

LETTER FROM  
**MELBOURNE**

A monthly public affairs newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which effect business opportunities in Victoria, Australia and beyond.

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The New Year Edition



**Inside**

Speaker replaced ♦ Geoff Shaw ♦ Holden. Ford. Toyota. BAE.  
Saving SPC ♦ Preselections. Kew tiff ♦ Not re-standing  
Building code renewal ♦ Port of Melbourne . FOR SALE  
East-West Road Link

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Letter From Melbourne is a monthly public affairs bulletin, a simple précis, distilling and interpreting public policy and government decisions, which affect business opportunities in Victoria and Australia.

Written for the regular traveller, or people with meeting-filled days, it's more about business opportunities than politics.

Letter from Melbourne is independent. It's not party political or any other political. It does not have the imprimatur of government at any level. Letter from Melbourne developed a federal and national coverage. This spawned Letter from Canberra (www.letterfromcanberra.com.au) four years ago.

The only communication tool of its type, Letter from Melbourne keeps subscribers abreast of recent developments in the policy arena on a local, state and federal level.

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# Letter from Melbourne

Since 1994. A monthly public affairs newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which effect business opportunities in Victoria, Australia and beyond. 2,000,000 words available to search digitally.

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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.

He was admitted as a barrister and solicitor to the Supreme Court of Victoria, and remains a (non-practicing) member of the Law Institute of Victoria. Previously, he graduated from high school in Bethesda, Maryland, and had many opportunities to become aware of the workings of Washington D.C.

For 30 years, he listened every Sunday evening to the late Alistair Cooke and his *Letter from America*. Alistair's early career was mostly in the coal industry, where he became involved with energy, environmental and water issues, and later in the SME finance sector.

He found time to be involved in a range of community activities where he came to understand some of the practical aspects of dealing with government and meeting people across the political spectrum. He now chairs a large disability employment service, including its British operations.



## About the publisher

Affairs of State

Established in 1993, is an independent Australian public affairs firm with contemporary international connections. Affairs of State provides a matrix of professional tools to multinational businesses, professional and industry associations, government agencies, pressure groups, NGOs and community causes in Australia and abroad.

The firm works with many engineering and information technology firms and other professional association and industry groups on a wide range of issues in Victoria, Canberra and overseas.

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- Two monthly publications
- Events at our offices and elsewhere
- Charts and specialist directories
- Facilitation with business and legal skills
- Training courses
- Mentoring of senior executives

## editorial

What a New Year. Some confronting economic decisions are being made by governments. Mainly in Canberra, by a conservativish Coalition government. Ford. Alcoa. Toyota. Shell. SPC.

Victoria is quiet on the government front, as opposed to the political front, where in the Legislative Assembly the noise barometer hit 7 on February 18.

The government is going about its business. Some larger infrastructure projects are at the top of the list, in particular the East West Link (This has federal help in finding, unlike a dreamed of underground rail link which does not have federal funding, at this stage. But the federals do not control everything.

Then other big projects such as a new underground rail line. As we write this Swanston Street is going to be dug up for two years. Likely.....! Not only the Lord Mayor Robert Doyle says a strong NO to that

Some challenges with the large firms who are leaving Australia, most being in Victoria, will cause concentration.

**Our Cover.** On a very hot summer day in February, the editor was driving past the CFA station at Barwon Heads. Very powerful. Two women, three men and a young fellow well under twenty. All nervously standing around the fire truck, awaiting a phone call to attend a fire somewhere in their sector, or perhaps elsewhere. Wonderful volunteers. Wonderful Australians.

– Alistair Urquhart

***Victoria is quiet on the government front, as opposed to the political front, where in the Legislative Assembly the noise barometer hit 7 on February 18.***

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## State Government & Politics

### *Funny buggers*

The Victorian government's tenuous hold on power was seriously eroded recently when rebel, former Liberal, and now independent Geoff Shaw refused to guarantee the passage of this year's budget and voted against the Coalition for the second time in three days. In Denis Napthine's worst day as Premier, Shaw voted with Labor to defeat plans for a parliamentary budget office to cost and scrutinise election policies.

### *Editorial musings*

In *The Age*, 'Most immediately, the Premier needs to take action to rebuild the standing of the Parliament. A second, related challenge for Dr Napthine is to ensure political debate in Victoria is recalibrated to focus squarely on policy. *The Age*/Nielsen poll found Victorians ranked health as the most important policy issue. Ominously for the government, 40 per cent said the health system had deteriorated since 2010, and only ten per cent said it had improved. Maintaining Melbourne's famed liveability will also require a more nuanced debate about the city's transport system. Sophisticated policy thinking is also required on manufacturing, long the lifeblood of the Victorian economy. We have one further plea to our politicians as they prepare for the election year: can they please resist the temptation to allow debate on law and order to descend into a simplistic race to the bottom. Here is an obvious policy opportunity for Daniel Andrews and the Labor Party. The deficiencies, indeed the dangers, of the Coalition's 'tough on crime' approach are exposed by the increased strains on prisons and courts.

### *Smith would not quit*

Victorian Speaker Ken Smith vowed to remain in the position despite his poisonous

relationship with balance-of-power independent Geoff Shaw threatening to kill the Victorian government's re-election chances. According to *The Australian*, Mr Smith, 69, said that he had no intention of giving up the speakership and that he was also considering running again for his safe seat at the next election.

### *Or will he/did he?*

According to the *Herald Sun*, Mr Smith soon thereafter announced that he would retire from politics after a career of more than 25 years. Ken Smith resigned as speaker of the Victorian Parliament after launching an extraordinary attack on independent MP Geoff Shaw during the first Question Time of the year.

Deputy speaker Christine Fyffe was elevated to the position shortly after the explosive resignation speech from Mr Smith, who accused Mr Shaw of "outrageous demands ... that went against policy and regulations".

The Frankston member says the former speaker's comments levelled against him were "undignified."

Mr Smith, who is the Member for Bass, had been under pressure to step down as Speaker after losing the support of Labor MPs and Mr Shaw, who holds the balance of power.

### *Plotting*

Premier Denis Napthine has ramped up claims Labor has been secretly plotting with balance of power independent Geoff Shaw to weaken the government's grip on power. According to *The Age*, in a fresh attempt to regain political traction after becoming mired in chaos, Dr Napthine accused Labor of quietly working on Mr Shaw to 'cajole' him into hampering the operation of the Parliament.

### *Preselections*

According to *The Australian*, Planning Minister Matthew Guy said he would resign from the Legislative Council and seek preselection in the eastern suburban lower house seat of Bulleen, following Energy Minister Nick Kotsiras's announcement that he would not contest the November poll. However, senior party sources said that Mr Guy was likely to face a challenge from Premier Denis Napthine's senior legal adviser Eddy Gisonda. Mr Kotsiras, who has held Bulleen since 1999, dismissed suggestions that he had been forced to resign, saying health and family, including his four grandchildren, were his primary motivations.

### *NOT SO.*

In the neighbouring blue ribbon seat of Kew, Community Services Minister Mary Wooldrige faces a challenge from former suburban mayor and ex-federal staffer Tim Smith.

### *Guy's move*

Matthew Guy, who has been linked with a move to the lower house for some time, confirmed just hours after Nick Kotsiras' announcement that he would seek preselection for Bulleen. The Planning Minister is often spoken about as a future Liberal leader, and had been linked to a tilt at the Legislative Assembly in the newly created seat of Eildon. Mr Guy grew up in Montmorency and lives in the Bulleen area. "With its many multicultural communities, Bulleen is an electorate that truly represents who we are and what makes Melbourne marvellous. As the son of a postwar migrant, I have great affinity with many residents in the Bulleen electorate." Mr Kotsiras, fighting back tears, made the announcement at Port Melbourne near Station Pier, where his family first arrived in Australia 50 years ago. Mr Kotsiras and Dr Napthine both said Mr Guy would be a good

member for Bulleen.

*Other retirements*

Hugh Delahunty Nationals, seat of Lowen.

