult to apply in a sector in which 6000 persons rely on these SRSs. They should not necessarily be one-size-fits-all, given the diverse range of facilities and locations and the diverse range of people who need the support of a well-run SRS. Such a system needs to be flexible to meet the emerging issues in the sector both now and as it will no doubt continue to evolve, as it has done continually over the past 30 years. Finally, given the large amount of support from both private and public quarters in this area, such an investment needs to be an efficient use of the resources of the Victorian community.

So those five pillars of the public policy approach have been brought to bear throughout, including community consultation, the Parliamentary committees assessment process, the drafting of the bill and its introduction in this place.

As the minister also noted in her second-reading speech, the bill has focused on a particular set of areas to bring hope of a better existence to all those who rely on SRSs for their particular areas of need. To quote

from the minister's second-reading speech once more, the reforms in this area include:

- strengthening occupancy rights;
- strengthening financial protections;
- building staff capability;
- introducing new enforcement mechanisms;
- strengthening reporting of serious incidents;
- introducing outcome-based standards; and
- streamlining administration processes.

It is against that background that it gives me significant pleasure in saying that this bill has received the broad support of both sides of this house, perhaps with the exception of the less-than-generous contribution of the member for Ferntree Gully. I could be rude and refer to the ill-informed judgements of the member for Ferntree Gully, but as a general proposition I would say that the less-than-informed and perhaps confused contribution of the member for Ferntree Gully was unbecoming of this debate, which has been marked by broad consensus and support across this place.

In making one final contribution I would point to the introduction of outcomes-based standards.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The time has come for me to interrupt proceedings of the house. The member will have the call when this matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Fishing: poaching

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — The issue I raise is for the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is for the minister to immediately increase the number of fisheries officers to reduce the significant and increasing problem of poaching in Victorian waters. I am advised that there should be 76 fisheries officers in Victoria but currently there are only 58, which is 24 per cent below what is needed to protect our fisheries. I am further advised that during the busy Easter period this year, when there was a real need to monitor and police recreational fishing as well as to

prevent poaching of valuable abalone and crayfish, there were only eight fisheries officers actually on duty.

The minister would be acutely aware of the devastation caused by the outbreak of ganglioneuritis virus in our extremely valuable wild-catch abalone industry. Therefore he should understand the very real concerns of the industry about the increasing levels of poaching, which not only represent theft of valuable abalone from the sea but also are likely to increase the spread of this deadly abalone disease.

Similarly, the rock lobster industry is facing major challenges, with massive cuts to quotas in recent years, and poachers are stealing valuable crayfish from our waters, making it even tougher for our hardworking professional crayfishers. In addition to the 24 per cent cut in numbers of fisheries officers, I am advised that the Brumby government has curtailed the use of overtime and other penalty payments, which has meant a significant drop in the number of officers working at weekends and after hours when more, not less, policing of our waterways is needed because there is a much greater likelihood of illegal activity and poaching taking place at weekends and after hours.

The government promised that more fisheries officers would be appointed when marine parks were created and when the cost of recreational fishing licences increased to cover marine waters. The Community and Public Sector Union, however, advised that since 2003 there has been a 20 per cent cut in the number of fisheries officers in Victoria. Indeed it has been said by many that Victoria is becoming a poacher's paradise because of the lack of enforcement and the lack of fisheries officers, and this poacher's paradise is causing enormous damage to our abalone and crayfish industries and many other aspects of our commercial fishing industry.

What we need from the minister is immediate action to protect our fisheries by recruiting more fisheries officers and ensuring that those officers have the funding to do their jobs properly, protect our fisheries and ensure that we have long-term sustainable fisheries in Victoria.

Williamstown electorate: men's health

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I seek from the Minister is for him to accept an invitation to visit the Williamstown electorate in the coming months to speak with local men about their health and wellbeing. I make this request at a time when the Victorian government is developing its first

ever men's health and wellbeing strategy. As part of the development of this strategy the Minister for Health, together with the Minister for Mental Health, released a comprehensive background paper earlier this year. The foreword of the background paper states:

Men in Victoria enjoy an excellent level of health compared with international benchmarks. However, in a range of areas such as life expectancy, avoidable mortality and health risk behaviours, research shows us that more attention is needed.

