Letter from Melbourne

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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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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
- Charts and specialist directories
- Mediation and negotiation
- Facilitation with business and legal skills
- Training courses
- Mentoring of senior executives

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.

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INVITATION

Understanding Government

Letter From Melbourne and its Editor invite you, our hard copy subscribers, to short complimentary seminars at Level 2, 14 Collins Street over the coming months.

On Monday:

- **28 July** *(Getting what you want from Government)*,
- **25 August** *(Follow the government money trail)*,
- **22 September** *(Ethics in Government)*,
- **27 October** *(What the Editor learned in Birmingham)*.

From 5.15 until 6.30pm

When you RSVP, please consider sharing this opportunity with any of your colleagues, and any interns and like-minded younger folk. You can have several people attend, even without you!

RSVP about five days beforehand preferably. 9654 1300 or alistair@affairs.com.au.
Editorial

RRRR%RRRR

I never thought that I would come out in this magazine, and name someone or something as I am about to do, but The Age is going just a little bit too far. The Age is too far, to the left, no doubt chasing the middle left Green vote. In politics class at school, I had a very practical teacher. He spent a few years shooting the Japanese, but when that was all over, he got on with the job of living in a practical Australia, teaching farmers’ sons to get on with life. ‘The Colonel’ taught us that come what may, 45 per cent of Australians voted Liberal, 45 per cent voted Labor and the other ten per cent changed their minds on voting day, according to the important issues of the day.

Right Now, with so many positive developments and plans for Victoria, it’s a terrible shame that the government’s impressive forward-looking vision for the state, built as it is on a solid budget, is all too often clouded by silly and, let’s face it, totally forgettable ‘scandals’ such as the whole Geoff Shaw affair, a painfully protracted and puerile nonsense if ever there was. These days, The Age ‘Independent. Always.’ (a new sub title since about a year ago) seems to fill several pages of most editions with anti-government material, in conjunction with the aBC coverage. Arguing over whether one project or programme could be done better or another way.

I try and keep this publication as free of partisan politics as is sensible to do so in the vein of it being a publication on public policy and government and business news. Oh, I have not mentioned the Herald Sun and the Fin and the big Australian. Yes. They have their often awful bias as elections and budgets are in the air, very much a BC coverage. Arguing over whether one project or programme could be done better or another way.

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It is a shame given that Victoria has everything to play for, and distractions such as skewed media content threatens that state of affairs, and a future of great promise, which, of course, should be the pride of all Victorians.

More lightly. The main purpose of Melbourne’s weather is to have four seasons in a day so that the Ladies, in particular, can have good reason to wear such a wide range of appropriate clothes and attachments. Well, this is not certainly the case this winter season.

Cover. It can be fun to walk up Collins Street, singing a range of songs, as one sees Can You Hear The People Sing flags on the light poles. Les Misérables, late June until 28 August, at Her Majesty’s Theatre. And there is much other wonderful theatre around Melbourne presently. Off you go.

State government & politics
Stolen tape
An email featuring a recording of a private conversation between former premier Ted Baillieu and a Sunday Age journalist was sent to Liberal Party members in Victoria. And reported in the Herald Sun. The Liberal Party has launched an investigation to discover who may have illegally accessed a computer database and emailed members - which was sent from an Elizabeth McRoberth, who the Liberal Party says is not a member. In the recording, Mr Baillieu is critical of parliamentary colleagues, including upper house MP Bernie Finn and rogue Frankston MP Geoff Shaw. Baillieu speaks of Mr Finn and his ‘crazy mates’ pushing Mr Shaw on several issues.

Political analysis
According to Josh Gordon in The Age: ‘Recently Denis Napthine tried to demonstrate his government was getting on with “governing for all Victorians” with new laws allowing police to confiscate the assets of drug traffickers. But once again he was thwarted by his own party. One theory in Liberal circles is that there is a small but active group of disgruntled Liberals who are conducting a guerilla-style campaign to destabilise the government. The objective of this crass squad of right-wing commandos is to induce a loss for the Coalition to clear the way for promotions, fresh blood and a new conservative agenda after the November 29 election, sources say.’

Editorial notes
In The Age: ‘The Age is deeply disappointed that a confidential interview, between Farrah Tomazin [The Age’s state political correspondent] and Ted Baillieu has been publicly released. Ms Tomazin’s tape recorder went missing in early May. The tape recorder, which carries a label identifying it as Fairfax Media property, should have been returned to us. Clearly, someone has listened to the tape and identified the speakers, and chosen to use some material in a political dirty tricks campaign.’

Trust The Age?
The Herald Sun in flamboyant style devoted a whole page to the story with the prominent heading ‘Trust us, we won’t tell a soul’, and proceeded to record the comments of both past and present Liberal premiers on the subject of ‘The Age tape debacle’. It continued: ‘On Tuesday, a recording of a private conversation between former premier Ted Baillieu and Sunday Age reporter Farrah Tomazin, in which the ex-leader slammed a number of his parliamentary colleagues, was leaked to Liberal MPs and party members’. An accompanying story noted that ‘Liberal Party officials are confident they will identify who created the email of the Ted Baillieu recording. The list is believed to have been made with the assistance of rogue party office bearers in federal electorates who have access to members’ email addresses in their seats’.