Jeanette Powell, Nationals, Legislative Council

Andrea Coote, Liberal

Phillip Davis Gippsland, recently retired and has been replaced by Andrew Ronalds

*Taking the cash*

In the *Herald Sun* editorial: 'Daniel Andrews' muted criticism of the militant CFMEU Union might well be explained by the construction divisions donation of \$136,000 to Victorian Labor over the past year. Nationally, the building union contributed \$405,000 to Labor.'

*Work ethic*

Premier Denis Napthine has guaranteed that embattled frontbencher Kim Wells will not be demoted, as the Police and Emergency Services Minister faced ongoing criticism over his work ethic. Wells had been at a cricket match during a fire!

*Probe into project funding*

According to *The Age*, Victoria's financial watchdog will investigate revelations that more than \$1 billion of taxpayers' money was used to finance major projects spruiked by the former Labor government as privately funded, including the Royal Children's Hospital, Southern Cross Station and the Royal Women's Hospital. The probe by the Auditor-General follows a report showing the former Brumby government lent money to the ongoing Royal Children's Hospital redevelopment, despite telling the public that the project was privately funded. In November 2007, the government-owned Victorian Funds Management Corporation purchased \$1.2 billion of bonds issued by the hospital's project syndicate, Children's Health Partnership. Ratings agency Standard & Poor's has downgraded \$58 million worth of the bonds bought by VFMC to "junk" status, warning that rents at the hospital are under pressure.

*Questions*

The Victorian government has been accused of secrecy with nearly 1,000 questions asked in Parliament still unanswered. According to a report in *The Age*, the questions on notice are from Labor to the government and are written. The Opposition says 993 questions, 521 in the lower house and 472 in the upper house,

still have not been answered. The questions range from specific electorate matters to broad portfolio issues as well as staffing levels in ministers' offices. Some of the unanswered questions focus on job losses at Telstra in Ballarat, the number of women on government agency and department boards, drug testing at Barwon prison and meetings attended by Planning Minister Matthew Guy.

*East West Fight*

Attempts to paint East-West (road) link protesters as rabble rousers have been labelled 'derogatory' by civil right advocates and offensive to residents whose homes lie in the path of the road project. Liberty Victoria also criticised government moves to clamp down on pickets and blockades by introducing tougher laws. The Coalition and some media outlets have been vilifying demonstrators as a small mob of radicals, whose "selfish" actions are costing Victorian taxpayers through unnecessary police resources. Attorney-General Robert Clark said activists who threatened the livelihood of law-abiding businesses "must be held to account".

*Crown land inquiry*

State Labor has called for an investigation of the Victorian government's push to sell waterfront Crown land in Frankston, including to key supporters of maverick local MP Geoff Shaw.

*Media man*

According to the *Herald Sun*, the Victorian government's PR operation is going back to the future with the return of the man who ran the Kennett government's media strategy in the 1990's. Steve Murphy, who was Jeff Kennett's director of communications and strategy, will return to the Premier's office with the brief of improving the government's media performance. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL other staff changes in Ministerial offices recently.

*New heads*

Five deputy secretaries have been chosen in recent days to lead the merged Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, after a global search by recruitment services company Egon Zehnder. But three of them already worked within the old departments of transport and planning. One was recruited from the Department of Treasury and Finance and another from the private sector. Only Christine Wyatt, the incoming deputy secretary for planning, was recruited from outside

government. She was global environment leader for consulting firm GHD. New deputy secretary for transport, Gary Liddle, was previously chief executive at VicRoads. Terry Garwood was retained as deputy secretary for local infrastructure and Louise Hall was retained as deputy secretary, corporate. Sue Eddy, the new deputy secretary for finance, previously worked as director of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

*More women*

Liberal historian Margaret Fitzherbert says bold action is required to boost women's representation because "the passage of time hasn't fixed the problem". Part of the problem, she said, was women being asked inappropriate questions, which could be deterring them from entering politics altogether. According to a report in *The Age*: "I have attended many preselections and I've watched as woman after woman is asked the same kind of questions, which are usually variations on, 'Who will look after your children if you go into Parliament?' These questions, which are rarely - if ever - asked of a man, show me that women are not treated the same as men in preselection. In other words, it is simply not about merit," said Ms Fitzherbert, a former Young Liberal president.

*Musings*

In *The Age*, Farrah Tomazin wrote: 'By ignoring the rank and file in choosing candidates, Labor has put itself in a precarious position.'

*Good job*

The Department of State Development, Business and Innovation is looking for a Director, Industry Programs. Contact Cheryl Goldsmith at Slade Partners on 9235 5140.

**Federal**

*East-West details*

According to *The Age*, the Victorian government has blocked a Senate order to produce documents on the multibillion-dollar east-west tunnel project, saying it would damage federal-state relations. On December 2, the Greens successfully moved a motion in the Senate requiring Infrastructure Australia to produce the state government's tunnel submission, including the secretive business case, to the body by December 11.

*Jobs clash*

Premier Denis Napthine is set for a showdown with the federal government over the impending

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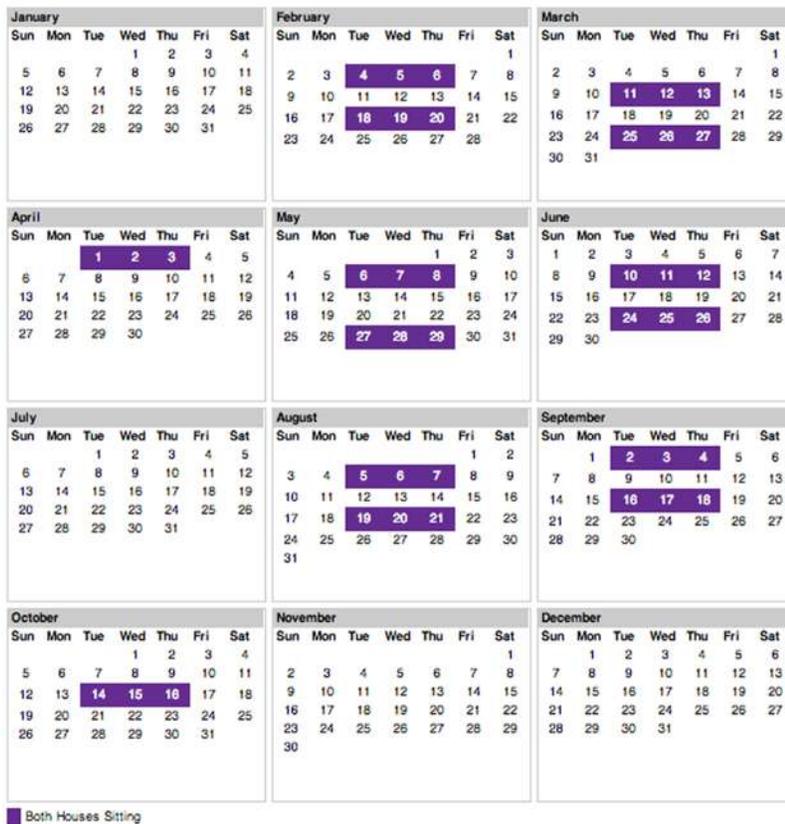
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### Victorian parliamentary sitting days



The sitting days mean different things to different people. The important thing is what do you want!

You can see that there are only some thirty days of Parliament sitting between now and the Victorian election on 29 November this year.

For the parliamentarians, these sitting days can be very busy indeed, but the parliamentarians know how to adapt to the hours available. It is not as though they spend all of their time in their respective Chamber.

If you know how things work in the Building, it can sometimes be a good time to meet with a minister.

Then reflect on the other levels of seniority: shadow ministers, other parliamentarians on both the government and the Opposition side of the House (s). And all of these people have staff and often civil/public servants in their offices.

All ministers have their electorate offices as well as offices for their respective ministry(ies), all in the Parliamentary precinct.

All other parliamentarians have their electorate offices. And an office in the Building, some of them are pretty small. And are shared with others.