The background paper, which is publicly available on the Department of Health's website, makes clear that comparatively men fare worse than women as they are more likely to have unhealthy lifestyles due to a range of factors including poor diet, excessive alcohol and tobacco use, lower rates of physical activity when over 35 years of age and greater participation in a range of high-risk activities. I am aware that in the area of women's health the Victorian government has already undertaken substantial work which most notably led to the development and launch of a women's health strategy in 2006. I am sure that the consultations and submissions to the men's health background paper will provide an excellent and exciting platform for the development of Victoria's first men's health and wellbeing strategy.

There is a genuine appetite amongst men to learn more about their health. Many men want to understand what preventive steps or lifestyle changes they should take to achieve better health outcomes. In July last year my office organised what we thought would be a small event to discuss prostate cancer awareness. We organised the Prostate Cancer Foundation to come along and give a presentation and invited speakers such as Ted Whitten, Jr, and urologist Dr Douglas Travis to share their experiences and expertise. As I said, we expected about 50 people to come along but to our surprise and delight we filled all 180 seats at the Williamstown Sailing Club, and there were many more people standing. This event was a simple demonstration of the interest in men's health that currently exists.

I plan to conduct some further men's health and wellbeing sessions in the coming months which will be led by local GP, Dr Murray Verso. This is a good opportunity to invite the Minister for Health to visit the electorate and engage with local men about their health and wellbeing, as I am sure it will provide him with a valuable and practical understanding from men in my electorate, which should help to inform Victoria's first ever men's health and wellbeing strategy.

Rheola Charity Carnival: commencement time

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — The issue I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Small Business. I seek the minister's help to resolve how the Rheola Charity Carnival, which is always held on Easter Monday, can be successfully run in 2011 given that next year Easter Monday is also Anzac Day. This event has been running successfully for 140 years apart from one year during World War II.

It is the annual society event in Rheola, which is a small community in the south-east of my electorate. The population of the Rheola district swells 20-fold or 30-fold on Easter Monday as people flock to the Rheola Memorial Pioneer Park to watch or participate in the vintage tractor pull, woodchopping events, sheepdog trials, the Rheola gift footrace, pony club events, clay target shooting, a ute display, a vintage steam engine display and the much-anticipated Miss Carnival Girl competition each year.

Dr Napthine — Is that a bit sexist?

Mr WALSH — And Carnival Boy! This year the carnival raised \$23 000, which is to be shared by the Inglewood and Dunolly health services. The carnival normally commences its activities at 9.00 a.m., but in 2011 Easter Monday is Anzac Day and under the ANZAC Day Act it cannot start until 1.00 p.m. or the organisers could be subject to a \$10 000 fine for starting earlier.

The committee has written to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the office of the Minister for Small Business, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, the RSL and Business Victoria, at this stage without a successful conclusion to the issues. The organisers have received support from the RSL provided recognition of Anzac Day is given with a service and a minute's silence is observed.

Many of the committee members are descendents of veterans who have served in the armed forces for Australia and believe it would be the largest Anzac Day service ever held in Rheola if the two events can be run concurrently. The committee proposes to hold a service commencing at 11.00 a.m. and then to have the charity carnival starting at 11.30 a.m. This matter comes under the auspices of the Minister for Small Business, and I seek his intervention so that the Anzac Day service in Rheola can commence at 11.00 a.m. and the 141st Rheola Charity Carnival can then start at 11.30 a.m.

I look forward to a successful conclusion to the issue from the Minister for Small Business and an even more successful Rheola Charity Carnival next year. If we can resolve this issue, I will give the minister a personal invitation to attend the carnival with me and help to distribute the prizes for the Miss Carnival Girl competition.