Jeff blasts Ted
The Herald Sun ran with a cover story with the headline ‘Just Get Out’ and reported that former premier Jeff Kennett has questioned why Ted Baillieu is remaining in parliament after a leaked recording emerged of the ousted Liberal premier calling some of his party colleagues ‘crazy’. Kennett is quoted as saying ‘Why doesn’t he get out and do something he enjoys, with people he enjoys being around?’ ‘It shows that Ted is still upset, is still frustrated by a number of his parliamentary colleagues. If you are frustrated by people around you, why commit yourself to another four years with them? Why make yourself unhappy?’

That tape
The Herald Sun carried a follow-up on the mysterious dirty dealing behind the tape that
Part of the political and government process is to have a discussion or develop a relationship with government ministers, shadow ministers, advisers and public servants.

And sometimes the best way to do that is outside the office. We’ve curated a list of the best meeting places and coffee shops around Victorian Parliament so you can spend less time thinking where to go and more time thinking about the important things.
has embarrassed the Liberal party and raised a host of questions about the role of The Age in the affair. The story claimed that ‘a senior Abbott government adviser has emerged as a prime suspect in the leaked tape scandal’ but no definitive proof has emerged.

Smith backs Labor plan
Liberal backbencher and former Speaker Ken Smith claimed he would back Labor’s push to expel maverick MP Geoff Shaw, despite the government leaning towards a suspension move, saying he does not want the Frankston MP suspended with pay. Spring Street was braced for a tumultuous week when it resumed with the opposition promising to move to expel the rogue MP for contempt of Parliament over the misuse of his parliamentary vehicle. Mr Smith, whose tenure as Speaker was ended by Shaw withdrawing support, told Channel Ten that expulsion is where the saga should finish up.

But then...
Later, Smith said he would wait before deciding whether to vote with the opposition to expel Geoff Shaw from Parliament. See later.

Byelection
A Frankston byelection would be avoided even if controversial MP Geoff Shaw is expelled from the Parliament, with the Speaker able to rule a vote out if she believes it is too close to the state election. Former Speaker Ken Smith, a government MP who lost his post as Speaker following Mr Shaw declaring he had lost confidence in him, says he will vote with the opposition to find Frankston MP guilty of contempt of Parliament. No date has been set for Parliament to vote on the privileges committee’s recommendations to force Mr Shaw to repay nearly $7000.

Out of touch
According to The Age, Frankston’s Liberal Mayor hit out at balance of power MP Geoff Shaw, saying he is ‘out of touch’.

Not on
According to The Age, Premier Denis Napthine has categorically ruled out allowing embattled MP Geoff Shaw to wind back Victoria’s abortion laws.

Shaw saga
The career of controversial MP Geoff Shaw was under a fresh cloud after ex-Speaker Ken Smith backed an Opposition stance that his misuse of a taxpayer-funded car was a contempt of Parliament. Mr Smith has left the door ajar to crossing the floor to side with Labor on any vote to censure the Frankston MP. The Government-dominated committee recommended he repay $6838 for several trips in his car that benefited his hardware business. But though it found that Mr Shaw had abused the use of his parliamentary vehicle for commercial purposes, it said he’d not ‘wilfully’ broken the code of conduct for MPs and so was not in contempt of Parliament. This was despite legal advice suggesting that ‘reckless, careless or wanton’ could amount to a wilful breach of the code. If the Assembly votes to support the committee’s recommendations, Mr Shaw will have dodged a potential career-ending punishment, such as expulsion from Parliament. But Liberal MP Ken Smith told the Herald Sun he supported a dissenting report by Labor MPs, and Mr Shaw was not fit to stay in Parliament.

I would certainly get up and speak in favour of their minority report. Shaw should have been found guilty of contempt of parliament,’ he said. He did not rule out crossing the floor, for the first time in 25 years, if there was a vote on the matter because he believed parliamentary privilege had been abused.

Shaw saga (2)
Balance-of-power MP Geoff Shaw has been ordered to repay a further $6838 for misusing his parliamentary car, but has escaped harsher penalties. According to The Age, the lower house parliamentary privileges committee handed down its final report into the Frankston MP’s misuse of his car, and found Mr Shaw was not in contempt of Parliament but contravened the code of conduct. The government-dominated committee was split, with all four Labor members finding the Frankston MP guilty of contempt.

Suspend, not expel
Geoff Shaw could be suspended rather than expelled from Parliament under a Victorian government plan to avoid a messy by-election and protect the Coalition’s fragile grip on power. Government sources have confirmed an attempt to fine and suspend the balance-of-power MP – possibly for a period of weeks – is the most likely option as a sanction for misusing his vehicle and fuel card. Another day of brinksmanship, Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews challenged the Coalition to back a harsher Labor plan when Parliament resumes to expel Mr Shaw from Parliament. Former Speaker Ken Smith is not ruling out supporting the proposal, potentially giving Labor the numbers needed to out the Frankston MP.

Outcome
Rebel independent MP Geoff Shaw was last night handed the longest suspension from the Victorian Parliament in a century after lengthy investi–gations found he had rorted his vehicle and fuel allowance. The vote came after former Speaker Ken Smith announced at the eleventh hour he would back the Victorian government on the floor of the parliament, ending days of uncertainty about the government’s ability to reach the November 29 election.

