LETTER FROM
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About the editor
Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB
Alistair Urquhart graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, in Law, History and Politics. He may even hold the record for miles rowed on Lake Burley Griffin.

About the publisher
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editorial

Learn how to shout better

Anyone in Melbourne with a spare hour on the days that the Victorian Parliament sits, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday about every second or third week depending on the month, can visit the public gallery of either of the two Chambers and quietly watch the sometimes very noisy proceedings. 2 pm is often the best because that’s Question Time in the Assembly, but it can also get interesting and noisy at other times. Most people, professionals, school students and anyone else would often be surprised if not disgusted, as the parliamentarians act out and shout across the historical and architecturally beautiful chambers. Attendant staff refer to a noise level of one up to 10!

What is the MP’s role in life??

An almost worse case scenario happened this past week. Noise level 10!

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Ken Smith surprised the Parliament by closing the lower house until 26 November when it would normally next sit.

Victorian Premier Denis Napthine has backed Parliamentary Speaker Ken Smith who is facing increasing pressure from the Opposition to resign for not commanding support from the majority of the House. Dr Napthine blamed the shutdown on the bad behaviour of Opposition MPs. ‘People who saw the Parliament today would know who to blame.’

Mr Smith is refusing to bow to Opposition demands that he resign.

When Parliament began on Thursday morning, the Opposition resumed its attack on the Speaker almost immediately with senior Labor MP Jacinta Allan leading the charge. She again asked him to consider his position. ‘We on this side of the House are gravely concerned about the bias that’s shown from the chair, about the partisan that’s shown from the chair.’ Smith tried to call the House to order.

The sitting then descended into chaos, with virtually all Labor MPs shouting at Smith. Smith says the Opposition is trying to provoke a vote that could force the Government to fall and he will not stand for it. ‘I’m not going to do that. I’ll just suspend the sitting of the Parliament.’

There had been uproar in Parliament on Tuesday when independent MP Geoff Shaw sided with the Opposition to express a lack of confidence in Smith.

It was the first time Shaw has sided with the Opposition since he left the parliamentary Liberal Party in March, giving him the balance of power in the Lower House. Shaw voted against the Government’s business program, which is the preferred order of legislative debate.

The Government is insisting Mr Smith’s position is safe. You may hear the noise right down Bourke Street on 26 November.

Cover. Mr Ken Smith is the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Before he entered Parliament some 22 or so years ago, Ken had been an active leader of the Master Plumbers Association, and hence very active in the then Fight between the small business end of town and the unions.

Happy Reading. Happy hearing.

– Alistair Urquhart

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State government & politics

Well positioned
Victoria’s economic strengths will sweep it ahead in the next twenty years, positioning it to capture the demand from Asia’s middle class for everything from better food to education and better returns on its investments, a report by consultancy firm Deloitte forecasts. The report, ‘Positioning Australia for Prosperity? Catching the Next Wave’, predicts that six ‘super-sectors’ will grow faster than the rest of the global economy. It says Australia generally, and Victoria specifically, has unique advantages in almost all of them.

Economic boost
A last-quarter dividend binge worth almost $250 million has underpinned a higher than expected surplus for Victoria as the state government has sought to squeeze life from its balance sheet. Premier Denis Napthine recently released the full year financial report for the 2013 financial year showing a surplus of $316 million. According to the Financial Review, a surprisingly good performance from the state’s water companies reaped $171 million. A further $64 million came thanks to special dividend from Snowy Hydro. The accounts also show the government pocketed $350 million from the State Electricity Corporation of Victoria as a special dividend. The SECV is a corporate shell that largely administers the state’s electricity contracts with Alcoa. This dividend stemmed from the SECV’s trading activities and was quietly banked against the 2012-13 financial year when the 2013-14 budget was announced in May. All up dividends totalled $1.17 billion in 2013 compared to just $665 million the previous year.

In the black
According to The Age, the state government delivered a budget surplus almost twice as big as expected last financial year - partly attributing the revenue windfall to ‘free’ income from improved bus shelters and a ‘special dividend’ from Snowy Hydro. A final tally by Treasury has revealed the budget was in surplus by $316 million in 2012-13, well above the $177 million predicted in the May budget. Treasurer Michael O’Brien vowed to protect Victoria’s budget position and maintain the state’s AAA credit rating, signalling ongoing austerity despite the state election next year.

Adieu
According to the Herald Sun, Philip Davis will resign from Parliament after 21 years ahead of the redistribution of electoral boundaries. Elected in 1992, Mr Davis served as the member for Gippsland and then the Eastern Victoria Region. In 1983, farmers wanted to improve productivity by introducing a wider comb for shearers (wider than 2.5 inches, which had been the standard). Shearers feared it would attract cheaper labor from New Zealand, and was not in accordance with the shearers’ award. Phillip Davis was a farmer at the time, who chose to shear through the strike. He remembers the violence and what he calls ‘industrial intimidation’.

Facing purge
According to The Australian, up to eight long-serving MPs are being encouraged or encouraged to resign in the run up to Christmas in the interests of renewal. Deputy leader Louise Asher is the highest profile minister in their sights. Murray Thompson, son of former Liberal Premier Lindsay Thompson, will also face pressure to stand down to provide a safe seat for a potential minister.

Redistribution (1)
New boundaries were released recently, with fifteen of the 88 lower house seats replaced. The changes have left some MPs considering their future ahead of next November’s poll. The most dramatic change was the reduction in the number of rural seats by one - the Echuca-based Rodney electorate, held by the Nationals, has been abolished - and two seats have been created in growth areas of Sunbury and Werribee. Both those seats should fall to Labor, but boundary changes across the state have seen many seats become marginal.

Redistribution (2)
Matthew Guy has been linked to the rural seat of Eildon, created following a shake-up of the state’s electoral boundaries recently. The Planning Minister is an upper house MP, representing the northern metropolitan region that takes in part of the new seat. The biggest loser of last week’s redistribution was senior minister Mary Wooldridge whose Doncaster seat was abolished. Labor wants to finalise preselections before Christmas but the Liberal Party said its preselections are unlikely to be held until next February. The Liberal Party has to realign local branches with the boundary redistribution. Paul Weller’s electorate of Rodney was also abolished, and Labor MPs Daniel Andrews, James Merlino and Lisa Neville are among the MPs whose seats are far tighter than they were before redistribution.

Musings
Josh Gordon in The Age: ‘Neither side of politics was whooping for joy or despairing following the first redrawing of Victoria’s electoral boundaries for 12 years. This is probably a sign that the Victorian Electoral Commission has got it right.