Crime: Forest Hill electorate

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is for the minister to inform my constituents of the reasons for the decrease in crime in both the Whitehorse and Monash municipalities in my electorate over the past 12 months when compared to the previous year and let them know what further action is being taken to make our streets safe.

The latest Victorian police statistics as at March 2010 revealed that for the period from April 2009 to March 2010 the total number of crimes decreased by 3.3 per cent in the city of Whitehorse and, inspirationally, by 17.2 per cent in the city of Monash when compared to the same period the year before.

I read in the local newspapers occasional articles on thefts that are being investigated and assaults that have occurred. There are many programs and campaigns that local police are running to crack down on crimes such as motor vehicle theft and crimes against property. As does every Forest Hill constituent, I congratulate the local police of both Nunawading and Glen Waverley police stations for their efforts and continued hard work to ensure that the Forest Hill electorate remains a safe place to live, work and raise a family.

The recent crime statistics are a testament to the terrific job being done by everybody involved. However, there is more that needs to be done. I have spoken previously in this house on the matter of community safety, as it is vital that people feel safe in their homes and on the streets. Senior Victorians are represented as victims of crime in my area, and since 18.1 per cent of the population in my electorate is aged 65 and over, feeling safe is a concern for many of those constituents. Living life in fear is not a choice anyone would make.

The latest crime statistics are great news and show our streets are becoming even safer. I am still approached by constituents in my mobile office or at my community morning teas with stories of and concerns about violence, particularly in the city precinct, and a perception that we need more police patrolling the streets.

I welcome the recent commitment by this government to increase the number of front-line police by 1966 over the next five years. This will be the single biggest increase in police numbers in the history of Victoria and will go a long way to making certain that the people of Forest Hill and across Victoria feel safe.

With increased equipment and resources and new and tougher laws this government has given police what they need to take further action to reduce the crime rate, in Whitehorse and Monash in particular. This needs to continue, so I ask the minister to confirm to drivers and other constituents the reason for the decrease in criminal activity that we see in my electorate, based on the current crime statistics, and look at what further actions can be taken to ensure everyone feels safe on our streets.

Yarra Street, Warrandyte: bus bays

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport and I ask that he release the reports and evaluations behind the decision to remove the bus bay indentations along Yarra Street, Warrandyte. At this moment work is under way to remove the bays where buses currently pull off the road to let passengers get on and off. The Department of Transport has said that this procedure will help to ease congestion and prevent the buses from being delayed through having to wait to merge with the traffic. While the Department of Transport believes this will ease congestion, just about every person you speak to who actually lives in Warrandyte believes it will increase congestion on the township's main road.

How can a bus stopping in front of a line of traffic while passengers get on and off, pay for their fares and have their tickets checked help with the flow of traffic? How can stopping traffic that was previously moving help traffic congestion?

In typical form this change has been made by the government without any consultation with the residents of Warrandyte, the traders or the peak community body, the Warrandyte Community Association. These changes will certainly not come without a significant financial cost — a cost which perhaps would have been justified if some sort of trial period had been established in order to prove that such changes were beneficial. Instead the money will be spent on an unproven process, which no doubt will be reversed at some stage down the track should the congestion issues worsen, all at additional taxpayers expense.

Warrandyte residents have worked hard in the past to preserve the character and ambience of Yarra Street in

the face of an increased population and more recently amidst concerns about the capacity of the local road network to cope with an evacuation during a bushfire disaster. What they have achieved through their work has continued to be an iconic part of Warrandyte and a centrepiece of the town.

There are many projects in Warrandyte that could have had money spent on them instead of wasting money on work that the community did not ask for and which will likely not achieve the intended results. At a minimum the community should be made aware of the reasoning behind the bus bay changes to gain some understanding as to why the government believes the changes will benefit the local road users. To that end I ask the minister to release to the community the study or review that led to these works being done.