Quit gambit
Merely days into his suspension from Parliament, the independent MP said while it was his ‘intent’ to recontest the seat of Frankston, he would consider pulling out if polls suggested he was his ‘intent’ to recontest the seat of Frankston, he would consider pulling out if polls suggested that he was headed for defeat. ‘I’m not going to go into a known loss,’’ he said. ‘At the moment there’s good support in Frankston, so we’ll see.’

Test of power
Premier Denis Napthine will move to test his authority over the Victorian Parliament with an attempt to introduce tougher sentences for paedophiles, drug traffickers and culpable drivers. According to The Age, with Frankston independent Geoff Shaw suspended from Parliament for 11 sitting days, the government’s legislative agenda remains under a cloud, with the numbers deadlocked 43-43, there is not enough support to pass the new laws.

Musings
In The Age, Mark Hawthorne wrote: ‘On Monday night of last week, Denis Napthine picked up his mobile phone and made two calls. The first was to Geoff Shaw. The second was to Ken Smith. Neither bothered to answer. It’s a sign of just how far on the outer both men are with the political party of which they are members.’

Labor’s IBAC push
According to The Age, Victoria’s anti-corruption agency has been asked to investigate Premier Denis Napthine’s claim that balance of power MP Geoff Shaw demanded a particular judicial appointment to guarantee his political support.

Explained
Ten out of ten to the Herald Sun for explaining a complicated constitutional issue so quickly.

Judicial appointment
Geoff Shaw has denied using his balance-of-power clout to make demands for a judicial appointment, claiming his concerns have always related to Victoria’s abortion laws. According to The Age, the balance-of-power independent has also vowed not to back down on his threat to back a no-confidence motion against Denis Napthine, who he said had refused to guarantee that former Speaker Ken Smith would be prevented from voting with Labor to expel him.

Easier said than done
In The Age in mid-June, former Premier John Cain wrote: ‘The government’s recent conduct is proof enough of the need for an election. The Premier Denis Napthine should have visited Government House, either on his journey to Bendigo or instead of that journey. His duty as leader of the government is clear. The convention we observe in this country, and have for centuries in the Western world, requires that the leader of the government must be able to command a majority of votes on the floor of the lower house at all times. That support must come with certainty and integrity. It is not to be conditional or subject to trade, or on a contrary whim. The Premier knows and has known for some months that he cannot do this. He cannot give the Governor any assurances that he commands that majority. A governor so informed would then inform the Governor, who would have to inform the Governor that he too is unable to command a majority.’

A real ‘sorry’
The Herald Sun reports that rogue MP Geoff Shaw wants to submit a written apology to be read out in the Victorian Parliament, but the premier Denis Napthine wants him to apologise personally in the Legislative Assembly, specifically to ‘stand up in the house’ and make the apology on September 2. If the apology goes ahead it is believed the Assembly Speaker Christine Fyffe will read the letter on behalf of Mr Shaw which in turn will pave the way for him to return to the parliament and regain the balance of power weeks before the state election in November. If, however, Shaw fails to apologise in person to the Assembly and the people of Victoria for his behaviour by September 2, he will be found in contempt of Parliament and can be suspended. The implication on a formal personal apology stems from Shaw’s less than serious behaviour in recent days. In early June Shaw made an apology of sorts at a comedy show; premier Napthine was quoted on a formal personal apology stems from Shaw’s less than serious behaviour in recent days. In early June Shaw made an apology of sorts at a comedy show; premier Napthine was quoted

The Australian saying, ‘I think it was a bit of a joke. He needs to be genuinely remorseful, genuinely apologetic to the people of Frankston, the people of Victoria and the parliament’.
Vetting MPs
Victoria’s major political parties face internal ructions over the way election candidates are vetted, with some members calling for a more rigorous process - including the introduction of mandatory police checks. According to The Age, as the dust settles over the Coalition’s suspension of Geoff Shaw - and Labor faces its own fallout after its Frankston candidate was forced to step down amid claims of bullying - both sides of politics are coming under growing pressure to tighten up their vetting systems in order to minimise future woes.

Libs say no to extremes
The Age reports that the Liberals will not do preference deals with extremist parties at the next state election in November. During a tour of Frankston visit with the local Liberal candidate, Sean Armistead, premier Denis Naphine, when asked if the Liberals would negotiate with the controversial Rise Up Australia Party, replied ‘We won’t be doing deals with extremist parties’.

Tetchy Tim
The Herald Sun reports that Victoria’s attorney-general Robert Clark has called on Tim Mathieson, Gillard’s partner and the former ‘first bloke’, to explain himself after leaving an angry message on premier Denis Naphine’s electorate office phone. Mathieson was mentioned in state parliament during a debate about MP Geoff Shaw.

Missing millions
A Senior Victorian Labor frontbencher has made a $500 million gaffe over a regional development fund, further undermining the opposition’s financial credibility in the run-up to the November election. According to The Australian, a $1 billion budget error by the opposition Treasury spokesman, it has emerged that regional minister Jacinta Allan falsely accused the government of failing to make provision in the state budget for the last half of the $1bn Regional Growth Fund. The $500 million is contained in the budget as part of global allocations for government departments in the 2014-15 statement of finances.

Travel bans
According to the Herald Sun, a bold new proposal comes as figures reveal that 700,000 police and local government infringements are issued every year are unpaid while 40 cent of Victorians refuse to pay court fines. Under the new plan, fine evaders would be blocked from overseas travel until they have paid any outstanding warrants.