If you know the parliamentary sitting day part of their diary, this allows you to plan ahead, as to where you might meet someone, in the electorate or wherever. Bump into them in Queens Hall or after sitting in the public gallery?

You might be planning a dinner some time ahead. You be sure what nights the or she or they are not available.

We recently published *Coffee, Minister?*, a chart which might help you to appreciate the geography of Victorian parliamentarians and Ministers.

move to cut subsidies to Toyota, a decision that could cost tens of thousands of jobs and bring to an end nearly 60 years of car manufacturing in Australia. With a state election in November, the Victorian government is facing thousands of job losses on the manufacturing front, with Ford, Holden, SPC Ardmona and potentially Toyota bearing the brunt of federal decisions not to lend financial aid.

To help create thousands of jobs, the Victorian government is lobbying Canberra to fund major infrastructure projects in Victoria, including a push to ensure the long-term viability of BAE Systems in Williamstown by expediting ship-building contracts. The Victorian government slammed a Productivity Commission paper, commissioned by Treasurer Joe Hockey, which called for an end to all financial help for car makers and parts suppliers when the Automotive Transformation Scheme ends in 2020.

#### Rail to rescue jobs

Premier Denis Napthine is pleading with the federal government to "bring forward" Commonwealth infrastructure funding to offset the pain caused by the looming end of manufacturing by Holden. Dr Napthine revealed before a meeting of federal cabinet to discuss the car industry crisis he has been pushing for several "significant" yet-to-be announced infrastructure projects for Victoria, potentially including a second stage of the east-west link connecting the Tullamarine Freeway to the Western Ring Road, the Metro rail project and public transport improvements.

#### Musings

In *The Age*, Farrah Tomazin wrote: 'Denis Napthine did not seem too impressed when he

was asked about the political implications of Canberra's decision to knock back a lifeline for SPC Ardmona. "I'm not fussed about the political ramifications," he told journalists at the cannery's Shepparton plant. "This is absolutely not about politics. I even find that question offensive. This is about people." Maybe so, but whether he likes it or not, Victoria faces an election in nine months, a time when thousands of jobs are being lost from companies bearing the brunt of federal decisions to withdraw financial support. Ford and Holden have already announced they will cease manufacturing in 2016 and 2017, while the future of Toyota is also in doubt amid an impending decision to cut subsidies to the Altona-based car manufacturer. Now Australia's last fresh fruit cannery is under threat as anxious workers await a decision by SPC's parent company, Coca-Cola Amatil, on February 18. As a country premier, the last thing Napthine wants is to be accused of turning his back on thousands of growers, pickers and suppliers in Victoria's food bowl.

#### Going it alone

Premier Denis Napthine has deepened the divisions with his federal colleagues over financial aid for SPC Ardmona, rejecting the federal government's criticisms of "co-investments" in the company.

Dr Napthine denied that co-investments amounted to a form of corporate "entitlement", in the wake of renewed warnings from Canberra against industry assistance. According to *The Australian*, the comments came as retail figures showed a surge in support for the food manufacturer at supermarket checkouts just as the company warned about unfair competition from overseas rivals.

## Education

### Mac.Rob tops

For the tenth time in 11 years, Mac.Robertson Girls' High School has topped the state in VCE marks, with a median subject study score of 38. Mac.Robertson principal Toni Meath was effusive in her praise of the graduating class. She said that four girls achieved a perfect ATAR of 99.95 – out of just 12 girls in the state – and almost 60 per cent of their students scored 95 or above. "They've been a strong cohort since year 9 and they showed that again," she said. "We're absolutely ecstatic."

### Scores

According to the *Herald Sun*, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority figures show 718 perfect study scores of 50 were awarded to 656 students statewide. A total 19.2 per cent or 14,636 students achieved a study score of 40 or more to earn the title of top scorer. RMIT University Annette Gough said achieving such a result took consistently good performance not only in exams but earlier school-assessed tasks.

### Labor proposal

Every public high school would be required to have programs to support gay students that "come out" if the Labor Party wins this year's state election. With thousands of people expected to attend Melbourne's annual gay Pride March, Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews will use the event to announce that a Labor government would set up a statewide Safe Schools Coalition to tackle homophobia in the classroom.

### Tungamah pool

The Tungamah community has had a win, with

residents expecting to be splashing around in their town's pool in late January. The 33-year-old pool at Tungamah Primary School, about twenty minutes from Yarrowonga, had been closed this summer after the school told residents there was no public liability insurance to allow its operation. About 30 residents attended a meeting and the school said it was, in fact, covered by insurance.

*Federation University*



Australia has thirty-eight universities. The newest being Federation University, which brings together Ballarat university and some other constituent campuses. Photo above. Look closely at advertisement on the back of the bus.

*Rundown schools*

According to *The Age*, more than half of Victoria's state school campuses classified as having serious structural problems were overlooked by the Victorian government for upgrades, documents reveal. A report presented to Education Minister Martin Dixon in March last year found 37 public school campuses have badly deteriorated buildings, defective services and poor general appearance. But 19 of those were not allocated any money for repairs or rebuilds in a statewide, \$51.5 million funding scheme rolled out the following month. The rundown campuses had been given an overall ranking that the audit identified as in need of major repairs "no later than within the next three to six months". Mr Dixon said the funding, which was funnelled to 250 schools for repairs to 570 buildings, had been used to

deal with the "most urgent and highest-need maintenance problems" left by the previous government.

*More cameras*

More than half of Victorian teachers want extra CCTV-style cameras in schools amid escalating reports of physical violence, verbal threats and vandalism, new figures suggest. According to the *Herald Sun*, as the school year begins, a statewide survey shows three-quarters of teachers have experienced some form of violence from students - a spike from 55 per cent in just four years. And more than half have been subjected to verbal abuse or physical threats from parents.

*Research funding musings*

According to Keith Nugent, deputy vice chancellor at LaTrobe University: 'This issue of independent research has been raised in *The Age* as a result of La Trobe University's discussions with Australia's largest complementary medicines company, Swisse Wellness, to conduct new research into the efficacy, if any, of complementary medicine. (Recently, *The Age* reported that Dr Ken Harvey had quit his job at La Trobe over its \$15 million deal with Swisse.) These issues are not new to the university sector. Many institutions around the world have significant relationships with large multinational pharmaceutical companies. What is new about La Trobe's discussions, however, is that these relationships are not currently in place with the growing complementary medicine sector. It is because the community needs and deserves answers to these questions that La Trobe wants to create an independent centre for research into complementary medicines.

**Energy**

*Painful*

According to the *Herald Sun*, electricity and gas companies are disconnecting 115 Victorian customers a day for unpaid bills as households reel from punishing price rises. Victoria's utilities regulator will probe whether retailers are flouting regulations by unfairly cutting off struggling consumers in a debt crackdown.

*Power cuts*

Increasing the security of Victoria's electricity supply would depend on the amount people were prepared to pay for power, according to network and economic experts. According to a report in *The Age*, Australian Energy Market Operator spokesman Joe Adamo said

the state had the supply capacity to break the 10,494-megawatt peak demand record set in January 2009, if all supply and distribution assets worked. In the midst of our recent heatwave, demand peaked at about 10,300 megawatts and turning off power was not required. Typical weekday demand at this time of year is about 6600 megawatts.

*Heat forcing cuts*

Up to 100,000 Victorian homes could be without power as the extreme hot weather places excessive strain on electricity networks. According to *The Age*, the Australian Energy Market Operator informed the Victorian government on the 15th January that it could be forced to cut some supply to the state despite temperatures expected to reach 44 degrees. Energy Minister Nicholas Kotsiras said adequate power supplies could not be guaranteed for the rest of the heatwave. Demand from interstate and reduced capacity from Loy Yang A power station in the Latrobe Valley was placing an additional strain on the state's electricity network, he said.