Leisure Networks, Geelong: funding

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I raise a matter on tonight's adjournment with the Minister for Community Development, and I am pleased to see that she is in the chamber. The issue I raise relates to Leisure Networks, which operates out of my electorate of Geelong but covers the greater Geelong region and the Barwon south-west region, and its proactive approach towards grassroots participation in sport in the region through its sports access program.

The action I seek from the minister is to provide full support to Leisure Networks in its application for a community support grant. For the information of members, Leisure Networks works to promote and strengthen community sport and recreation and health opportunities for people of all abilities across the Barwon south-west region of Victoria. Importantly, it has a strong focus on supporting young people with disabilities. It is a great organisation that does a great job.

Leisure Networks is seeking a \$30 000 grant to deliver a feasibility study and business plan for its sports access program. The program aims to address the economic barriers that prevent youth from actively participating in local sport and recreation activities. The program will target communities in Geelong and the wider region. The important part of the proposed feasibility study will be to identify the groups this program most needs to target.

The sports access program has been trialled successfully and has provided financial support to primary schoolchildren in the region. A review by Deakin University showed that the participants in the program and their families continue to be actively

involved in sporting clubs and activities and that the benefits include not only social connectedness but also improved health and wellbeing. The program has been actively supported by the local business community — and I congratulate the local business community on supporting the program — and also by various local councils within the region. There is a great willingness within the community to see the program continue well into the future. I am more than willing to provide my personal support for the program into the future.

This feasibility study will enable Leisure Networks to come up with a sustainable model to allow that to happen. In providing my full support I am sure that the government, and the minister, will also provide support to Leisure Networks through meeting its funding application, which will then allow this great and effective program to continue to help young people across the Geelong and Barwon south-west region become healthier and more socially connected.

Echuca: kindergarten facilities

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I wish to raise the issue of a crisis looming in the Echuca community and no doubt right around the state relating to the planned changes to the kindergarten hours under the federal government's universal access program. I call on the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development to give an assurance that funding will be made available to provide the additional kindergarten facilities that will be needed to meet the new requirement.

Under the changes every four-year-old child will have to attend kindergarten for at least 15 hours a week for a minimum of 40 weeks a year by 2013. While the intent of the change is admirable, the practical implementation of this policy is causing headaches in Echuca, the largest centre of my electorate of Rodney. Demand for preschool at 10 hours a week has exceeded supply within Echuca for many years, and extending the requirement to 15 hours per week will effectively boost demand for the service by a further 50 per cent.

I ask the minister just how these preschool centres are expected to cope with the new requirement. Already the Echuca South Community Preschool has indicated quite clearly that it will not have sufficient space to accommodate the 98 children who currently access the service if it has to provide a 15-hour weekly kindergarten program. The preschool, with the support of the Shire of Campaspe and the Loddon Mallee Preschool Association, recently sought funding under the 2009–10 children's capital program renovation and refurbishment grant to extend their building to enable

the universal access program to be fully implemented. However, the minister's department flatly rejected the application, leaving the Echuca South Community Preschool committee bewildered, frustrated and disappointed.

The government put aside funding in the last budget to purchase land for a new state primary school in Echuca West. It would appear to be the ideal opportunity for the government to plan and develop a completely new preschool centre of a size that would meet current and future demands under the universal access plan.

I call on the minister to outline her plans to meet the requirements of the new program in Echuca. This is not something new; it is something that the government has been aware of for many months — certainly enough time to have formulated a plan or at least a strategy to tackle the issue, which is causing major concerns among those charged with providing preschool education. Providing details of the government's plan would also alleviate the real concerns of parents, who at this stage face the prospect of their children not being able to access kindergartens for the required hours or in some cases missing out all together.

High Street–Epping–Findon–O'Herns roads, Epping: traffic lights

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports. The action I seek is for him to have VicRoads examine the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of High Street and Epping, Findon and O'Herns roads in Epping to alleviate the congestion that is currently being experienced.

There is a good reason for families moving to Epping. They are choosing to move there in record numbers because it is a great place to live, work and raise a family. There is a fantastic local environment: the red gums have been retained in the area, and there are good local hospitals, a great shopping precinct and the excellent Epping Views Primary School, which is offering a great education to locals.