IBAC
To get to the headquarters of Victoria’s anti-corruption commission, walk through the city to a nondescript building on the corner of Collins and William streets, past the cafe in the dimly lit lobby, and up the elevator to the first floor, where a security guard waits at reception. The Age asked: nine months after the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission opened for business, what has happened? The Coalition’s election policy clearly promised a ‘one-stop shop’ to tackle corruption. But to minimise political risk, the government demurred. The commission’s ability to investigate politicians and public servants for misconduct in public office, and limited its jurisdiction so it could only investigate matters that, if proved in trial, would constitute an ‘indictable offence’.

A series of reports tabled in Parliament have given the public the first small glimpse of IBAC’s work in the past few months. One thing is clear: the rate of investigations it conducts, compared with the rate of complaints it receives, is relatively low. Despite having the extraordinary power to tap phones, seize documents and carry firearms, the commission had not applied for any warrants or made a single arrest or prosecution between February 10, when it officially started, and June 30. Over that same period, 638 complaints and disclosures had been assessed - including 131 whistleblower claims - but only six disclosures were investigated. The rest were referred to other integrity bodies because they did not involve serious corruption or were dismissed due to lack of information or insufficient grounds.

Frankston
The Victorian Government would survive the early exit of rogue MP Geoff Shaw by winning a by-election for his electorate of Frankston, according to a poll of voters in the seat. The poll found that while the overwhelming majority of Frankston voters have an unfavourable view of Mr Shaw, who will face court next year on corruption charges, there has been a swing to the Liberal party since the last state election. According to the Herald Sun, if Mr Shaw is convicted and has to leave Parliament, a by-election loss for the Liberal party would see Labor and the Coalition tied with 44 seats, which would likely see an early general election. Also of note was the fact that a clear majority of those polled in Frankston supported the east-west tunnel.

More Shaw
The Victorian government is backing balance of power independent Geoff Shaw, suggesting an elderly man who was injured in a clash with the MP could be guilty of contempt for blocking his way. Police are investigating the incident in which John Zanmit, 79, was left bruised and with blood on his face after clashing with controversial Frankston MP Geoff Shaw.

Video
According to the Herald Sun, Geoff Shaw looks unlikely to be charged over his stoush after footage emerged appearing to back his version of events.

Fire alert error
Victoria’s troubled fire alert system is already causing headaches before the bushfire season has even started, with nearly half a million people incorrectly sent bushfire danger alerts. According to The Age, people with the Fire Ready app - more than 450,000 - received extreme and code red fire warnings despite the weather being wet and cool. Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said the error occurred when test data for the new app, to be released later this month, was incorrectly loaded onto the live system. This meant warnings were sent, and notices were posted on the Country Fire Authority’s website as were updates on new digital warning signs in country towns. He apologised for the mistake.

Rent owed
Public housing tenants owe a record $15.1 million in rent to the state government, with some community workers and politicians blaming the spike in arrears on cuts to a housing support program. According to a report in The Age, rental arrears have increased by 22 per cent in the most financial year, soaring from $12.4 million in 2011-12 to an unprecedented $15.1 million. Greens MP Colleen Hartland said satellite courts to the30,000 Housing Advocacy and Support Program were needed to prevent the spike in unpaid rent. In the past two years, the state government has cut $2.7 million from the
Quote of the month

By the Right Reverend The Honourable Dr Peter Hollingworth AC OBE, given at a Rotary Club of Melbourne weekly Wednesday luncheon in October 2013.

It has been said that politics is about the right ordering of the common good. The idea of the common good will be interpreted by governments in accordance with their political philosophies and managed in somewhat different ways. Any government, especially a new one, will also be strongly influenced by budgetary considerations just as it will seek to base its decisions on its underlying philosophy.

The policy and philosophy of the new Government is based on the belief that the state should not direct civil society, but rather empower it in its endeavours to secure the common good for all its citizens.

Food for Thought! For good Food, Fun, Fellowship and the opportunity of serving, we offer thanks.

TAFE Deal

The Ombudsman is to investigate a contentious decision by Victoria’s top education bureaucrat to pay a former colleague’s company $1 million to oversee TAFE reforms. George Brouwer has written to Higher Education and Skills Minister Peter Hall to advise him of his investigation into Richard Bolt’s hiring of his former primary industries colleague, Marianne Lourey, without a competitive tender process.

After the Coalition government slashed TAFE budgets, Mr Bolt last year used his special powers to override the state’s purchasing guidelines to directly engage Ms Lourey to replace a mid-level public servant to lead the TAFE reform taskforce. Ms Lourey was hired through her company, ACIL Allen, of which she is a director, at a cost of almost $1 million.

Adieu

On the eve of his retirement as founding director of Victoria’s biggest TAFE institute, Bruce Mackenzie confirmed the college’s most ambitious project to date: a $100 million, 150-bed private hospital to be built on Holmesglen’s Moorabbin campus. The hospital will offer training places for nurses studying for their degrees at the $20 million school of nursing, which Mr Mackenzie launched at Moorabbin three years ago. It will eventually, he hopes, incorporate training programs for physiotherapists, podiatrists, nutritionists and other allied health professionals.

Boss bid

Schools would be allowed to recruit principals from all walks of life in a radical move to fill key leadership roles. The Education Department has floated the idea of bringing outsiders into other

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key positions usually taken by senior teachers. According to the Herald Sun, the department believes teachers often are not of the “calibre or quality” to fill more than 200 principal jobs available each year. The proposal has angered the principals’ union, which disputes that people without an educational background can effectively lead schools and manage talented staff.

Sacking teachers

Principals will gain the power to fire poor-performing teachers under a wide-ranging state government plan for Victorian students to rival the world’s best. However, the new responsibility has sparked fears principals could get caught in lengthy legal challenges if sacked teachers contest their terminations. Recently, the Victorian government launched its far-reaching policy that aims to achieve “world-leading education performance” in the next ten years.

Evaluations

One of the most curious and contentious events in Victorian education started recently in regional offices across the state and continued. Almost all of Victoria’s 1530 public school principals will have been briefed for two or three hours by their regional directors about a new process of evaluating the performance of every person who works in schools.

Fast tracking

The Victorian government will consider fast-tracking talented professionals into the classroom amid warnings of an oversupply of primary school teachers. The government has flagged plans to introduce a British program in which accredited schools recruit and train new primary school teachers. The government has been targeted for not having enough supervisors. According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne councils are pulling out all stops to solve the crisis - one setting up kiosks at shopping centres to ask the public for ideas. Even students are being asked to help solve the problem. Booroondara Council, which takes in 108 school crossings across the inner east, has launched a comprehensive effort to find about 40 supervisors. On existing trends as many as ten crossings could be left unmanned if staff aren’t found.