*CSG*

According to a report in the *Weekly Times*, the Victorian Government is under pressure to consider introducing exclusion zones if a coal seam gas industry goes ahead in the state. Two kilometre buffer zones will be introduced in NSW around residential areas and certain farming areas will be declared no-go zones in response to strong demand from community members. Victorian Farmers Federation president Peter Tuohey said no-go zones made sense but stressed the importance of getting the science right on coal seam gas exploration first.

**Mining**

*Brown coal*

According to *The Age*, two major proponents of new brown coal projects in the Latrobe Valley have revealed they missed out on government grants, narrowing the field of companies in line to share \$90 million on offer. In statements to the stock exchange, companies Exergen and Environmental Clean Technologies both said their applications had been unsuccessful for federal and state government cash under a grant scheme to demonstrate new brown coal technology in the Valley. The \$90 million program was first announced in 2012, but has been highly secretive about which firms had applied and were shortlisted. Sources said an announcement on grants is expected in about six weeks, with final contract negotiations

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## Environment & Conservation

### Oh Deer

Wild deer are trampling through the Dandenong Ranges National Park eating native plants, damaging waterways and disturbing the habitat of native animals. Outside the park, deer have caused car accidents and damaged commercial flower and nursery crops in the Dandenongs. According to *The Age*, a report on Victorian deer hunting has revealed that licensed shooters killed a massive number of deer in the 2012-13 year - an estimated 50,112 - up 20.5 per cent on the previous year. The numbers suggest Victoria has a wild deer population that could be in the hundreds of thousands. Deer were shot in all areas except the Mallee and north central district, the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research report reveals. The largest number, between 12,001 and 16,000, were shot in West Gippsland.

### Heatwave

More than 1000 fires were reported on Thursday January 16th, 40 of which were still burning into the afternoon. According to *The Age*, temperatures are expected to peak at 45 degrees on the 17th, which, with predicted wind gusts of more than 40km/h, created a forecast that has put firefighters on edge. "[Friday] will be a crucial day with hot temperatures and the wind picking up," Emergency Services Minister Kim Wells said. Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said communities between and around Hamilton and Geelong especially needed to be on high alert.

## Events

### Live music

According to *The Age*, the Victorian government has vowed to implement an "agent-of-change" planning principle, which will provide certainty to live music venues that clash with new residents over noise complaints. It comes as the state government prepares to announce a series of red tape reforms, which include making it easier for small venues that want to host live music. Planning Minister Matthew Guy used the last sitting day of State Parliament last year to declare that the government would do whatever it could to implement a principle of agent of change in Victoria's planning scheme.

### Flower show

The Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show is on from the 22-29 March 2014.

## Gaming

### Crown extension

According to *The Age*, a deal that extends Crown Resorts' Melbourne casino licence is being discussed. The company has reportedly asked the Victorian government to extend its licence for another 60 years beyond the 2033 expiry. The request forms part of Crown's negotiations with Victorian Treasurer Michael O'Brien regarding a \$184 million pokies levy that was announced in December, according to reports. But with 20 years still to run on the Melbourne licence, analysts hope an extension is not the only pay-off that Crown can squeeze from negotiations.

## Health

### Medical tourism

According to *The Age*, Victoria's new \$1 billion Comprehensive Cancer Centre could become the state's first hospital to host a private floor for insured patients and wealthy foreigners seeking world-leading cancer care. As part of a push to attract more medical tourists and retain the brightest doctors, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has developed a business case for 50 private beds inside the new Comprehensive Cancer Centre, which is due to be built in Melbourne's Parkville medical precinct by the end of next year. The new centre, being funded by the federal and state governments in a public-private partnership, will house the relocated Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, which is now in East Melbourne, and provide cancer research and clinical care facilities for Melbourne Health, which runs the Royal Melbourne Hospital, and Melbourne University.

### Heat plans

One of Australia's leading heat health experts says Victorians should be taught to develop heatwave plans similar to bushfire plans to help them survive lethal periods of extreme heat. As Victorians brace themselves for another spell of temperatures in the 30s and 40s, Dr Margaret Loughnan, a health geographer at Monash University, said too many vulnerable people such as the elderly and those with chronic illnesses, were not prepared for such hot weather. She said the government could ask people to develop heatwave plans ahead of summer that makes them contemplate staying safe at home during a heatwave or leaving, just like people do with bushfire plans.

### Smoking ban

The push to outlaw smoking in Melbourne's alfresco dining areas has been strengthened by "overwhelming" support from city traders involved in a pilot smoking ban. According to *The Age*, a survey of visitors to The Causeway lane, where a smoking ban is being trialled until March, showed strong backing for the rules to be rolled out city-wide. A Melbourne City Council interim report gauging the mood of the smoking ban, between Little Collins Street and Bourke Street Mall, showed businesses were also in favour of change. Cr Richard Foster said the trial could pave the way for blanket smoking bans in alfresco areas across the city. "There are two ways that we can proceed: one is to conduct trials in other precincts, the other is to take a more systemic response and simply introduce smoke-free dining right across the CBD."

### Queue jumping

According to *The Age*, Victoria's cash-strapped public hospitals are making an increasing amount of money from privately paying patients, causing concern some "private patients" could be jumping public waiting lists or getting other favourable treatment. As the Victorian Auditor-General, John Doyle, prepares to investigate private patient fees in public hospitals this year, audit figures show Victorian public hospitals earned \$719 million from private patients last financial year, up nearly 18 per cent from \$611 million in 2011-12. The surging income from health insurers and individuals paying their own way for care is causing concern that "private patients" could be jumping queues for surgery and other procedures or getting superior treatment in private rooms, for example, when

all patients are meant to be treated equally under the national healthcare agreement, irrespective of their ability to pay.

### Booze ads

According to *The Age*, the Greens will push for a ban on the promotion of alcohol in sport, arguing that it provides a loophole for the alcohol industry to target children. Greens health spokesman Richard Di Natale said he would move for a Senate inquiry into alcohol promotion to children when Federal Parliament returns.

### Vending machines

According to the *Herald Sun*, syringe vending machines could be installed in Footscray and Braybrook within months under a state-first program. The machines will initially be rolled out in Richmond and Abbotsford following a partnership between the Salvation Army and the Yarra Drug and Health Forum. YDHF chief executive Greg Denham said the machines should be made accessible in heroin hot spots to allow people access to clean syringes after-hours and a place for used drug paraphernalia to be disposed of safely.

### Full page

Health Minister David Davis took out a full page ad outlining the pay deal for Ambulance Victoria, with the headline "Supporting Paramedics".

### Good job

Amaze (Autism Victoria) is looking for a Chief Executive Officer. Contact Julia Soutter at (03) 9654 7622 or Julia@fnow.com.au.

## Business & investment

### Fan shortage

White goods retailers were hit with a massive demand for fans, airconditioners and other tools to beat the heat, with some saying there is an industry-wide shortage of cheaper items, such as small fans. During the heatwave, Myer reported a 1000 per cent jump in fan sales compared with last year, and one Harvey Norman branch had sold more than 100 portable airconditioners a day in recent days.

### Toyota

Premier Denis Naphthine will host a crucial round-table meeting with unions, car makers and the federal and state governments in February in an effort to save Toyota as a local car manufacturer. Dr Naphthine has also written to Prime Minister Tony Abbott asking for a meeting about Toyota, and the future of manufacturing in Victoria, before the February 13 round-table talks.

### Defence deals

According to a report in the *Herald Sun*, Victoria is pushing for \$27 billion in defence contracts over the next decade to boost the state's manufacturing industry after the exit of Holden and Ford. In a submission to the federal government's review of the Victorian and South Australian economies, the Victorian government has argued the defence contracts will transform the economy from its reliance on the car industry.

### Building industry

As reported in *The Age*, bribery and dirty deals are rife in the building industry. There were also

details on how Victoria Police, the Australian Crime Commission and NSW Police had failed inquiries involving organised crime in the constructions sector.