Burnt by red tape
In the Herald Sun: ‘Thousands of Victorians whose properties have been rendered worthless after the Black Saturday bushfires are still waiting for the Victorian Government to offer them a solution to the red tape that is ruining their lives. Their predicament has been revealed by the Government’s own Red Tape Commissioner. Family finances are being strangled as property owners struggle to survive. The Black Saturday bushfires took 173 lives and injured hundreds more. Thousands of homes were destroyed.’

Family First
According to The Australian, Family First has threatened to bring down the Victorian government with its preference allocation and produced analysis showing it could cost the Coalition up to nine seats, delivering victory to Labor in the November election.

Two days work
The Department of Treasury and Finance last year paid $200,000 to a consultant that was contracted for just two days’ work, and that ultimately produced a report drawn from publicly available information, Auditor-General John Doyle has found. According to The Age, the finding is included in a review of 63 appointments since the Victorian government took office in 2010 promising to drastically cut the use of consultants. The report found the hiring of consultants and advisers had not been properly scrutinised by Victorian government departments, and that appointments often lacked transparency.

The report also found: In 40 out of 63 appointments assessed, departments did not complete and keep conflict of interest forms; In 17 cases, departments received only one quote and did not properly assess it; Eighteen Environment Department contracts and 14 Justice Department engagements also lacked proper planning, The Auditor-General made recommendations to improve government practices that Premier Denis Naphine said he would discuss with the secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Land deal
Premier and racing minister Denis Naphine faces major conflict of interest questions over a $1.5 million government grant to a leading thoroughbred racehorse. According to The Age, Premier Naphine is in partnership in the horse Spin the Bottle with Colin McKenna, the head of expanding meat processor the Midfield Group, a major employer in the premier’s South-West Coast electorate.

Seat battle
According to the Herald Sun, deputy premier and Nationals leader Peter Ryan has accused the Liberal Party of wasting Coalition election resources by running a candidate in safe Nationals territory, the seat of Euroa. Under an agreement between the parties, a party does not run a candidate against the other in newly created seats where the margin is above 12 per cent.

Candidate blow
According to the Herald Sun, Helen Constanas, a Labor candidate slated to run against Geoff Shaw in Frankston, was accused of bullying her personal assistant while she was chief executive of the Peninsula Community Legal Centre, which is in Frankston. The Age reports that Constanas has stepped down after the bullying claims became public and that she reportedly disclosed elements of the claims to the Labor party in January, in anticipation of the sensitive information being leaked.

Premier to rescue
Premier Denis Naphine recently rushed to the aid of an elderly woman involved in a two-car crash on a road near Port Fairy. He helped two paramedics cut the woman out of the car. The woman, in her 80s, is recovering, but she was much a little surprised to see who was helping her.

Positive projections
The Age reports that the coalition government has released independent modelling showing the Victorian economy will be $9.9b better off by 2031 due to major projects announced in the May budget. Commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the modelling estimates the coalition’s $27b infrastructure program will create 60,000 jobs and boost the state economy by 1.8% because of productivity gains linked to the projects. Prepared by consultants SGS Economics and Planning, the study shows that much of the gains will flow to Labor’s heartland in the west. It claims that Brimbank, Hobson’s Bay, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley, Melton and Wyndham would be $3.9b better off.

Pre-election puffery
No doubt readying itself for the November election, the Liberal Party of Australia has announced that the $1 billion budget error by the opposition will have the Liberal Party of wasting Coalition election resources by running a candidate in safe Nationals territory, the seat of Euroa. Under an agreement between the parties, a party does not run a candidate against the other in newly created seats where the margin is above 12 per cent. The Age reports that Constanas has stepped down after the bullying claims became public and that she reportedly disclosed elements of the claims to the Labor party in January, in anticipation of the sensitive information being leaked.

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election, the Labor party is now marketing its leader Daniel Andrews and The Age is eager to help by devoting five pages and a cover picture in its ‘Good Weekend’ magazine with the headline ‘Playing to win’. The spin continues inside with the ‘teaser’: ‘He’s a golf-obsessed Catholic who, under a recent media frenzy, was the barely recognised Victorian Opposition Leader. Now, Daniel Andrews is tipped to be the state’s next premier’.

NO

The Herald Sun reports that the Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority, Euan Ferguson, has issued a directive telling members to stop wearing CFA uniforms, including the brigade T-shirts and protective gear, while promoting ‘public policy or political positions’.

Water info capped

The Age reports that the state’s water agency, the Office of Living Victoria, ‘is suppressing documents detailing how managers have spent millions of taxpayer funds, saying disclosure could cause “stress and anxiety”’. The OLV ‘has ruled that all email correspondence between its senior officers, water minister Peter Walsh, and his office and two government departments regarding budgetary matters cannot be publicly released’. The Auditor-General has revealed how $22.5m from an environmental collection levy Victorians pay on their water bills has been used to bankroll the OLV. The A-G said there was no documented rationale for directing the funds to the OLV, making disbursement ‘inconsistent with the original purposes of the fund’. The Age reported that ‘those employed without competition include OLV head of office, Simon Want, a former Howard government adviser, and chief scientist, Peter Coombes. Mr Want and Dr Coombes were contracted by Mr Walsh to draft the Victorian coalition’s water policies, which led to the OLV’s creation’.