Crossing crunch

Some school crossings could be left unmanned because there are not enough supervisors. According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne councils are pulling out all stops to solve the crisis - one setting up kiosks at shopping centres to ask the public for ideas. Even students are being asked to help solve the problem. Booroondara Council, which takes in 108 school crossings across the inner east, has launched a comprehensive effort to find about 40 supervisors. On existing trends as many as ten crossings could be left unmanned if staff aren’t found.

Energy

Get in quick

Peter Reith is the chair of a Victorian government review of the state’s gas industry that is expected to present its findings within weeks. It is understood the review will recommend the state follow WA’s lead by adopting a “royalties for regions” system to defuse the certain contest between landowners and gas explorers. Mr Reith’s public commentary indicates he has developed a ready understanding of Victoria’s gas challenge. It is clear that unless the state promptly embraces the political challenges of unconventional gas exploration and development, Victoria might within a decade find itself in the same invidious position as NSW.

Rebate lottery

New energy concession restrictions are a postcode lottery that will punish customers in suburbs with the highest electricity and gas prices, a report warns. According to the Herald Sun, the Consumer Action Law Centre and Victorian Council of Social Service have lashed out at changes that will force concession cardholders to apply for discounts on annual costs over $2763 for electricity and $1462 for gas. Residents in Geelong, Footscray, Williamstown, Flemington, Broadmeadows and Werribee will be among the worst affected, their Winners and Losers analysis says. The Victorian Government says its excess energy concession will help weed out fraudulent households running up big bills while operating home businesses or draining power for illegal use such as drug labs. It would also pinpoint homes needing energy saving advice. But the report claims it will create red tape for some low-income families who can’t afford well-insulated housing or efficient heaters and appliances, as well as discriminating by postcode.

Coal

A decision on the results of a tender allocating licences to billions of extra tonnes of brown coal is expected by the end of the year. Deputy Premier Peter Ryan said the government had been talking to “a number of potential purchasers”, particularly in Asia, and there was “a hell of a lot” of interest. “We have invited the market to consider the fact that we have 13 billion tonnes of brown coal available for allocation … in the Latrobe Valley,” he said.

CSG

Victoria has known conventional gas fields in Bass Strait and along its eastern coast. But critics simply don’t buy the industry line, also peddled in NSW, that “unconventional” gas resources such as CSG should be unlocked in order to avoid future shortages and the price hikes they bring. Nor do they accept that ‘fracking’ - in which gas is extracted by pumping water, chemicals and sand deep into the earth through drilled pipelines - is risk free. According to The Age, farmers are worried about the disruption on their properties, and the prospect of gas escaping into drinking water as it rises to the surface. They have seen what has happened in Queensland, where some rivers have started bubbling unusually and landowners can set their bore water alight, apparently because of the chemicals. What the government has not explained is how the delicate balance between industry, consumer needs, agriculture and environment can be achieved. And until it does, it faces one big ‘fracking’ headache.

If you do not understand this article, call our office for a free coffee! You should!
A new federal government signals a time for change

While businesses faced a tough operating quarter in September, the latest VECCI - Bank of Melbourne Survey of business trends and prospects reveals a three-year high in business confidence in a post-election rebound, and a brighter outlook for the year ahead.

The survey reveals that confidence in the Australian economic outlook has strengthened considerably, with 40 per cent of the survey’s respondents anticipating stronger national economic growth over the year ahead. This is an improvement of 21 percentage points on the June quarter 2013, and an improvement of 26 percentage points on the same time last year.

In Victoria, 32 per cent of respondents expect stronger state economic conditions over the coming year, an improvement of 15 percentage points on the previous quarter and 20 percentage points on the same period last year.

However, despite the renewed optimism for the year ahead, the current experience of Victorian businesses, who reported another challenging trading quarter in September, provides a sobering reminder of just how difficult trading conditions continue to be for many businesses.

Reduced sales, falling selling prices continued to fall, and declines in profitability remained widespread. The level of overtime declined, while employment was flat. With the exception of the education, health and community services sector, business performance over the September quarter 2013 was weaker across all surveyed sectors, with the building and construction industry experiencing a particularly challenging period.

While renewed longer-term confidence has emerged in the post-election period, it has not yet translated into further business investment, with survey respondents reporting continued declines in investment in both plant and equipment, and buildings and structures in the September quarter.

Expectations for the December quarter are that selling prices, exports and profitability will begin to recover and may therefore lead to an investment pick up in the second half of 2014. At present, there still appears to be excess capacity in many businesses, with 50 per cent of survey respondents reporting that they are not operating at a satisfactory level of capacity.

In stark contrast to recent surveys, regional respondents were particularly optimistic about near-term economic prospects for both the national and state economies. Regional respondents also experienced stronger sales, exports and selling prices than their metropolitan counterparts in the September quarter.

The positive shift in business sentiment is encouraging and makes clear that the previous parliamentary term was characterised by considerable indecision, policy inconsistency and uncertainty for business.

With business confidence on the rise in a tough trading environment, now is the time for the new federal government to deliver its pro-business pre-election commitments.

These include:
- reducing red tape
- reversing the ALP’s FBT changes to motor vehicles
- abolishing the carbon tax

The VECCI - Bank of Melbourne Survey of business trends and prospects is available to VECCI members only. To obtain your copy, please contact 03 8662 5333.

– VECCI Chief Executive, Mark Stone
Napthine cool
According to the Financial Review, the threat of soaring gas prices will not prompt Victoria to more quickly develop potential gas fields on land, Premier Napthine said. Dr Napthine said Victoria had no urgent need to explore for new gas reserves even though a shortage of gas in NSW and the start of exports from Queensland could put pressure on –Victorian manufacturers that were reliant on gas.

‘Fracking’ ban
The state government is promising to maintain a ban on ‘fracking’ as it moves to head off an electoral backlash from rural communities worried the state government is preparing to open Victoria to onshore gas exploration.

Environment & conservation
Pig hunt
Victorian hunters are calling for clarity on when and where they can cull feral animals on public land. It comes amid reports of rising feral pig numbers in Gippsland and the northeast of the state. According to The Weekly Times, Field and Game chief executive Rod Drew says the organization did not encourage its members to hunt on public land due to the confusion over what was legal and what was not.

Fire season
According to The Age, Victoria’s Country Fire Authority is predicting larger and more severe fires because of climate change, warning emergency service workers will have less time to recover and prepare from one disaster to the next. A CFA planning strategy document identifies climate change as a key threat, concluding there will be ‘more record hot weather’, more heatwaves, more drought and less autumn and winter rain.