### Dimmey's

Melbourne discount retailer Dimmey's has been placed into administration just weeks after it was fined \$3 million for breaching product safety laws. Administrator Richard Cauchi from SV Partners said it will continue to operate the retailer's 40-plus stores as it prepares to sell the 160-year-old business. He ruled out job losses "at this point". Dimmeys, which employs 500 people, was fined \$3 million in late December after the Federal Court found it had contravened Australian consumer law by selling items, including bath toys, children's swimwear, cosmetics and basketball rings, that were hazardous or did not carry compliant warning labels.

### Fair or not?

The Shopping Centre Council of Australia and Kingston Council will consider backing plans for a third Melbourne Costco warehouse at Moorabbin Airport. According to *The Age*, the Moorabbin Airport Corporation, which has a 99-year lease over the Commonwealth land, is preparing a major development plan for the proposed \$35 million project. Planning approval will come under the jurisdiction of federal Infrastructure Minister Warren Truss and could benefit from an accelerated planning process. A spokeswoman for Victorian Planning Minister Matthew Guy confirmed the department was not involved in the Moorabbin Airport development proposal. The SCCA, which represents retail landlords, was part of an unsuccessful legal challenge to halt development of a Direct Factory Outlet and retail centre at Essendon Airport in the mid-2000s. It argued that stores built on airport or federal government land can circumvent local planning rules, giving them unfair access to land as well as an unfair advantage over established centres.

### Hey Hey

According to a report in *The Australian*, miners will receive significant concessions and the industry's archaic licence system will be overhauled under Victorian government plans to slash red tape to attract gold, copper and mineral sands investment. Acting Victorian Premier Peter Ryan announced cuts of up to 50

per cent to rehabilitation bonds for the start-up phase of production for mines and quarries as part of a drive to capitalise on the multibillion-dollar mining sector.

### Refinery sale

A consortium led by investment bank Macquarie Group is believed to be in talks with Shell about buying its Geelong refinery site as well as its 900 petrol stations. According to the Geelong Advertiser, Shell and BP are both mulling a sale of their petrol stations and refineries as they shift their businesses to focus on exploration and production, according to market speculation. Shell's iconic red and yellow scallop logo could disappear from petrol stations if a major shake-up of the nation's fuel retail business goes ahead.

### Alcoa

More than 500 workers at Alcoa's ageing Geelong aluminium smelter will know by the end of March if the plant will close. ALSO VERY IMPORTANTLY, the closure of Alcoa Australia's Point Henry Aluminium smelter in Geelong will trigger a big drop in demand for electricity, prompting warnings it would increase financial stress on power plants and could lead to blackouts. The energy generation industry was dismayed at the decision to close the smelter, which is Victoria's second biggest energy user, *Financial Review*.

### Sydney catching up

According to a report in the *Financial Review*, the number of apartments being built in Sydney will overtake Melbourne this year, but property players in the southern city say Melbourne will remain Australia's apartment-investment capital. "Sydney is on fire, but it is coming off a low base. I think it is too late to get into that market and it is now Brisbane which is at the point Sydney was at a year ago," said Melbourne developer Michael Yates. Building approval figures out on Monday showed apartment approvals rose almost 40 per cent in trend terms in December compared to the same month a year earlier. At the end of last year, 17,461 units were under construction in Melbourne and 21,546 had been approved. In Sydney, 14,595 units were under construction at the end of the year and 24,525 had been approved. In contrast, when Melbourne approvals peaked at 25,217 in 2010-11, Sydney recorded 8614 approvals.

### VECCI

According to *The Age*: 'The Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce (VECCI) is currently taking action in the Supreme Court of Victoria to become a charitable organisation. It is reported that it wants charity status for the purpose of avoiding tax and recouping payroll and land taxes it has already paid. Its claim to charitable status rests on the premise that it is operating in "the public interest".'

## Industrial Relations

### Needed in action

According to *The Age*, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade sought an injunction against the United Fire Fighters Union after the union blocked a last-minute request to approve extra staff to help battle the heat, particularly the expected increase in emergency medical calls. MFB fire fighters are trained in emergency medical response, including the use of defibrillation machines, resuscitation and oxygen treatment. Nine extra trucks and up to 36 extra staff were to be rostered on for the day shifts on the Thursday and Friday of the heatwave. The MFB made a request to the union for approval to roster on extra staff to help with the increased spike of emergency medical calls. At a conference hearing of the Fair Work Commission the union and MFB came to an agreement to roster extra staff.

### Job numbers

Unemployment in Victoria has reached the highest level for more than a decade, as the Victorian government braces for further job losses in the lead-up to the November election. In a sign that the state's labour market is continuing to wane, Victoria's jobless rate lifted a notch in December to 6.2 per cent using the Bureau of Statistics' less volatile trend measure. In trend terms, it was the highest unemployment rate since February 2002. Victorian Treasurer Michael O'Brien said more than 52,000 jobs had been created since the 2010 election. "Only resource-rich Western Australia has created more jobs than Victoria over the last three years." But the figures come amid growing concern about state employment. In December, Holden announced it will stop making cars in Australia from 2017, raising concerns about the future of the automotive industry, which employs more than 25,000 Victorians.

It also follows concerns Alcoa could be preparing to close its struggling Point Henry smelter near Geelong. The future of SPC





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Ardmona - Australia's last remaining cannery - is also under a cloud, with the Shepparton-based employer seeking a \$50 million rescue package. Greater Shepparton City Council has estimated the unemployment rate in the Goulburn Valley would leap from 8.6 per cent to 11 per cent if the plant closed.

### Building code

The Victorian government will consider restoring its controversial construction industry code to its original form after winning a major court victory against the militant builders union. A full bench of the Federal Court ruled that Victoria had not breached the Fair Work Act when warning builder Lend Lease, part of a consortium bidding on the new Bendigo hospital, that it did not comply with its code and related guidelines for the project because of an enterprise deal struck between the company and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union.

## Justice & police

### Racial bias

Victoria Police has pledged to eliminate racial bias in its ranks and has revealed plans to trial giving receipts after searches on the street. According to *The Age*, the moves follow a sweeping inquiry - which attracted more than 70 submissions - into how police engage with the community and whether police cross-cultural training is sufficient. Chief Commissioner Ken Lay: 'Whilst I'm confident Victoria Police as an organisation does not racially profile, I'm equally confident that some of our members have actually engaged in that process.'

### Bikie laws

State Attorney-General Robert Clark is considering giving Victoria Police powers similar to those used to arrest five Victorian "bikies" during a family holiday in Queensland.

### Deaths in custody

According to *The Age*, a coroner has weighed into Victoria's prison crisis, warning inmates are increasingly at risk of harm. Coroner Peter White linked "avoidable" deaths in custody to staff shortages at remand centres, prisons and police cells, while delivering his findings on the death of a mentally ill prisoner who hanged himself in 2010. He warned that the system of dealing with mentally ill inmates at Melbourne Assessment Prison was stretched and more funding was needed to minimise the threat of self-harm or suicide.

### Fire levy

One of the state's largest insurers will have

to refund \$11.3 million wrongly collected from more than 200,000 customers following an investigation by the Fire Services Levy watchdog. According to a report in *The Age*, Insurance Manufacturers of Australia, which underwrites RACV Insurance policies, will reimburse about 206,000 customers who were hit with an 11 per cent increase on their base building premiums in June 2013. It is one of the biggest refunds in Victorian consumer history, according to Fire Services Levy Monitor Professor Allan Fels. Professor Fels said IMA failed to pass on the benefits of the fire service levy reforms. "IMA stood as the only major insurer to increase total building premiums over the last half of 2012-13," he said. Under changes from July, local councils now collect the levy through rates, replacing a previous levy on insurance premiums. Consumer Affairs Minister Heidi Victoria said the announcement showed that monitor was protecting consumers during the transition to a property-based levy.

### Family violence

An alarming level of family violence repeat offences has sparked calls for tougher sentencing and an overhaul of programs aimed at changing violent behaviour. Police crime statistics show almost one in four people charged with family violence last year had faced similar charges before. The number of repeat offenders has more than doubled in five years.