Decline of the West

The Age carries a story about a report from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in which it claims that Geelong and Victoria’s western region are among the most ‘economically vulnerable’ parts of the country and the situation may worsen following more manufacturing redundancies. The report estimates it as the third-most vulnerable nationally, behind Gosford-Wyong and Central Western Sydney in NSW, where average work hours plummeted by more than 8 per cent.

Good job

The Department of State Development Business and Innovation is looking for a Commissioner for Victoria. Melbourne@hortoninternational.com.au.

Federal

Clive’s Vic plans

According to the Herald Sun, the increasingly ubiquitous Clive Palmer ‘has a radical plan to turn Victoria into Australia’s “economic heartland” through mining’ as his party gets ready to contest the Victorian November election in every seat. The mining magnate turned federal MP has revealed a plan to ‘turn the Latrobe Valley into a minerals processing hub, allowing Australia to cash in on its resources for even higher prices and address soaring unemployment’. His broad-brush ‘priorities for Victoria are to focus on minerals processing in the Latrobe Valley; greater investments in port and road infrastructure for heavy industry; focus on hi-tech manufacturing for export; boost education for jobs and innovation; better training scheme for young jobless.

Labor threat to East West

The Herald Sun notes that the federal government has warned that the rollout of projects such as Melbourne’s East West Link were now under threat after Labor and the Greens blocked its infrastructure Bill in the Senate. Federal Labor and the Greens refused to support the new Bill to water down the powers of Infrastructure Australia unless it agreed to 29 amendments, including mandatory assessments of all projects for their impact on climate change.

Stay away

Victorian government MPs have warned Tony Abbott to steer clear of the November state election campaign, claiming the Prime Minister has become ‘toxic’ for the Coalition brand in Victoria. State Labor is determined to capitalise on Mr Abbott’s rising unpopularity, preparing to ramp up an advertising campaign linking Premier Denis Nphine to the federal government’s decision to cut health and education funding.

PM bales

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has cancelled a visit to the Geelong campus of Deakin University with Premier Denis Nphine, an event protesters were targeting. Several community groups had planned to protest against Mr Abbott and his first budget that has cut billions from the state budget and made dramatic changes to the cost of living.

Ballet school

It is one of Melbourne’s grand mansions - a sprawling century-old stately home that will be a new boarding school for Australia’s aspiring ballerinas - and it has just been purchased with $1 million of taxpayer money granted under Joe Hockey’s tough budget. Tucked away in the budget papers was a $1 million grant for the Australian Ballet School, to help with its purchase of a new boarding residence. Armed with that taxpayer money, the school has spent more than $4.7 million on a mansion.

Agriculture

Hemp. More next issue.

Arts

Van Gogh-ing home

The National Gallery of Victoria has taken off display its ‘yes-no’ van Gogh portrait and agreed that despite it having been in Victoria’s collection for 74 years, it rightfully belongs to two unnamed South African sisters, heirs to an estate dispersed under duress during the rise of Hitler.

Miff

The Melbourne International Film Festival has announced six Australian films enjoying world premieres among the line-up at this year’s festival, including Kill Me Three Times, the new film from Red Dog director Kriv Stenders. The festival begins July 31.

Education

Rural schools

Funding for rural schools could be overhauled, mobile kindergartens may be used in remote areas, and teachers could get more incentives to work in small towns, as the Victorian government tries to tackle the growing gap between city and country students. Two months after Victoria’s Auditor-General slammed the Education Department for failing to provide quality schooling to all students, the government is working behind the scenes on a strategy that will seek to bridge the divide.

Selling off too much

The Age’s former education editor, Geoff Maslen, notes that there will be 500,000 more students by 2031, yet Victoria is still selling schools. He writes: ‘Twenty-two years since Jeff Kennett closed inner-city schools and with the Napthine government closing more in the middle-ring and selling the “spare land”’, future watchers are querying how a city whose population is soaring can afford to lose schools and land’. As it is angry parents are demanding new schools be built in Southbank and Docklands. ‘The number of primary-school-aged children in the two city-edge locations is forecast to jump from 285 in 2011 to 1366 in 2021. But that rise will be a slight storm surge compared to the tsunami sweeping across Melbourne and around Victoria if new government projections are correct’. According to the report ‘Victoria in Future 2014’, it is predicted the state population will hit 6.6m by 2021, 7.7m in 2031 and 10m by 2051. Prepared by the Department of Transport, Planning and Infrastructure, the report estimates that by 2051 the school-age population will have increased to 1.4m – that is 500,000 more students than are sitting in classrooms today.

Punt perils

Maths will be used to show secondary students how gambling odds are stacked against them in a new program in Victorian schools. According to the Herald Sun, the unit for years 9 and 10 pupils will use probability to debunk common betting misconceptions. If follows concern many punters become hooked as teenagers.

New library

A $23 million collaboration between Melbourne City Council, the state government and developer Lend Lease, Library at the Dock also features community meeting rooms, a dedicated children’s library and is home to a community choir - the type of (non-book) offerings that have seen visitor numbers to Melbourne city libraries actually increase from 1,035,399 in 2011-12 to 1,105,276 the following year.