Wait and see
According to a report in The Age, almost a third of residents living in bushfire-prone areas say they are prepared to ‘wait and see’ before evacuating, meaning communities risk a high number of fatalities in the event of an extreme bushfire. Experts warn the unexpectedly high ‘wait and see’ response would almost certainly lead to fatalities after surveying residents in bushfire-prone towns and suburbs in Victoria. Final findings after interviewing 600 residents in a national survey updated earlier this year were published by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Council in September. Residents from Beechworth, Delatite, Warrandyte, West Wodonga, Wonga Park and Yackandandah were surveyed. Evidence presented to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission after Black Saturday fires that claimed 173 lives suggested many casualties might have been averted if residents had made and acted upon decisions earlier.

Uproar
Thousands of people who can’t build on their properties because of new bushfire rules may launch a class action against the Victorian Government. According to the Herald Sun, the government has responded by announcing it will set up an advisory committee to look at the changes to mapped bushfire risk zones. More than 20,000 homes and properties across Victoria were recently exempted from red tape and are now being reviewed to determine their bushfire risk. But almost 120,000 properties considered susceptible to ember attack became subject to the bushfire regulations for the first time.

Campers
According to the Herald Sun, families will have to pay to stay at more than 100 of Victoria’s national park campgrounds under a Victorian government plan. In addition, the cost of camping at premium sites will be hiked from $37 a night to $59 a night.

Events
Big Day Out
The future of Australia’s premier music festival, the Big Day Out, is in doubt with music industry sources saying it could fold as early as next year. The 21-year-old festival - which tours in January and February each year through Melbourne, Sydney, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland - cancelled a planned second day in Sydney because of poor ticket sales. It may also have lost control of some lucrative sideshows - the gigs that happen for individual bands at separate venues while on the Big Day Out tour.

No show
According to the Weekly Times, Victorian Agricultural Shows executive officer Rod Bowles said with few notable exceptions usually around growing population centres, most agricultural shows would welcome an injection of new blood. Mr Bowles said the VAS has 115 show society affiliates. “Some are doing better than others but they all need the younger members coming through.” Shrinking communities have not had the volunteers available to do all the work necessary to stage a show. Other shows have become victims to fashion tastes. Cohuna A&P Society pavilion secretary Kylie Thornton said some traditional categories such as preserving, knitting and crochet were struggling for entries, and the rise of the TV chefs had not translated into more cooking entries.

Tourism campaign
Tourism Victoria launched a $3.6 million “virtual tourist experience” as part of its ‘Play Melbourne’ campaign. It’s dubbed the Remote Control Tourist, which, speaking of jigsaw puzzles, claims to be a first in vicarious tourism and one that may well puzzle those still not entirely conversant with social media. The campaign’s objective is to attract the interest of digital-savvy young “opinion leaders” in key interstate markets such as Sydney to take a holiday in the Victorian capital renowned for its lashings of culture, coffee and cool.

In the new “go before you go” campaign, which went live recently, a quartet of young bicycle-pedalling so-called Remote Control Tourists - two males and two females with helmets fitted with video cameras - will be at the disposal of social media devotees for whom Twitter and Facebook are second homes. They’ll be able to deputise for Remote Control Tourists to Melbourne’s tourism delights, such as its laneways, bars and cafes, before actually committing to visiting the city. The Remote Control Tourists’ territory will be bounded by inner-city suburbs such as Collingwood, Fitzroy, Prahran and Carlton.

Health
Tech systems
Hospitals will be given greater autonomy as part of an overhaul of the Victorian health system’s information and communication services, Victoria Health Minister David Davis has revealed. According to The Age, following a review of the previous Labor government’s HealthSMART system, the Coalition is set to announce that health providers will now be able to choose their own system. Currently, all hospitals and other health professionals must use a mandated system.

Child abuse
The tabling of the report by the Family and Community Development Committee of the Parliament into the handling of criminal abuse of children by religious and other organisations. Dr Napthine spoke strongly about the Government’s commitment to respond quickly and decisively to the damning report. The inquiry, chaired by Georgie Crozier MLC, undertook an extensive series of hearings and considered a large volume of public submissions. Dr Napthine said the report is the result of the strong leadership of former Premier Ted Baillieu, who initiated this inquiry, which led to the Commonwealth Government’s Royal Commission and the Special Commissioner of Inquiry in New South Wales. Mr Baillieu’s leadership placed the systemic criminal abuse of children on the national agenda.

Early starter
The Coalition Government has a strong record in protecting Victoria’s vulnerable children, having also initiated the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children’s Inquiry soon after coming to Government in 2010. Dr Napthine made it clear that his Government would immediately commence drafting legislation to implement a number of the key recommendations of the report.

Restraints
According to The Age, a mental health commissioner is urging the Victorian government to ban the use of physical restraint on young children, with disturbing images showing a nine-year-old boy with bruises and welts sustained at a Victorian hospital. National Mental Health Commissioner Jackie Crowe said children as young as seven were being physically restrained in acute mental health units to control their behaviour.

Nursing home
According to a report in The Age, Western Health is due to close a 30-bed nursing home in Melton South next June, with residents to be relocated to other providers in the area.

Regional smoking
The Victorian regional centres of Ballarat, Horsham and Ararat have the highest smoking rates in Australia, with more than a quarter of adults lighting up daily. The startling finding is contained in a report to be released by the National Health Performance Authority.

Quotas
Vulnerable mental health patients are being prematurely released from Victorian hospitals so staff can meet discharge quotas and free up beds. According to The Age, Community Visitors, who inspect accommodation for the
disabled and the mentally ill on behalf of the Public Advocate, exposed the troubling practice in their annual report and said it was being driven by bed shortages and high demand.

National targets
According to the Herald Sun, the Department of Health’s annual report showed that only 77 per cent of patients were transferred from paramedics to the emergency department within forty minutes. The target is 90 per cent.

Funding
A $100m injection from the Federal Government for a facelift for the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital to mark its 150th birthday is in doubt. The money for the crumbling hospital had been pledged by Labor, but the Federal Government says it does not think it can afford it. “This is a worthwhile project, but given Labor’s debt and the fact they never signed a contract, the Federal Government is considering whether it can afford the funding,” Health Minister Peter Dutton told the Herald Sun. The Coalition made no promise to match the spending, which was one of Labor’s biggest pledges aimed at Victoria during the election campaign. The hospital, built in 1863, treats 250,000 patients a year and is Australia’s oldest specialist eye, ear, nose and throat hospital. It is also Melbourne’s third oldest hospital.

Business & investment
Toyota
According to a report in the Herald Sun, Toyota chiefs have told Denis Naphine they remain committed to their Altona plant in a meeting at the company’s headquarters in Japan.

Jobs axed
According to The Age, Golden Circle will cut 123 positions from its Victorian juice plant and move the jobs to Queensland. The company announced it will close the Mill Park plant in Melbourne’s north and move production to its existing facilities in Northgate, Queensland.