### Vandals

A 259-year-old building has been vandalised just two days before Australia Day. Police were called to Captain Cook's cottage in Fitzroy Gardens just after 7.30am on the 24th January after reports it had been graffitied. It is believed vandals filled light bulbs with paint to create makeshift paint bombs, which they hurled at the walls and roof.

### Cells shipped in

Prisoners in Victoria have started moving into prison cells built from shipping containers. According to *The Age*, fifty-eight prisoners have moved into the containers, which were brought from the Pilbara and installed at the minimum security Dhurringile Prison near Murchison in late December. About 20 more were to move in. Corrections Minister Ed O'Donohue said that only the lowest security prisoners would be housed in the containers.

### Good job

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade is looking for a Chief Executive Officer, 9016 6000.

## Local Government

### One big council

Melbourne must slash its local councils from 31 to just one if it is to plan services and large-scale infrastructure effectively, a former CEO of the City of Melbourne and aide to premier Jeff Kennett says. And Australia should cut its levels of government to just two - national and regional - rather than the current three tiers. "Our federation and the sheer number and layers of organisations that involve themselves in decision making ... slows us down," said Elizabeth Proust delivering the Planning Institute's annual Kemsley Oration, the industry's key annual address, late last year. Hmmm...

### Feeling powerless

An eastern suburbs council fears an unpopular tribunal decision to allow a 48-dwelling complex in Ringwood could undermine its plans for the area. Maroondah City Council mayor Les Willmott said the council had rejected permits for the housing development twice in two years because it was too intensive for the part of Ringwood it would have been built in. "The area of Maroondah is characterised by the trees, the green, the hills," Councillor Willmott said. "For us, it's very important that that is maintained." Too often, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ignored local policy, Cr Willmott said. "It's a concern that our local policies are being overridden. There's an issue within the planning scheme, where the state government policies contradict the local government policies."

### Pool fight

According to *The Age*, Yarra Ranges council maintenance contractors cleaning the 25-metre outdoor pool in Olinda before summer discovered cracks up to a centimetre wide running down the pool floor in both directions. Noel Cliff, a Shire of Yarra Ranges councillor and Save the Olinda Pool supporter, said some council staff and councillors wanted to close the pool even if the cracks were fixed. The outdoor pool, open for four months a year from 2pm to 6pm and closed on total fire ban days, was not making money. But the social value was priceless. Save the Olinda Pool leader John Faull was among locals who raised £4800 to build the pool in 1963, holding dances, progressive dinners and raffles. In 1962, Mr Faull was among CFA volunteers who fought devastating fires in the Dandenongs for three days. The pool was partly built as a firefighting reservoir.

### Fire clean up

Municipalities on Melbourne's suburban edge

have issued more than 6500 fire-prevention notices to landowners urging them to clean up fire hazards, such as long grass. According to *The Age*, the City of Whittlesea, which was hit on Black Saturday by the Kilmore East bushfire, has also issued 160 fines to landowners who failed to clean up their property and comply with the notices. The shire has vast areas of open paddocks, grassland and flammable coastal scrub. Damien Taylor, the fire management co-ordinator, estimated that about 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the notices related to vacant land, while about 30 per cent related to holiday homes and hobby farms that aren't permanently occupied.

#### Frankston land

The Victorian government appears to have backflipped on a contentious sale of waterfront Crown land in Frankston in the face of stiff opposition from a local council. As Environment minister, Ryan Smith has ultimate authority over Crown land, and could have overridden any council decision. The contested land abuts Kananook Creek in a well-off pocket of Frankston known as Long Island. Frankston mayor and Liberal Party member Darrel Taylor said that the council would oppose sale of the land and preferred instead to license part of it to residents.

#### Anomaly

A former manager at Stonnington Council has been charged with almost 1,000 criminal offences following a nine-month investigation by Victoria Police of serious corruption allegations. Shaun Dike, 47, of Narre Warren South, is alleged to have stolen up to \$1 million, after suspicions were raised in February about invoices issued at several council-owned function centres. An independent audit commissioned by Stonnington Council found that an estimated \$750,000 worth of food and alcohol had been stolen over the past five years, although Victoria Police are still yet to determine an exact figure. Mr Dike was employed by the inner-city council for more than 15 years, but was suspended from his role as venue co-ordinator when a "financial anomaly" was uncovered by management.

#### Keeping watch

According to the *Herald Sun*, ratepayer's funds spent by councils on social causes and political campaigns may have to be declared on a new government website. The website, possibly to be called MyCouncil, will allow similar municipalities to be compared. A trial involving 43 councils began in July last year.

#### Royal invite

According to the Geelong Advertiser, Mayor Darryn Lyons has written to Clarence House and the Governor General saying a visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge would 'lift the spirits of our citizens.'

## Melbourne

#### Heat island

According to a report in *The Age*, an urban heat island is lifting city-centre temperatures, with Melbourne leading the nation for heat-related deaths, according to a national report. And Melbourne City Council has found temperature variations of up to 4 degrees between the city centre and suburbs because of the heat-island effect. The federal government's 2013 State of

Australian Cities report found people living in cities could be more susceptible to the effects of heatwaves. It said the heat island was "caused by the prevalence in cities of heat-absorbing materials, such as dark-coloured pavements and roofs, concrete, urban canyons trapping hot air, and a lack of shade and green space". Of the nation's capitals, the report estimated that Melbourne had the highest annual average number of heat-related deaths, with about 200 a year. By comparison, the state's 2013 road toll was 242.

#### Concerns

According to *The Age*, Melbourne City Council will take advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade before deciding whether to end its sister city relationship with St Petersburg. The Council was set to decide whether to cut ties with the Russian city over anti-gay laws, but delayed the decision after concerns were raised that suspending the relationship could have diplomatic consequences.

#### The Wheel

According to *The Age*, the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel has been given the all clear by Work Safe Victoria to reopen for business. One of the cabins had been closed because of complaints from passengers after the wheel reopened on December 23.

#### Fed Square

According to Federation Square officials, more than 90 million people have visited the square in its 11 years and it ranks in the top two city destinations for tourists. Electronic counters are used to record visits, officials said. The \$450 million square now hosts more than 2000 events a year. According to *The Age*, Fed Square chief executive Chris Brooks hopes to increase the diversity of events and make it a destination, rather than just a spot to pass through or meeting place.

#### Not going to plan

The key plan to deliver enough housing, transport, jobs and services to cater for Melbourne's booming population is late and faces a major rewrite following higher than expected population figures. The draft Victorian government plan has also been criticised as a "business-as-usual approach" and for "retroactively" justifying government policies such as the east-west link. The completed Plan Melbourne 40-year blueprint for the city's future was due to be released on January 1 following the release of the draft report in October. The finished plan is now not expected until next month after the government received hundreds of submissions commenting on the draft.

## Planning

#### Pencil tower

A super-thin, 73-storey apartment tower with a design twist has been given the green light for Southbank. According to the *Herald Sun*, Planning Minister Matthew Guy said the tower, with 256 apartments, would prove a stunning addition to the inner-city skyline. Melbourne City Council failed unsuccessfully in its bid to block the approval in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Mr Guy said the thin tower was a sign of things

to come as Melbourne strives to accommodate a rapidly growing population.

#### Out of reach?

Planning and building regulations are adding about \$15,000 to the price of every new home in Victoria, the Master Builders Association has claimed. According to the *Herald Sun*, it says this leaves thousands of cash-strapped buyers unable to fulfil the great Aussie dream of owning their own home.

In its pre-budget submission, the association has called on the Victorian government to ease housing affordability pressures by cutting red tape ahead of the November state election. It says this will help people currently locked out of the market by skyrocketing prices. Planning delays, taxes, levies and multiple government land charges are lifting the building cost for new homes by between \$500 million and \$875 million a year - which is directly passed on to buyers.

