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
Letter from Melbourne

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

Contents

8 Justice & police
9 Local Government
10 Melbourne
10 Planning
10 Sport
10 Transport – Ports
11 Transport – Air
11 Transport – Rail
12 Utilities
12 Society
12 Vale

Advertise with us
Want to get your firm or product in front of the power-holders of Victoria? Advertising with Letter from Melbourne is the best way to do so. Read by CEOs, MPs and movers-and-shakers in Melbourne and beyond, our magazine gets your voice by the people who matter. Email info@affairs.com.au or call 9654 1300 to discuss how we can help you.

About us
Affairs of State

Published by A.B Urquhart & Company Pty Ltd trading as Affairs of State.

Disclaimer: Material in this publication is general comment and not intended as advice on any particular matter. Professional advice should be sought before action is taken.

Material is compiled from various sources including newspaper articles, press releases, government publications, Hansard, trade journals, etc.

Copyright: This newsletter is copyright. No part may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission from the publisher.

Affairs of State respects your privacy. While we do believe that the information contained in Letter from Melbourne will be useful to you, please advise us if you do not wish to receive any further communications from us.

Edited words in this edition: 11,055
190 editions. 2.01 million words approx.

Cover image
Royal Botanical Garden, Melbourne.
Author: Daderot, Wikimedia Commons.

Staff
Editor
Alistair Urquhart
alistair@affairs.com.au

Sub Editor
Morgan Squires
mcqu1@student.monash.edu

Design
Cory Zanoni
coryzanoni@gmail.com

Copy Editor
Robert Stove
stoverobertjames@yahoo.com

Subscriptions & advertising
info@affairs.com.au

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.

The firm provides the following to clients:
- Two monthly publications
- Events at our offices and elsewhere
- Chairs and specialist directorates
- Facilitation with business and legal skills
- Training courses
- Mentoring of senior executives

A list of recent developments in the policy arena on a local, state and federal level.

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.

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 state and federal level. 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.

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 supported by a database of 2,000,000 words available to search digitally.

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

Content

1 State Government & Politics
2 Federal
3 Education
4 Energy
5 Mining
6 Environment & Conservation
7 Events
8 Business & investment
9 Industrial Relations
10 Transport – Ports
11 Transport – Air
12 Society
12 Utilities
12 Vale

Advertise with us
Want to get your firm or product in front of the power-holders of Victoria? Advertising with Letter from Melbourne is the best way to do so. Read by CEOs, MPs and movers-and-shakers in Melbourne and beyond, our magazine gets your voice by the people who matter. Email info@affairs.com.au or call 9654 1300 to discuss how we can help you.

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 its 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.

The firm provides the following to clients:
- Two monthly publications
- Events at our offices and elsewhere
- Chairs and specialist directorates
- Facilitation with business and legal skills
- Training courses
- Mentoring of senior executives

Clients
- Two monthly publications
- Events at our offices and elsewhere
- Chairs and specialist directorates
- 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 he federals do not control everything.

Then other big projects such at 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 say 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.**

---

**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.

**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 Wooldridge 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 Eldion. 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
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 lay 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 1990s. 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. Some of the ưunanswered 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.

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 Share 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
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 shipbuilding 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 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.

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. Jump in to 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.

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
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 La Trobe 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

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 Adano 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 Kotsiraro 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.

CSIRO
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 kilometer 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...
under way with winners.

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 amended its Victoria application, 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.

Balloons in hospital
According to The Age, the Greens will push for a ban on the promotion of alcohol in hospital, 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 Napthine 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 Napthine 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”. Dimmey’s, 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 part of an unsuccessful legal challenge to halt 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 part of an unsuccessful legal challenge to halt the Moorabbin Airport development proposal.

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 demand for electricity. Prompting warnings it would increase financial stress on power plants and demand for electricity. 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.

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...
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. Old 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 200,000 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 the monitor was protecting consumers during the transition to a property-based levy.

Family violence

An alarming level of family violence repeat offenders 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 Dhurringale 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 efficiently, according to the City of Melbourne’s former CEO. Jeff Kennett says. And Australia should cut its levels of government to just two - national and state - rather than the 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 Knoxley Oration, the industry’s key annual address, late last year.

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, 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 state - rather than the 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 Knoxley Oration, the industry’s key annual address, late last year.

Pool light

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 pool is 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 Noel Cliff was among locals who raised £4800 to build the pool in 1963, holding dances, progressive dinners and raffles. In 1962, Mr Faul 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 clear 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”.

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 officers are seeing 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 remediate 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 say a plan to privatise 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 Swanston 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.

Regional rail link
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 trains 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 $4.8billion 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.

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 the train’s major routes would still be more than 125,000 vehicles on those roads per day during much of the staged shutdown.

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 websites. 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 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 display kicked off, kicked off night traffic as a key example of the midnight fireworks display kicked off, kicked off night traffic 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.