Trade trip
Denis Naphine turned super salesman on Tokyo’s rails before announcing Japan’s version of IKEA will come to Melbourne. According to the Herald Sun, bemused passengers on the capital’s subway were confronted by the Victorian leader handing out his business card. And waving his ‘Suica card’ – the electronic subway pass that can also be used to make purchases – he even made favourable comparisons between it and the myki card he pulled from his wallet. Mr Naphine also announced that retail giant Muji will open its first Australian store at Chadstone in November, creating at least 400 jobs.

Justice & police
Rape laws (1)
The state government recently released its discussion paper, which outlines proposed improvements, and is calling for public feedback and submissions. According to the Herald Sun, rape laws are set for a complete overhaul aimed at seeing fewer offenders escape justice.

Rape laws (2)
Rape laws may be changed to make it easier to prove rape was committed even if the accused person believed consent was involved. The Victorian government released a public consultation paper on its review of sexual offences, which details proposed changes to laws as to what prosecutors must prove about an accused’s state of mind.

Bursting cells
The police union has savaged the state government for undermining its own tough-on-crime agenda by “sitting on its hands” as the justice system crombles, forcing officers to baby-sit prisoners who cannot fit in bursting cells. Police Association assistant secretary Bruce McGeenie said police were no longer prepared to prop up the overcrowded prison system as it was clear there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

Corruption powers
New laws governing the Victorian government’s controversial anti-corruption commission and other integrity bodies are constitutionally invalid, the former chief parliamentary counsel in Victoria says. According to The Age, Queen’s counsel Eamonn Moran has found the state’s new integrity and anti-corruption laws are “of no force or effect”, which would have had an impact on the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission, the Auditor-General and Freedom of Information Commissioner.

Drug tests
Victorian police are to face tough new drug tests as they target illicit substances taken up to six weeks earlier. According to The Age, legislation introduced by the state government this week provides for hair testing, the testing of officers while off duty, target-testing of entire divisions or areas of the force and testing of unborn Victoria Police members. Police Association secretary Greg Davies said no other employer was able to drug test their employees while they were on leave, but the beefed-up measures would ensure the integrity of the force.

Prisons
Prisoners are harming themselves and assaulting each other and staff at Victoria’s jails in increasing numbers. According to The Age, the Department of Justice’s annual report showed that about eight out of 100 prisoners mutilated themselves, double the rate of the 2008-09 financial year.

Law reforms
People who have been injured in car accidents will find it harder to claim compensation for severe long-term mental illness under reforms expected to save the state government millions of dollars. According to The Age, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) can award compensation to people it deems have suffered a serious injury as a result of a transport accident, which includes those who have developed a severe long-term “mental, behavioural disturbance or disorder”.

Drug deals
Melbourne’s multi-storey car parks have become a scene of drug trading and a danger spot for overdoses, according to the professionals who monitor the city’s weekend party patrons. Salvation Army officer Major Brendan Nottle said staff and volunteers had been regularly discovering unconscious teenagers on the concrete floors of car parks after they had taken GHB, also known as liquid ecstasy.

Crown training
A County Court judge has questioned whether Crown casino is adequately training its security staff after one of its bouncers was found guilty of breaking a patron’s wrist.

Hidden cameras
According to the Herald Sun, the new rules allowing police to hide speed cameras — effective immediately — permit mobile speed cameras to be hidden behind trees, bushes, posts and road signs, to lessen the risk to operators from irate motorists. The cameras can also be used at the bottom of hills and on slopes if the “road safety objective” cannot be achieved at an alternative location. “There is no restriction from a technical, legislative or enforcement perspective on a mobile road safety camera being operated on a slope, hill or gradient,” the new rules say.
No respect
According to the Herald Sun, a dramatic city clash between police and university students put one officer in hospital and four protesters facing charges. The students also bought shoes from a department store and hurled them at Liberal Party headquarters. Federal treasurer Joe Hockey was caught up in the protest near the steps of State Parliament.

Local government
Slow down
According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne City Council is likely to consider reducing speed limits in the CBD from 40km/h to 30km/h. The idea was floated at a council bike forum, and Cr Cathy Oke said she liked the idea. However, the RACV’s Brian Negus said: ‘We just don’t think it’s practical.’ A survey by Dr Alison Carver of Deakin University found that 42 per cent of people supported 30km/h speed limits on local roads.

Wi-fi
Melbourne City Council is set to trial a free public Wi-Fi service in the city, but it will need to act fast to catch up to smaller capital cities racing ahead with bigger plans. According to The Age, the council is in talks with a major telecommunications company, believed to be Telstra, about a demonstration project that would guide the future of Wi-Fi in Melbourne. While Melbourne lord mayor Robert Doyle said it was still unclear when the trial would begin, he said he hoped it would start as soon as possible.

Refund
According to the Herald Sun, local councils that poured ratepayers’ funds into a doomed referendum campaign now want the federal government to bail them out. The referendum had been scheduled to coincide with the September 14 election, but was de-railed when Kevin Rudd called an earlier poll.

Poultry problems
Bayside City Council has lodged a motion for the Municipal Association of Victoria state council asking the government to change the Victorian Wildlife Act to allow bans where bird feeding is causing a nuisance. According to The Age, Bayside council’s call for greater powers to prevent disruptive bird feeding activity has been sparked by one ‘recalcitrant’ resident in East Brighton whose twice-daily feeding sessions are creating a nightmare for neighbours.

Climate rates
Several inner suburban councils are considering donating to the new Climate Council, which replaces the federal Climate Commission abolished by the new Federal Government. According to the Herald Sun, the Climate Council is being financed by donations. Yarra Council will vote on a motion to donate funds at a meeting and a similar session is expected to go before Moreland Council. But critics have lashed out at the move, saying local councils should not be wasting their ratepayers’ money on matters that lie outside their areas of responsibility.

Rubbish pain
According to the Herald Sun, surgeons are calling for changes to bin designs, or garbage assistant programs, in order to curb the damage posed by runaway rubbish bins. Almost a dozen cases have been reported of elderly persons being injured while taking out the rubbish, but medics say the injury rates could be much higher.

Melbourne
Hotel
According to a report in The Age, the Adelphi Hotel, with its glass bottomed swimming pool, has quietly reopened after a makeover.

Zoo
Melbourne Zoo has a new gorilla. Olana is a 12-year-old 140kg gorilla that recently arrived from the UK.

Hidden bars
According to The Age, after successfully selling Melbourne’s laneways as a visitor drawcard, Tourism Victoria is now looking upwards with a campaign that promotes our rooftop bars and restaurants. The latest example is in South Yarra at the three-storey Emerson, capped by a rooftop dining area with a menu by former Royal Mail sous chef Jeff Trotter. In St Kilda, Vietnamese restaurant Uncle opened recently in a former shoe shop that seems tiny at street level but opens out, Tardis-like, on the second floor spilling onto the next-door rooftop.