#### Objectors lose

VCAT's decision to approve a brothel in an industrial park bordering a residential area shows how tensions can rise when the tribunal adheres to planning considerations in determining applications for brothels, which inevitably polarise communities. According to *The Age*, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal "does not consider the morality of a brothel", a spokeswoman for the tribunal said. "That has been determined by Parliament." The decision to approve the Port Melbourne brothel has gained the backing of some local residents and businesses. But others have said it will put their employees' safety at risk, especially at night, and that restrictions on the amount of advertising displayed on the brothel's exterior do little to allay their fears. They are also concerned that granting the permit will encourage other applications, transforming the community for the worse just when rising property prices are increasing residential development in the vicinity.

#### Abbotsford

According to the *Herald Sun*, the Abbotsford Convent is marking ten years as a community arts precinct with an \$18 million fundraising drive to restore historic buildings.

#### Frankston deal

According to *The Age*, Environment Minister Ryan Smith wrote to the Frankston Council seeking support for sale of the land at the rear of homes in Gould Street, a well-to-do seaside pocket of Frankston also known as Long Island. An extract of the letter provided by Mr Smith reads: "The sale of part of Kananook Creek Reserve is one solution that may resolve this issue and allow the council to manage the reserve for all Victorians." A spokeswoman for the Environment Minister said the land had been problematic for 40 years, and the previous Labor government had failed to resolve the long-running issue. She said the minister's intervention was not unusual.

## Sport

#### Called off

About 1,000 spectators were treated for heat exhaustion at the Australian Open as tournament organisers applied the extreme

heat policy at Melbourne Park on 16th January afternoon, declaring the conditions unsafe for players.

## Transport – Ports

### Deal eyed

According to *The Age*, the Victorian government is actively considering privatising the ports of Melbourne and Hastings under an election-year infrastructure plan that could reap as much as \$8 billion. Government and infrastructure sources are adamant that selling the Port of Melbourne on its own would undermine both the sale price and efforts to develop an alternative terminal away from the city to handle future growth in container trade. Under one scenario, older parts of the Port of Melbourne, including Swanson Dock, could be offered using a 29-year or 49-year lease, to avoid locking up valuable city land for up to a century. The newer Webb Dock section and Hastings - subject to environmental approvals - could be offered for lease over a longer time frame as part of a package. Container trade would be progressively shifted to Hastings as the new port is developed over the medium term. Privatising the port - one of Victoria's last significant publicly owned assets - is now seen as politically necessary to fund alternative transport proposals. "There is no way we are going to let Labor waste a valuable asset for a short-term political fix," the government source said.

### Changes urged

The Port of Melbourne Corporation has asked the Victorian government to change its plans for part of the east-west link, fearing the toll road will create traffic bottlenecks near the port as freight trucks and cars converge in their thousands at the link's western end. It also predicts the east-west link will trigger a boom in truck traffic in Melbourne's inner west when it opens, intensifying conflict between residents, councils and the freight industry and building political pressure to restrict truck access to local roads. And it identifies what it says is a serious flaw in the design of the east-west link port connection - a four-lane elevated road planned to run parallel to CityLink for three kilometres but without any direct connection between the two. In a submission to the planning panel that is considering the \$6-\$8 billion road project, the Port of Melbourne Corporation supports the link's completion, but reveals it has serious doubts about the planned port connection between the tunnel opening in Royal Park and Footscray Road.

## Transport – Air

### Museum plan

Avalon Airport is among preferred sites for a national aviation museum in a petition proposal calling for a State Government feasibility study. Australian Aircraft Restoration Group members say the site has it all and a museum could become a year-round tourism magnet complementing the biennial Australian International Airshow.

## Transport – Rail

### Regional rail link

The \$4.8 billion regional rail link will provide just two years' breathing space for commuters on one of Melbourne's busiest train lines when it opens in 2015 before rapid population growth in the outer west sparks a new peak-

hour crush. According to a report in *The Age*, Metro warned the state government almost two years ago that the state's biggest infrastructure project would bring only short-term relief to the Werribee line before congestion begins to bite again in 2017. In a five-year strategic operations plan from 2012, the rail operator said a mix of longer nine-car and seven-car trains would be needed within five years to handle passenger growth on the Werribee line, and that would involve lengthening railway station platforms to 200 metres. Two new stations have opened since Metro delivered its plan, one at Williams Landing on the Werribee line and another at West Footscray on the Sunbury line, but neither have platforms long enough for nine-carriage trains.

### Summer works

Three railway lines were to be shut for more than three weeks until January 19 as work on the regional rail link, the state's biggest infrastructure project, goes into overdrive. According to *The Age*, some of Melbourne's freeways will also be closed for roadworks, and some trams will be suspended or disrupted. Coaches will replace all trains on the metropolitan Sunbury line and on the regional Bendigo and Ballarat lines, adding an estimated 45 to 60 minutes to average journeys, while work takes place round the clock on the \$4.8 billion rail project. The planned shutdown of Melbourne's busiest road, the M1, for major works is unprecedented in scale and VicRoads has warned of delays of up to an hour, advising drivers to avoid the area if they can. The M1, or West Gate and Monash freeways, which is connected by CityLink's tunnels, carries an average 180,000 vehicles each weekday. VicRoads says traffic volume falls about thirty per cent during summer holidays, which would still be more than 125,000 vehicles on those roads per day during much of the staged shutdown.

### Derailed

According to *The Age*, a tram was derailed after being hit by a car in Lygon St, East Brunswick. Trams were replaced with buses for a short time but services returned to normal after the tram was placed back on the tracks just before noon.

### December heat

Melbourne's rail operator said that a forecast 40-degree maximum had "forced" it to cancel 48 services combined, due to heat-related speed restrictions that take effect at 38 degrees. Metro took the unprecedented step of cancelling trains in advance so passengers who regularly catch those trains could make other plans, it said. Metro spokeswoman Larisa Tait said the speed restrictions would also cause some delays. The heat-related cancellations in Melbourne contrast with Perth's recent experience, in which not a single train was cancelled due to the heat, despite a string of days above 40 degrees.

### January heat

Metro urged commuters to leave work early as the temperature soared into the mid-40s with many train and tram services cancelled or delayed because of the extreme temperatures. Yarra Trams echoed the warning, urging passengers to leave early due to the need to take trams out of service for maintenance. Route 82 from Footscray to Moonee Ponds was suspended until Saturday so those trams could be allocated to other routes. Replacement buses

were operating.

### Slower

According to the *Herald Sun*, V/Line has warned that travelling times will be longer on the Geelong and Warrnambool lines because of trains slowing down as a safety precaution when the temperature is 36C or above.

### Old trains

Victoria's ageing train infrastructure is costing taxpayers millions in unnecessary power usage and stymieing efforts by the train operator to cut its greenhouse emissions. According to *The Age*, Metro is the state's second-biggest user of electricity, but its efforts to consume less power are being hampered by Melbourne's antiquated rail infrastructure, including a power-supply system that is more than 90 years old and trains that are close to retirement age. In its 2012-17 strategic operations plan, under freedom-of-information laws, Metro revealed it was the state's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter through electricity use. It is understood that only aluminium manufacturer Alcoa consumes more electricity. Metro's five-year plan includes a target to cut power use by 10 per cent for each kilometre of train travel - and ultimately by 20 per cent - to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and save taxpayers' money. The state pays Metro's electricity bill under the rail operator's franchise agreement with the Transport Department.

### Old trams

More than half of Melbourne's trams have no air conditioning for passengers, making for a hot and sweaty ride for tens of thousands of commuters and tourists during this week's extreme heat.

Fairfax Media measured the temperature inside a tram and found it was 42.8 degrees. Passengers inside complained of the taxing conditions, saying they expected better. There are 255 trams with no air conditioning in Melbourne, and 235 with it. Many of the non-air conditioned trams run on the city's busiest and most crowded routes, including along Swanston Street and St Kilda Road, the world's busiest tram corridor. Trams without cool air, except for the driver, are the older Z-Class and A-Class, and the W-Class trams that run the City Circle route. The state government has no plan to install air conditioning on those trams, all built before 1988, because it is considered to be too difficult and expensive.