Like most locals, I travel through this intersection regularly, so I know firsthand how frustrating it has become to travel there due to the congestion that is being experienced. Local families would like to see traffic lights installed at this intersection so as to alleviate congestion. The Brumby Labor government is investing in vital services such as a better transport system so that Victorians can spend more time with their families and less time in traffic.

With the support of locals, we have been able to achieve traffic improvements such as the installation of traffic lights at the High Street and Cooper Street intersection; the duplication of Cooper Street, which I understand will provide further good news along that road; the delivery of the Craigieburn bypass; the extension of Edgars Road; and the establishment and expansion of the 575 bus route. I would encourage more locals to use this great service and to call my office if they need a timetable, because encouraging a modal shift from cars to buses will also be a good way to alleviate congestion at this intersection.

I am glad that the Liberal Party finally saw sense and supported the introduction of a growth areas infrastructure contribution, which means we as a state government will have access to more funds from developers to speed up the delivery of roads and public transport and the installation of traffic lights to improve traffic speeds and safety in the area.

The government has also given a commitment to build the E6 freeway, a new north–south route that will take traffic away from local roads such as High Street, Findon Road and O'Herns Road. I encourage the minister to continue the good work in this area and look at installing traffic lights at this intersection.

Port of Hastings: future

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports. The action I seek is for the minister to come to Hastings, meet with the Western Port community and to listen to why it is critical that the port of Hastings be allowed to develop as a competitor to the port of Melbourne and not simply remain as its dumping ground for toxic and other low-value and unwanted industries. The recent defeat of the government's bill that would have gifted ownership of the port of Hastings to the port of Melbourne has provided the government with an opportunity to reconsider its flawed strategy. The development of the port of Hastings is one of the most crucial steps in the future prosperity of Victoria and must be undertaken now but with great care for and sensitivity to the unique character of the Western Port area. In many ways the Brumby government's recently defeated bill was attempting to legislate a situation that had already been established by stealth.

It would be a surprise to many but, contrary to the government's rhetoric, the government has already ruled out allowing any of the valuable container business to go to Hastings until at least 2035. When trying to understand what the Brumby government is trying to achieve and why, it is useful to consider what

the department and Labor members of Parliament have said on the matter. At the briefing on the government's bill the department suggested that the government had tried the competitive model but that it had not worked.

The government's document entitled *Port Futures — New Priorities and Directions for Victoria's Ports System* also makes it clear that the Brumby government will not allow the port of Hastings to compete with the port of Melbourne. It states:

Under the current 'competitive' model, the incentives for PMC are to maximise throughput through Melbourne and defer diversion to Hastings for as long as possible. This includes retaining all existing non-containerised trades for as long as possible, as well as retaining the container trade.

This statement underlines the fact that under the Brumby government the port of Melbourne is in charge. At page 20 the same document states that all of the valuable international container trade is earmarked exclusively for Melbourne until it reaches capacity in around 2035.

During debate on the government's bill in the other place on 22 June Ms Tierney, a Labor member for Western Victoria Region, made it very clear that Labor does not believe that Victorian ports should ever compete against each other. The member suggested that that situation would be shameful, as it would be Victorians competing against each other. These statements identify not only the government's intentions but the severely distorted view it has of competition and its benefits. Decades of experience around the world have comprehensively proven that where there is real competition efficiencies develop, costs are controlled and living standards improve for the community. Where there is no competition efficiencies drop, costs artificially inflate and the community inevitably pays through lower living standards and higher prices. This government has chosen to prevent competition, and Victorians will be worse off because of that.

The port of Hastings is nothing more than a convenience for this city-centric Labor government. It is just somewhere it can send the toxic and other unwanted, low-value industries that the port of Melbourne rejects. The government's plan for the port of Hastings will see toxic and unwanted industries forced on the Western Port area. The fact that the government intends to use existing infrastructure will severely compromise local services. The Brumby government plan will damage the local environment, gridlock local roads in the Western Port area, destroy the Stony Point rail passenger line, totally industrialise

Crib Point and put massive numbers of B-double trucks on local roads through our local communities.