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UK guru
Kevin McCloud, the presenter of popular architectural television series Grand Designs has been in Melbourne and spoken publicly about aspects of our city (leave Flinders Street Station alone, ‘enough already’ with the high-rise towers). He’s really very impressed with Melbourne and understands why we wear the mantel of ‘the world’s most liveable city’.

Planning
New body
The Victorian government will create a new statutory body, the Metropolitan Planning Authority, to steer the city’s absorption of an extra two million people over the next 40 years. The strategies were contained in Plan Melbourne. The long-awaited metropolitan planning blueprint that succeeds Melbourne 2030, the growth plan created under the previous Labor government. The new authority replaced the existing Growth Areas Authority, which had been managing development on the city’s fringes. It was headed by Peter Seamer, who will lead the new agency. State developer Places Victoria will be retained, although its activity will be restricted to development of specific sites. Already about 500 hectares of renewal area has been identified in and around the city centre, including the Fishermans Bend precinct, the E-gate area on the CBD’s west and the Arden-Macaulay area in North Melbourne.

Rural growth
Bacchus Marsh, Ballan, Broadford, Kilmore, Warragul-Drouin and Wonthaggi have been earmarked as key “rural towns”. According to the Weekly Times, the towns have been “designated as new major population and employment growth” areas by the state government.

High rise fears
The Victorian government’s new planning strategy confers on councils the power to ban appeals against developments of up to four storeys in a ‘growth’ zone earmarked for a concentration of medium to high density housing. According to the Herald Sun, some eastern suburbs councils have already limited the extent of the growth zone in their
municipalities.

Solar shadows
Developers may be prevented from building high-rises that would block sunlight from hitting solar panels on buildings in central Melbourne, under new rules being considered by the state government. The Department of Transport, Racing and Local Infrastructure is reviewing planning and building provisions that affect solar panel placement and overshadowing.

Musings
In The Age, Michael Buxton, professor of environment and planning at RMIT University, wrote: ‘This is not a plan. It is a hoax driven by money. Powerful private interests are shaping city development, to the detriment of Melbourne residents. The Victorian government has radically deregulated its land use planning system, giving unprecedented power to developers to determine the shape and function of our city. Unless we redesign effective urban planning, Melbourne will cease to function effectively.’

Full page
Plan Melbourne took out a full-page ad highlighting community information events coming up. It also provided a number and website address for more information or to provide a submission, which closes on 6 December.

Higher and higher
According to the Herald Sun, Planning Minister Matthew Guy slammed critics who say too many skyscrapers are being built in central Melbourne. ‘There are critics who say we are heading down the Hong Kong path, but in doing so they miss the point about why high density is important in defined locations.’ He officially launched works for Vision Apartments – a $400 million 72-storey tower to be built opposite Queen Victoria Market.

Missing link
Twenty-seven development sites for medium and high-density housing have been identified close to rail lines across Melbourne. While building groups welcomed the inner-city housing push close to public transport, one planning expert warned housing was being fast-tracked without additional community services. Development sites include the Forrest Hill precinct in South Yarra, Frankston station, Keon Park station in the north and Deer Park station in the west. The Victorian government’s new Plan Melbourne report said ‘establishing a more compact, sustainable city is challenging but the social, economic and environmental benefits will be long-lasting’.

Population growth
Debate about overseas migration and population growth is ridiculous because Victoria has embraced faster growth in the past, Planning Minister Matthew Guy said. According to The Age, Mr Guy said that the argument that overseas migration is the ‘problem with this country’ is ‘ridiculous’. ‘This country was growing faster on a percentage basis, Victoria was growing much faster on a percentage basis in the 1950s and ‘60s. It was managed in a spirit of co-operation and as a positive challenge and one that this country and in particular the state of Victoria accommodated without a great deal of fuss,’ he said. Mr Guy, the son of a post war migrant, said he found it astounding ‘there are some still who say if we cut off all overseas migration tomorrow that is the answer to all of our problems’.

Boulevards
St Kilda Rd-style boulevards would provide grand entrances in suburban areas under the Victorian Government’s 40-year metro plan, and state schools in some areas would be told to open their grounds outside of normal hours so local residents can enjoy the open space. Among those roads being considered are the Nepean Highway in Frankston; Maroondah Hwy, Ringwood; Dynon Rd, West Melbourne and Plenty Rd, Bundoora.

Developer
The state government’s troubled developer Places Victoria has made one of the biggest losses recorded by a government department in recent memory. The beleaguered agency is selling off 1932 million 72-storey tower for only 342 million loss last financial year. It was forced to write off 94.4 million in property assets and take a dramatic 45.5 million hit on its fibre-to-home projects, its annual report reveals. In 2012 the authority reported a loss of 18 million.

Greening
According to the Herald Sun, pocket parks would pop up around the city and schools in growth areas would share their ovals with local sporting clubs in a State Government bid to boost green open space for communities.

Objections
The Victorian Parliament has lodged a planning objection against a 21-storey luxury hotel and apartment complex proposed for a nearby site at the former Palace Theatre. The move appears to be unprecedented, with upper house president Bruce Atkinson saying he was not aware of Parliament lodging a planning objection before. The objection raises concerns about the 70-metre-tall development overshadowing the historic Parliament House.

Preston market
According to the Herald Sun, Preston Market will be redeveloped as part of a new $750 million residential and retail complex, its owners have announced. The development will connect to Preston railway station and is expected to facilitate residential developments, including affordable housing.

Sport
Melbourne vs. Sydney
The Australian Boat Race, held annually for the past three years, will go head-to-head against the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney facing off. The women’s team from Melbourne continued its unbeaten streak and the men at last claimed victory in a close fought race.

Races
According to the Herald Sun, numbers will be capped at the biggest two days of the Melbourne Cup Carnival with officials willing to turn awayracegoers to protect the sanctity of ‘the Flemington experience’. Attendance at Derby Day and the Melbourne Cup meeting will be restricted to less than 110,000 people regardless of demand for tickets.

Transport – air
Expansion
The biggest expansion of Melbourne Airport since it was built will create more than 3000 jobs in a $1 billion construction program over the next two years. Work has commenced on a new domestic terminal and a new transport hub to ease congestion, with further works to come on a new runway and international terminal upgrades. According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne Airport chief executive Chris Woodruff said the airport’s operations now supported about 57,000 jobs, a figure set to reach 95,000 in the next two decades.

A suburb
Melbourne Airport’s massive car park should have its own suburb name and postcode, given that ‘it is so enormous’, according to Planning Minister Matthew Guy. The ever-expanding airport car park is one of the largest in the country, with 25,000 parking spaces for passengers and employees. Another 2850 spaces are planned. Chadstone Shopping Centre, by comparison, has about 10,000 spaces. There was no doubt the airport needed a rail link to the city, the minister told a Property Council growth summit in Melbourne, but there was no ‘definitive timeline’ on when that would happen.