### Security lapse

Personal information about public transport users in Victoria has been exposed to potential identity theft because government authority Public Transport Victoria failed to secure its website. The security flaw in the PTV website was discovered by schoolboy Joshua Rogers, 16, who used a simple hacking technique to unearth a database containing the personal records of customers of the former Metlink online store. The database includes full names, addresses, home and mobile phone numbers, email addresses, dates of birth, seniors card ID numbers, and nine-digit extracts of credit card numbers. Joshua contacted PTV in December to warn it of the site's vulnerabilities. It referred the matter to the police.

## Transport – Road

### Proving the case

The state government failed to submit a “robust” business case for independent scrutiny to justify the east-west road link, according to Australia’s major projects umpire. Infrastructure Australia has singled out the controversial \$6 billion to \$8 billion road as a key example of why the public are cynical about about “big-ticket” infrastructure announcements. In a strongly worded submission to a Senate inquiry examining government plans to overhaul of the advisory body, Infrastructure Australia national co-ordinator Michael Deegan warns that big spending promises are being made without proper scrutiny.

#### Room with a view

In September, the state government paid \$90 million for 175 apartments in the Evo complex, Parkville, from off-the-plan investors. According to *The Age*, State government plans for the east-west link show the seven-storey building surrounded by two tollway flyovers which will meet CityLink, with apartments overlooking a steady stream of traffic. In an unusual move, and in what Treasurer Michael O’Brien described as “unique circumstances”, the state government offered to buy out the purchasers’ contracts before settlement. The apartments are being advertised online with real estate agents Noble Knight - but there is no mention of the east-west link or the six-year construction phase.

#### Kennel problems

Seeing Eye Dogs new centre, opening in March after 16 months of construction, has been told by the government that three-quarters of its site will be needed for construction of the \$6-8 billion road tunnel linking the Eastern Freeway to CityLink. In all, the government says 11 businesses in the Kensington area will be affected by the new road. General manager Leigh Garwood says the Linking Melbourne Authority was almost as shocked as his organisation when it was told about the fate of the new guide dog project. The authority has since met Seeing Eye Dogs three times, and Mr Garwood says it is doing its best to minimise the impact.

#### Moonee Valley

According to *The Age*, Moonee Valley Council has confirmed its opposition to the east-west link in a scathing submission on the comprehensive impact statement for the project.

#### Call for answers

According to *The Age*, the authority in charge of the east-west link has not adequately explained the impact the road will have on people during and after its construction, according to the government planning panel assessing the project. The Department of Planning’s hearings into the \$6 billion-\$8 billion project began on Tuesday. Its panel of experts assessing the project tabled a list of 89 questions about the toll road, which the Linking Melbourne Authority must answer within 20 days.

#### NYE

Just as Melbourne opened up its parks to New Year’s Eve midnight fireworks displays it closed nearby loop stations, Public Transport Victoria has said. Flagstaff and Parliament railway stations shut at 11.45pm just before the midnight fireworks display kicked off at Treasury and Flagstaff gardens. After the display passengers taking advantage of the

free public transport needed to be funnelled through to Southern Cross and Flinders Street stations. Alan Fedda, Public Transport Victoria director of customer service, said the move was designed to allow quicker access out of the city and avoid the crush between midnight and 1am when public transport was at its busiest.

#### Traffic chaos then

According to the *Herald Sun* in late December, motorists were being advised to steer clear of the city, or they could experience delays of up to an hour. The Domain tunnel was shut for four days until New Year’s Eve. The inbound lanes of the West Gate Bridge were to be closed overnight for eight hours, and the outbound lanes for eight hours from 11pm. Batman Ave, City Rd, Alexandra Ave, Punt Rd and the Swan St Bridge would experience the heaviest traffic and longest delays.

#### Sporting compo

According to the *Herald Sun*, sporting clubs have been given a \$15 million package as compensation for disruptions the East West Link project will cause. The Victorian Government cash will be used to guarantee the future of sporting clubs using Royal Park and to fast-track improvements to the recreation reserves. Displaced sporting groups including AFL9s, Melbourne OzTag and ArchiSoccer will benefit from additional capacity at sporting grounds around Princes Park South. The University of Melbourne Baseball Club will be permanently removed to the Old Grass hockey fields in Royal Park. The City of Melbourne and sporting clubs were critical of the original plan that would have seen 10 clubs displaced to make way for the tunnel.

#### Taxi licences

The Taxi Services Commission began issuing final notices late last year to operators who were in arrears on their annual payments, which have risen in cost every year since being released by the former Brumby government in 2009. According to *The Age*, Taxi Commissioner Graeme Samuel said a lasting solution had not yet been found. “The commission has some receptiveness to the position that says we ought not to be taking wheelchair-accessible taxis off the road for failure to pay a fee that is clearly going to drop in a few months’ time, and we’re now working on a mechanism to deal with that,” he said. From July, the annual licence fee for wheelchair-accessible taxis will be reduced to \$18,400, in line with a finding of Professor Allan Fels’ taxi industry inquiry.

#### Good job

The Taxi Services Commission is looking for a Director – Business Strategy and Planning. Contact Kathryn Harper on 03 9650 2555.

## Utilities

#### More desal not the answer

Melbourne’s substantial future water needs should be met by capturing more rainwater from rooftops and drains and encouraging water recycling, not new desalination plants or dams, the state government says. According to *The Age*, the government will release its plan to provide the extra water needed for the 2.5 million extra people expected to live in Melbourne by 2050 through more water efficient design of suburbs and households. As part of the plan, the government says it will rewrite

the mandates of state-owned water companies and develop with industry a voluntary code to disclose household water efficiency for buyers and renters. The government is also considering changes to building codes and planning laws to enshrine better water performance in homes, businesses and communities, such as meeting higher standards for stormwater or more efficient appliances in homes.

The state government will also make it a requirement of the government-owned water corporations - such as Melbourne Water - to enact plans consistent with the Melbourne’s Water Future strategy. Water Minister Peter Walsh said there would be provisions ensuring the goals were achieved within the existing funding limits for water companies, meaning households bills would not be allowed to rise to meet the objectives. Mr Walsh ruled out any privatisation of the water corporations. And, despite the planned use of more recycled water, that would not be extended to drinking water. The chief executive of the Victorian Water Industry Association, Tony Wright, said the group was broadly supportive of the plan’s objectives and many of the measures “made a lot of sense”.

## Society

#### Homelessness

According to *The Age*, street homelessness could be eliminated in Victoria within ten years if the government spent less than \$15 million a year on new homes and support, the state’s peak homelessness body says. The Council to Homeless Persons has put a plan to the government to get the 1092 people estimated to be sleeping rough in the last census off Victorian streets and into their own homes by 2024.

## Vale

Paul Arber. Former tennis player and coach. Dr Suzanne de Villiers Bosisto, 66. Michael Clark. Shakespeare tutor. John Norman Dunn. Helen Ferber AM, 94. Roy Fink, former Director of Colo-rectal Surgery Dept at St Vincents. Clifford Fivash, 90. Wing Commander AFC (Retd). Gregory Fountain, 63. Arthur Gietzelt, 93. WW2 veteran and former Hawke government minister. James Green. Tibol Gonczol OAM, 80. Simon Graham, 73. Barney Hannebery, 76. Frank Patrick Henagan. John Harcourt-Horsfield, 71. Artist and host. George Herscu, 85. Dorothea Jelbart, 91. Roy Leschke, 89. Michael Letch OAM, 65. Disabled achiever. Stephen Lithgow. Sister Rae Lockey. Margaret Lyttle, 101. Past principal of Preshil. Valda McRae. Perc McGuigan, 100. Winemaker. Ian Mann. Maurice Laurence Mashford, 83. Clinical Pharmacologist. Dr Stanley John Scott, 77. Anna Simonsen. Chinese teacher at Wesley College for 24 years. Charles Richard Stackhouse, 89. Iris Sutherland. Peter O’Toole, 81. Actor. Jack Ward, 92. Antarctic pioneer, librarian. David Wishart, 97. Victorian director of Agriculture.