Crime: Cranbourne electorate

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is for the minister to do everything in his power to ensure that residents in the electorate of Cranbourne are kept safe. It is a great pleasure to know that this government delivers when it comes to community safety in the electorate of Cranbourne, including by providing more police, a multimillion-dollar state-of-the-art police station and tougher laws to deal with antisocial behaviour. During its term in office this Labor government has delivered a state-of-the-art police station in Cranbourne and is now delivering a state-of-the-art police station in Carrum Downs, from where 20 new front-line officers will service Carrum Downs, Langwarrin and their surrounds.

My reason for raising this matter is that when I have recently knocked on many doors and spoken to many people one issue that keeps appearing is crime, and specifically antisocial behaviour, mainly late at night. I recently had the pleasure of working with police command and the local council in closing off some of these hot spots with the installation of lockable gates. It was also with great pleasure that I welcomed the recent quarterly crime statistics that came out about two weeks ago. These statistics clearly identify that crime is still declining in the Frankston and Casey police area. Statistics for the Frankston police service area show that crimes against the person are down 11.6 per cent, crimes against property are down 9.1 per cent, drug offences are down 16.4 per cent, total crime is down 10.9 per cent and assaults are down 13.7 per cent. In the Casey police service area they show that crimes against the person are down 5 per cent, crimes against property are down 7.2 per cent, drug offences are down 6 per cent, total crime is down by 6.9 per cent and assaults are down 1.5 per cent.

I commend all police officers in both the Frankston and Casey service areas for the great job they do in protecting our local communities. I hope the continuing strong support of the Brumby Labor government will help local police maintain their efforts and keep our valued community safe.

Responses

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Community Development) — I wish to thank the member for Geelong for his enthusiasm for the project he has

promoted and for the support he gives wholeheartedly to his community in general terms. I know that he is a very active supporter of a number of community projects and initiatives in his electorate.

The member for Geelong has asked me to support a Victorian community support grant application by Leisure Networks for \$30 000 of funding to deliver a feasibility study and a business plan to ensure the sustainability of its piloted sports access program. The Victorian community support grants aim to build stronger, more active and more inclusive communities and neighbourhoods. These grants certainly go a long way to help communities build on their assets, which range from local skills and knowledge and the strength of social connections and networks to facilities, buildings and other infrastructure. Project planning grants ensure that project proposals are well planned, involve the right people and are very clear in what they are aiming to achieve. They are about ensuring that the necessary levers are in place to ensure the sustainability of a project before communities spend many dollars testing to see whether it is sustainable.

In this case Leisure Networks would like to use grant money to prepare a feasibility study and business plan so as to justify the ongoing delivery and future expansion of the sports access program to a broader range of groups throughout the Geelong region. As the member for Geelong has explained, the sports access program aims to address the economic barriers which prevent young people from getting involved and accessing local sport and recreational activities. I understand this project is supported by G21, an alliance of councils in the area, and the project supports the objectives of the G21 health and wellbeing pillar. I am well aware that studies show that active children tend to become active adults, and significant links have been identified between youth obesity, social exclusion and socioeconomic disadvantage. By removing the economic barriers to youth involvement in sport and recreation activities the program can have a life-changing impact on many young people.

The member for Geelong referred to the Deakin University review of the pilot of the sports access program, the findings of which were extremely positive. I understand that the program so far has seen more than 100 students from 13 different primary schools get actively involved with more than 30 sporting clubs in the Corio and Norlane areas and in the East Geelong and Whittington areas. The members for Lara and Bellarine are also very proud of this achievement.

I will certainly be looking carefully at the Leisure Networks application, but for now let me thank the member for Geelong for taking the time to support the hard work of his constituents. I would also like to thank the people at Leisure Networks for their work in rolling out this program to date, and for the time they have taken to ensure its sustainability. Clearly a lot of time and effort has been dedicated to the program. I am sure that Leisure Networks project will be well planned and that its business case will be well developed.