Fixing cities
Melbourne’s Tullamarine Airport will be ringed by gridlock if state and federal governments fail to improve road and rail connections, says David Crawford, chairman of the airport’s operator, Australia Pacific Airports Corporation. Mr Crawford warned that the state could not afford to delay improvement projects and fall links to the airport. ‘We’re in the ridiculous position that the time to get to the airport now has almost doubled over the past 10 to 15 years,’ he said. ‘We’re increasing the number of passengers coming in but we’ve done nothing to improve the infrastructure for people to get to and from the airport.’ Mr Crawford, who is also chairman of construction and infrastructure company Lend Lease, said state and federal governments needed to improve road links, particularly as the current government’s plans for an airport rail link had been delayed for 10 to 15 years.

Transport – rail
Fare dodgers
Fare dodgers will be able to pay a cheaper on-the-spot fine of $75 in a crackdown on a growing army of public transport freeloaders. According to the Herald Sun, the state government says legislation being introduced to Parliament will speed up enforcement, so ticket inspectors can catch more cheats. Latest figures show fare evasion has spiked since the $1.5 billion myki system became the only ticket in town.

Signal failures
According to The Age, a signal failure occurs five times a day on average on Melbourne’s railways, creating chronic delays for commuters as trains are forced to slow down or stop completely to avoid a collision. In all, there were more than 1900 signal failures on Melbourne’s rail network in the 12 months to August, Metro figures show. Metro said each failure caused train delays, sometimes short, but sometimes major. Most signal failures occur most often at some of Melbourne’s busiest stations in the inner city, and at stations where suburban lines converge. The worst hit
Assistance Dogs Australia are sniffing out puppy raisers!

Assistance Dogs Australia is a non-profit organisation that provides daily assistance to people with physical disabilities by training Labradors and Golden Retrievers to enhance their quality of life and give them freedom and independence. As a result of this program these highly trained dogs allow recipients to have greater mobility, gain confidence and allow them to have higher self-esteem.

Assistance Dogs Australia currently operates without ongoing government funding and relies heavily on volunteers and sponsorship. Each dog is an investment of over $27,000 and it takes 2 years to train each puppy – however dogs are placed with their recipients free of charge. Recipients include people with C4 quadriplegia, paraplegia and developmental disorders such as cerebral palsy.

Volunteer puppy raisers ensure that Assistance puppies are socialised and well-mannered in a variety of settings including the local shopping centre, public transport and even the work environment. Puppy raisers attend weekly training sessions and all costs are covered by Assistance Dogs Australia.

“Puppy Raisers will teach these pups to undertake tasks that are difficult or even impossible for people with physical disabilities to achieve,” says Assistance Dogs Australia’s “Top Dog”, Richard Lord. “Raisers are especially important when socialising puppies. They can also take the pups to the shops, cafes, on public transport and even to the cinema as it’s all these experiences that will help them become an Assistance Dog.”

“I think the most rewarding part of being a puppy raiser would be knowing that you are changing people’s lives by helping Assistance Dogs get these amazing pups off on the right paw” Richard says. “To see the impact these dogs make on their recipients is priceless.”

For more information or to apply to become a puppy raiser call 1800 688 364 or visit www.assistancedogs.org.au.

― Richard Lord
stations include Flinders Street, Southern Cross, North Melbourne, Camberwell and Dandenong. Reasons for faults include blown globes, arson, lightning strikes and copper theft. The Public Transport Users Association said the high rate of signal faults was proof the existing technology was in desperate need of modernising.

New station
According to the Herald Sun, the new West Footscray station is up and running, six months ahead of schedule.

Locally made
Melbourne has unveiled its first locally made tram in two decades - and earphone-wearing pedestrians are bound to hear it coming. The new E-class tram has the gong now heard on C-class trams, but also has a new horn to attract the attention of distracted pedestrians, Yarra Trams chief executive officer Clement Michel said. Two new E-class trams, numbered 6001 and 6002, joined Yarra Trams’ fleet on Monday afternoon, taking passengers along route 96. Five are expected to be in service by year’s end, with 50 due in Melbourne by 2018. Made in Dandenong by Bombardier, it is the first tram built in Melbourne since 1994. The E-class tram is 1.5 metres longer than the next-longest tram, known as “the Bumblebee”. It can take 210 passengers, but only 64 seated. Its bench seats will allow parents with young children to comfortably squeeze three to a seat, Mr Michel said. They are also designed to be easy to replace. Gone are bum-rests along the walls and fold-up seats. There is now dedicated wheelchair floor space which doubles as standing room for about ten passengers.

Light rail
The Victorian government has proposed turning route 96 between St Kilda and East Brunswick into an end-to-end light rail route that is separate from road traffic, by removing hundreds of on-street parking spaces. According to The Age, fifty high-capacity E-class trams, the first two of which have entered service, will run along route 96, which carried almost 17 million people in 2011-12. The route 96 project is aimed at improving reliability by removing the possibility of trams getting stuck in traffic. But traders are alarmed at the potential loss of on street parking along Acland Street, and the street’s possible closure to through traffic to widen the tram terminus, saying business will suffer.

Transport – road
Traffic forecasts
Traffic volumes have fallen or remained static has rejected the push, saying Taxi reform
According to the Financial Review, tensions in the Victorian Liberal Party over taxi deregulation are boiling over, with former premier Jeff Kennett declaring that the failure to compensate licence owners is a betrayal of conservative values. But Transport Minister Terry Mulder has rejected the push, saying plate owners had speculated on their asset and compensation was explicitly ruled out in the state’s legislation. The philosophical tensions over –Liberal economic policy come as taxi plates are still selling for almost $300,000 each, undermining claims from critics that the reforms have completely wiped out their value.

The Victorian Taxi Services Commission data shows that trading in licences has continued. Prices appear to have bottomed out at just under $300,000 although Mr Kennett says the decline is worse. Mr Kennett, who refused to deregulate the industry during national competition reforms in the 1990s, insists the market has dried up and wants more information on who is behind the trades. He has dismissed assurances from the banks that they still lend against licences saying he knew people who were likely to lose their houses due to demands from lenders. “There is a fundamental breach to what I believe the Liberal Party is about in encouraging small business and recognising hard work and reward,” he said.

Fines fines
According to a report in the Herald Sun, taxi drivers have racked up more than $20 million in unpaid fines as the sheriff’s office uses GPS and number plate recognition technology to track them down.

Fare push
According to the Herald Sun, taxi fares paid in cash would be higher under a proposal before Victoria’s essential services commissioner. “There is a fundamental breach to what I believe the Liberal Party is about in encouraging small business and recognising hard work and reward,” he said.