Upgrades languish

State schools across Victoria are battling with decades-old classrooms and halls deteriorating while long-awaited upgrades fail to materialise. Critics say upgrades are determined by political considerations and lobbying, and that an ‘orderly system’ is urgently required. According to a report in The Age, Education minister Martin Dixon said the Coalition government had invested $1.1 billion in school infrastructure since coming to office, including 23 new schools. ‘There are schools whose maintenance needs are greater than the capital funding invested in them in over a decade of Labor’, But opposition education spokesman James Merlino accused the government of putting ‘politics above the needs of our school kids’.
At the recent launch of our state election campaign, Taking Care of Business, VECCI told both sides of politics that jobs, infrastructure, skills and international engagement will be vital issues in the upcoming November election.

The launch highlighted VECCI’s key priorities within these four areas that the major parties must address to win the support of Victorian business men and women.

Victoria has a solid economic base and industries with growth potential such as health, finance, education and agribusiness. However our state’s potential will not be realised without policies that drive greater confidence and business activity.

VECCI’s recommendations stand to boost employment, investment and living standards, increase business productivity, encourage even greater international orientation and generate positive and enduring economic benefits across the state.

In launching the campaign we highlighted the following measures:

**Jobs**
- Lift the threshold at which a business starts paying payroll tax to $850,000 - bringing payroll relief to 40,000 businesses and generating more jobs for Victoria.

**Infrastructure**
- Commence construction of East West Link Stages 1 and 2 and the Melbourne Rail Link.
- Commit to the expansion of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre – which would increase business tourism income by $150 million a year.

**Skills**
- Increase VET in schools funding to reduce youth unemployment and stimulate apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Redirect Training Guarantee funding to support career paths in the services sector including for hospitality, tourism and retail.

**International Engagement**
- Commit $75 million to Victoria’s international engagement strategy over the next four years.
- Build on Victoria’s strong export base by partnering with business to capitalise on free trade agreements and grow export opportunities in Asia across a wide range of industries.

There are also significant infrastructure recommendations for outstanding regional projects regarding Ballarat Railway Station, Bendigo Airport, Geelong’s Yarra Street Pier, South Gippsland Highway, Goulburn Valley Highway bypass of Shepparton and Mildura Riverfront Precinct.

VECCI has launched this campaign almost six months before the November election so the major parties have adequate time to commit to this agenda for business.

Many are longer term innovations that will require detailed discussion with both sides of politics. We will take the time to engage with both State Government and Opposition members of Parliament to explain our priorities and will also take our message to regional Victoria with launches in Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon.

We are very pleased that one of our recommendations, to cut WorkCover premiums, has already been adopted, with an announcement by the Government of a 2 per cent cut.

As a result, from 1 July 2014 the average WorkCover premium will be cut by 2 per cent, which will benefit almost 116,000 employers, and additionally there is a 5 per cent discount offered for annual premiums paid by 1 August.

This reduction rewards Victorian business men and women for the part they play in creating and managing safer workplaces.

VECCI is calling on the next government of Victoria, regardless who forms it, to commit to our four key priorities, plus our supporting recommendations. We hope the WorkCover announcement is just the first of many pledges that support Victorian business.

On election day in November the people of Victoria will decide which party will best represent them and our state. VECCI wants a government with a pro-business agenda, a clear majority and a strong mandate. This will ensure Victoria remains the best place in Australia in which to live, work and do business.

Mark Stone,
Chief Executive of VECCI.

Secular welfare
The group that provides chaplains and Christian religious instruction to Victorian schools expects a surge in demand after the federal government revealed plans to remove the option for schools to hire a non-religious welfare worker. Accounts filed by Access Ministries showed it has already reaped the benefits of increased federal chaplaincy grants, which have turned around its finances after running at a loss for four consecutive years.

To be vetted
According to a report in the Herald Sun, all religious ministers will need Working with Children checks and a new system will be created for organisations to report alleged child abuse under a $10 million state government reform. The Commission for Children and Young People, led by Bernie Geary, will take a central role in the new scheme, overseeing all abuse reports from organisations such as churches or sports groups. Premier Denis Napthine revealed the new measures, a further response to the state parliament’s child abuse inquiry report, Betrayal of Trust.

Cost saving
According to a report in the Herald Sun, more than 500 jobs are to be axed at the University of Melbourne as the prestigious institution acts to curb costs. The sector’s union claims the move will hit students and increase workloads for remaining staff. But Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis said it was necessary to help retain the university’s top status worldwide. The cuts will affect non-academic staff only, with $40 full-time equivalent positions to go by January 2016.

Tallulah
According to the Herald Sun, the schoolgirl in uniform carried away by police during a recent unruly mass protest by university students in the CBD will be asked to explain why she wasn’t in class. Camberwell High School student Tallulah, 15, was among a group of about twenty demonstrators forcibly removed from the road outside State Parliament during the huge rally against higher education cuts.

LaTrobe cuts jobs
In an overhaul aimed at saving $65m, LaTrobe University has revealed plans for a major restructure involving the loss of 350 jobs, the Herald Sun reports. The number of departments and schools will be cut dramatically with five faculties to be merged into two colleges.

Energy
Relicensed
According to The Age, a 45-year-old brown coal power plant in Anglesea that was originally built to help power the soon-to-close Port Henry aluminum smelter has been given a new lease of life after it was granted permission to feed electricity more broadly to homes and other businesses.