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — With respect to the point raised by the member for South-West Coast, I think I should start my response by indicating that, regretfully, one cannot take everything the member says as being well thought through or entirely truthful. If you look, for example, at half-witted throwaway lines like ‘poacher’s paradise’, you can just imagine the member for South-West Coast sitting in front of a mirror practising saying ‘poacher’s paradise’, as he does sitting here during question time and grimacing to the gallery.

Let me assure the member for South-West Coast that I value very much what the dedicated fisheries officers in this state do, and I value very much what they achieve in terms of prosecutions and in terms of their efforts to ensure that fisheries in Victoria are managed sustainably. I also recognise that history has it that there are far more fisheries officers now than there were when the member for South-West Coast’s party was last in power. Putting a historical perspective on it, it is regrettable that the member for South-West Coast can regurgitate nothing other than a bit of rhetoric and cannot be constructively engaged.

The member for Swan Hill raised a matter regarding the Rheola Charity Carnival and portrayed the carnival, which is held on Easter Monday each year, as a great community event that does a terrific amount of good for the hospitals and other charities it supports. It brings an enormous amount of enjoyment to those who participate and those who visit, and having attended that charity carnival some years ago, I must say I share the member’s views and also think it is a terrific event.

Unfortunately, as the member pointed out, next year the event will fall on an Easter Monday that coincides with Anzac Day, and under section 5A of the ANZAC Day Act 1958 entertainment must not be provided before 1.00 p.m. at a place where an admission fee is charged or a donation is sought from patrons. I am very happy to continue working with the organising committee, as I have done already and as my office and my department have done, but I think all members, and I am sure the member for Swan Hill, would recognise that the

celebration — not the celebration but the commemoration — of Anzac Day needs to be paramount in our minds on Anzac Day.

Dr Naphthine interjected.

Mr HELPER — I corrected myself.

Dr Naphthine interjected.

Mr HELPER — Maybe the member for South-West Coast should have had one less glass of red over dinner.

Dr Naphthine — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I take offence at the remark made by the Minister for Agriculture. I did not have any glasses of red at dinner. I think that was an offensive remark by a minister who is not up to the task, and I ask for its withdrawal.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! There is no point of order.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — The member for South-West Coast explained his position, so there is no point of order. The minister to continue.

Dr Naphthine — On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, I took offence at the remark made by the minister, and I ask him to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The member for South-West Coast corrected the record in his contribution, so there is no point of order. The minister to continue.

Mr HELPER — To continue — —

Dr Naphthine — On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, it is the normal practice of this house that when a member seeks a withdrawal because someone has made an offensive remark or assertion, that remark or assertion is withdrawn. The minister has made an offensive assertion, and I ask that it be withdrawn. I think that is the normal procedure.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! On that basis I ask the minister to withdraw.

Mr HELPER — I withdraw.

To continue my response to the member for Swan Hill, I also understand, and the member mentioned it when raising his adjournment matter, that the Rheola Charity Carnival organising committee approached the RSL

seeking some support and has received some support in terms of ensuring that the event could commence at 11.30 a.m. after an Anzac Day ceremony to be held, I presume, at the venue which is the site of the carnival. My understanding is that the RSL has supported the event, as you would expect it to because it is such a worthy event, but has stressed that it could not sanction entertainment activities at the carnival beginning before 1.00 p.m.

I will genuinely continue to work with the organising committee for the carnival in trying to seek a compromise solution for this event. Given the rarity of Anzac Day falling on Easter Monday, there will certainly have to be a significant amount of give on the part of the carnival organising committee. I sincerely hope that the commemoration of Anzac Day and the carnival can coexist next year when they coincide on the same day.

I will refer the matters raised by the members for Williamstown, Forest Hill, Warrandyte, Rodney, Yan Yean, Hastings and Cranbourne to the relevant ministers.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.40 p.m.