GPs tunnels
The company that has taken over running thirty per cent of Melbourne’s bus network will continue to use a bus tracking system recently junked by the state government because it is not considered fit for purpose. According to a report in The Age, Transdev is the only bus company in Melbourne that uses GPS technology to track its buses. A bus tracking system that was meant
to monitor Melbourne’s entire bus network has just been scrapped by the Victorian government at a late stage in the project’s development, with 95 per cent of the city’s bus fleet already fitted with tracking equipment.

But Transdev is contractually obliged to persist with the system, having been awarded the contract to operate 30 per cent of Melbourne’s bus routes in April ahead of local bus industry giant Ventura. The contract includes the state’s most used routes, the three orbital SmartBus routes and Doncaster rapid bus services, as well as some local services. Transdev spokeswoman Emile van de Graaff said the bus tracking system was performing adequately on its SmartBus and Doncaster services, but struggling on some local routes because of GPS black spots.

Too tall
Over-height trucks have forced lane closures in CityLink tunnels more than a dozen times in the past year, causing major traffic delays and ‘an unsafe environment for other drivers’. VicRoads said it will review penalties for over-height trucks hitting the tunnels.

Decline in deaths
According to the Herald Sun, figures released recently show there have been 182 road deaths in Victoria this calendar year. In the past twelve months the toll is 240, the lowest 365-day count since records began in 1952.

Closures
According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne’s commuters will face a horror New Year on grid locked roads. For the first time ever, the West Gate Bridge and the CityLink tunnels will close for maintenance at the same time over several days in late December and early January. Transport Minister Terry Mulder said he’d sought assurances that disruption would be minimised.

Bike lanes
According to the Herald Sun, the RACV has offered moves by the Melbourne City Council to remove car lanes so cyclists can have dedicated lanes to improve safety. But Canadian based Gil Penalosa, who has advised 130 cities around the world, said it was inevitable that motorists would have to yield more space to cyclists.

Light push
A feared Footscray cycling black spot where hundreds of cyclists have to cross a major truck route every day will be fixed as part of a $2.3 million Victorian government bike safety push.

Boom
According to the Herald Sun, police have revealed 854 fines, totalling more than $517,000, were issued to motorists and pedestrian who ignored signals at boom gates in 2012/13.

Utilities
Recycled water
According to a report in the Herald Sun, the Australian Academy of Technological Services and Engineering is publishing a report that recycling water is the best way to avoid drought. It finds that it is better for the environment, uses less energy, requires lower capital and costs up to half as much as desalination.

Desal water
Documents released recently showed the Victorian government paid more than $200 million to Aquasure during the year to June 30, with barely one-third of that sum relating to actual water. Aquasure was paid $72.27 million after it successfully pumped water into Melbourne’s dams during commissioning of the plant in December 2012. That payment was described by Aquasure as ‘interim water service revenue’, and was followed by a further $133.5 million of ‘operational water service revenue’. The latter is a payment by the government simply for the luxury of having the desalination plant available. Both types of payments had never before been paid, and they helped Aquasure record a $36.3 million profit for the year to June 30.

Jobs
The Victorian government is looking for suitably qualified and experienced people to register an expression of interest for the roles of Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Commissioner with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. E-mail to HR.recruitment@depi.vic.gov.au.

Society
Puppy farm
According to the Herald Sun, more than 100 dogs crammed in wire cages and kept in appalling conditions have been rescued after a puppy farm was raided in central Victoria. Police and RSPCA officers said the breeding factory was among the worst seen in Victoria, when warrants were executed during August and September.

Royal Mail
According to a report in the Herald Sun, fire has destroyed Dunkeld’s Royal Mail Hotel conference centre, but the historic hotel was not damaged.

Vale

Quote of the month
David Knowles of JBWere Philanthropic Services, has this to say about non-profits working with government as they review their funding arrangements:

They need to identify actual or perceived dependencies
Investigate opportunities to diversify their income services
Position themselves as results-focussed organisations enhancing civil society.

He adds:
A key priority for directors and executives is to spend time understanding the government’s philosophy, social policy and budgetary priorities.

Food for Thought! For good Food, Fun, Fellowship and the opportunity of serving, we offer thanks.
The Chatham House Rule. One rule. One reason.

We all go to lots of meetings, large and small, and normally there is no thought or consideration that the Chatham house rule be applied.

The Rule is a guideline to the handling of sensitive material that may be included in lectures and presentations given at various forums.

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. All participants are understood to have agreed that it would be conducive to free discussion that they should be subject to the rule for the relevant part of the meeting.

The rule originated in June 1927 at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also known as Chatham House, in St James Crescent London, near Picadilly. The rule has changed a little, on two occasions. The original rule was refined in October 1992 and again, in 2002.

The rule allows speakers with particular knowledge to let others know so that those others might be able also contribute to finding a solution to a problem. For example, details of a submarine capability or details of the family members of a nation’s president might contribute to the resolution of a civil war.

The aim of the rule is to guarantee anonymity to those speaking within its walls so that better international relations may be achieved.

Away from international affairs or defense matters, the rule is now (both its name and its purpose) used around the world to allow people to speak as individuals and to express views that may be, or may not be, those of their organisations, and therefore, encourages free discussion. Speakers are free to voice their own opinions, without concern for their personal reputation or their official duties and affiliations.

Meetings, or parts of meetings, either may be held on the record, or, under the Chatham House Rule. In the latter case, success of the rule may depend upon it being considered morally binding, particularly in circumstances where a failure to comply with the rule may not result in any sanction.

Care needs to be taken not to invoke the Chatham House Rule where what is intended is that the views discussed at the meeting be kept confidential. Quite confidential.

Frustrating or amusing it can be, to hear the convener of a function with several hundred people in attendance say that Chatham House Rules will apply. There is only one rule. It is also unlikely that this audience would keep what was said confidential, because it would not normal for such a large gathering to keep such information secret/confidential as per the Chatham House Rule. Perhaps there is a media table at the lunch!

Away from the Chatham House Rule circumstances, we can reflect on other conversations such as those between spouses/pillow talk, family members, cabinet (government) meetings, political party meetings (some of them) including the Labor’s caucus; and a whole raft of business and Society meetings, which all have clear bounds of secrecy from time to time and unfortunately has information which can escape, leak.

Within the formal (bureaucracy of) government, we have whistleblowers who break the confidentiality of their government work, sometimes with the provision to do so within a specific act of Parliament.

REMEMBER. There is one rule. It’s sole purpose is to allow confidential information to be shared with others working towards achieving an overall better result for an international affairs matter, or some other important domestic purpose.

This presentation was prepared by Alistair Urquhart, the editor of this publication.
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