Upkeep
The operator of the Hazelwood open-cut coalmine failed to maintain a permanent 50-metre-wide firebreak around the perimeter of the mine, even though it was one of its own procedures for fire control, according to the Victorian WorkCover Authority. According to The Age, After that visit WorkCover inspector Kevin Hayes issued the coalmine operator, GDF Suez, with a notice to implement a 50-metre-wide firebreak around the vast mine, and gave it until June 23 to comply. The inquiry heard that the Hazelwood mine, which burnt for 45 days from February 9 and shrouded the 14,000 residents of Morwell in smoke and burnt coal ash, was considered one of the most hazardous mines in Victoria.

Mine fire bill
The Age reports that the Hazelwood coalmine operator GDF Suez was confronted by a ‘perfect storm of events’ on the day multiple fires ignited in the mine under extreme weather conditions, the barrister representing the company, Rachel Doyle SC, argued on the final day of the fire inquiry. She also questioned why GDF Suez would be asked by fire-fighting authorities to contribute towards the $32.5m in fire-fighting costs borne by the CFA and MFB for the mine fire.

Program switch-off
A scheme that gives families energy-efficient devices such as light bulbs and standby controllers will be dumped by the Victorian Government. According to the Herald Sun, the decision to transition from the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target to another program in 2016 was made after an analysis found it was costing non-participating households $50 a year. The clean energy industry is likely to be angry about the decision, as it says savings for participants are significant and that 2000 jobs rely on the program. But the government says this is why the VEET will remain until the end of 2015, giving businesses time to adapt. Energy Minister Russell Northe said while the scheme had made significant achievements, it was now adding costs to most households and it was time to develop a new approach. ‘The Victorian Government is committed to delivering practical programs that promote energy efficiency to help Victorian homes and businesses keep their energy bill as low as possible,’ he said. A report by the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation found the cost of the VEET to the economy will be $711 million between 2015 and 2030.

Ombudsman
Victorians are complaining in record numbers about aggressive tactics used by energy companies to recover money from unpaid bills, as retailers increasingly outsource debt collection operations. The Energy and Water Ombudsman received 1456 complaints between January and March about debt collection of electricity and gas bills. Complaints have risen more than 70 per cent on the same time last year and 300 per cent since 2010. Debt collection problems now make up about a third of electricity and gas complaints.

Saving initiatives
The Victorian Energy Efficiency Target had been due to run until 2030, but the state government has told businesses working under the scheme it will close at the end of next year. According to The Age, the target forced electricity retailers to help households and small business customers save power by installing devices such as energy efficient light bulbs and standby power boards. It also aimed to cut the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the use of coal-fired power. The decision follows a review by the state government, which concluded that households that participated saved money, but those who did not get involved bore the costs of the incentives for others.

Gas boom
Up to $4 billion worth of gas-fired power stations are in danger of being ‘stranded’ as gas prices explode and the renewable energy target leaves the grid awash with excess power, new modelling has found. It says this could
cause investors to slash maintenance spending on older generators, potentially threatening future power supplies.

**Plug for power station**
According to the *Herald Sun*, the Victorian government has been urged to build a power station in the Latrobe Valley. Morwell’s Hazelwood station will reach the end of its life span between 2025 and 2030 and Latrobe City Council fears time to provide for future energy needs is running out.

**Thinking energy**
The Australian Institute of Energy, Melbourne Branch, recently held a half-day seminar on ‘Energy Pricing in Victoria: Trends, Causes and the Future’ at the Royal Society of Victoria, with a range of leading figures from the energy industry. More information on the Institute and its program of talks and seminars can be obtained by visiting its website www.aie.org.au

Your Editor is an AIE member. Well worth joining.

**Environment & conservation**

**Defining renewable**
Australia’s renewable energy target would include gas-fired power - derived from fossil fuels - under a controversial proposal by the Victorian government. According to *The Age*, the state also suggests the target should be scaled back to reflect falling demand for power.

In a submission to the federal government review of the target headed by businessman Dick Warburton, the Victorian government says it is concerned that ‘reliable baseload capacity’ is being driven out of the electricity market and calls for consideration of sources including gas-fired power under the target to help the power grid cope with peak demand.

**No snow**
Despite all of the multi-million dollar snowmaking equipment that many of the snow resorts have, it has been mostly idle because of the warm weather, and so the season opening weekend was officially snowless.

**Events**

**Eureka party**
Premier Denis Napthine has announced $300,000 to celebrate the 160th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat. The Eureka rebellion saw gold miners oppose a government licence fee, a key event in the development of Australian democracy and national identity.

The Battle of the Eureka Stockade was fought between 1971 and 1999. According to the *Herald Sun*, a political conflict of interest was hindering poker machine reform. ‘They’re clearly conflicted’, he said. ‘They put their own office ahead of the interests of the people of Victoria.’ A majority of forty of forty Legislative Council members are members of clubs with pokies, as are 46 of 88 members of the Legislative Assembly, according to the Register of Members’ Interests.

**Tatts wins**
*The Age* reports that ‘more than half a billion dollar hole has been blown in the Naphthine government’s budget after the Supreme Court ordered it pay gambling giant Tatts more than $451m in compensation for lost poker machine licences. But the government was spared an even bigger blow when Supreme Court judge Kim Hargrave dismissed a similar bid for compensation by Tatts’ rival Tabcorp. Premier Denis Napthine has announced that Victoria will appeal the Supreme Court’s decision.

**Health**

**Bike injuries**
An increase in the number of motorcyclists and cyclists injured on Victorian roads during the past decade has led to the amount of compensation being paid out more than tripling to $203 million a year. An analysis of Transport Accident Commission data found the number of injuries to people on motor and push bikes has risen significantly - from 1099 in 2000-01 to a high of 1337 in 2011-12.

**Blunders**
The Victorian government’s latest report on adverse or ‘sentinel’ events revealed 75 people over the past two years were victims of potentially deadly mistakes. According to *The Age*, in 2012-13, there were about 1.5 million admissions to Victorian hospitals and 153,000 planned surgical procedures.

**Salvos**
Organisations caring for Victoria’s most vulnerable children are handing back residential care units to the state government, over concerns they are funded at ‘dangerous, neglectful’ levels. According to *The Age*, the Salvation Army said it can no longer afford to subsidise two residential units for six children in state care in Melbourne’s east, and will return the units to the state government at the end of August. The news comes after another welfare agency, Menzies, handed several of its residential units back to the government earlier this year, citing similar funding concerns.

**Ageing hospitals**
The *Age* reports that large parts of two western suburbs hospitals are so old and dilapidated they will soon need to be knocked down and rebuilt according to documents for a proposed $550m redevelopment. A women and children’s centre will be built at Sunshine Hospital and Western Hospital Footscray’s emergency department will be rebuilt under the plans being considered by the Victorian government. According to Russell Harrison, Western Health’s executive director of operations, ‘our emergency department [at Footscray] is half the size it should be…’

**CFA Cancer scare**
The *Herald Sun* reports that the firefighters union, Union Firefighters, has slammed a report into the rate of cancers at the Country Fire Authority’s Fiskville training college.

The union secretary Peter Marshall claimed the report, which found firefighters who trained at the centre had no higher incidence of cancer, was based on a small, unscientific sample size. The CFA-commissioned Cancer Council report looked at the rate of cancer among 600 firefighters who had trained at the centre between 1971 and 1999.

**Cancer cash lift**
The *Herald Sun* reports that the Victorian government has granted 25 leading cancer researchers $17.5m to improve quality of care and try new medications. Health minister David Davis was announcing projects as part of Victorian Cancer Agency funding for 2013-14.

He said the research would take breakthroughs out of the laboratory and into patient care.

**Business & investment**

**Key to the future**
Food, defence and aerospace and services related to the resources sector will underpin the next generation of Victorian manufacturing jobs, and industry conference has heard. Victorian Manufacturing Minister David Hodgett said despite being challenged, manufacturing would remain a key economic contributor to the state for years to come.

**Hunt push**
According to the *Herald Sun*, a report commissioned by the government says the economic boost of hunting in Victoria last year was $400 million – about four times higher than expected – and there is potential for major growth. Agriculture Minister Peter Walsh has flagged the idea of wooing tourists from interstate and overseas to hunt Victorian game and pest species, telling a parliamentary committee it could create ‘a significant amount of economic activity in regional communities.’

**Small Business summit**
The 2014 National Small Business Summit, with the theme People, Policy and Productivity,
will be held at the Crown Conference Centre in Melbourne from Thursday August 7, 2014. The organisers, the Council of Small Business Owners of Australia, promise ‘a line-up of speakers rarely seen in Australian summit circles’. They declare ‘you will not be disappointed with the depth of conversation, the networking opportunities or the passion with which all participants will approach the ultimate goal of increasing productivity’. They also remind the public that small business owners employ over 4.5m people and are a major part of the economy.

**Cost of red tape**
The Herald Sun notes that up to 40% of the cost of a new Victorian home and land package is absorbed in taxes such as stamp duty and GST, according to a report by the peak industry lobby group, the Property Industry Association. These imposts it believes discourage Victorians from building new homes and limits much-needed work for builders. The Housing Industry Association executive director, Gil King, says they ‘will continue to be a barrier to getting our new home building in Victoria has been falling since a record level of activity in 2010’.

**Good job**
Invest Victoria is looking for an Executive Director, on a fixed term 5 year contract.

**Industrial relations**

**Jobs in the west**
The planned redevelopment is part of a 150ha site that is bound by the Western Ring Rd, Ballarat Rd, Station Rd and Tilburn Rd. Orica has scaled down its operations after more than a century of use and will retain a small presence in the area. Orica Deer Park was named as a strategic development site by Brimbank Council. The company will decontaminate the site under supervision of the Environment Protection Authority, with plans for new pedestrian, bike and vehicle links to the nearby rail station and retail precinct. Up to 3600 jobs could be ‘created in a western suburbs redevelopment that is half the size of Melbourne’s CBD.

**Pocketing millions**
According to the Herald Sun, more than 100,000 Victorian employers will benefit from the reduction which build on a three per cent cut delivered in 2012. But the Community and Public Sector Union says injured workers will cover the costs of the saving. Premier Denis Napthine announced the changes at a Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce lunch recently.

**Up the workers!**
The Herald Sun reports that workers on the East West Link are likely to ‘hit overtime pay dirt as building companies bid to work 24 hours a day on the tunnel’. The $8b project is the largest in Victoria since the controversial Wonthaggi desalination plant, where workers were making up to $200,000 a year. Overtime requests by short-listed East West Connect and Inner Link Project could push wages to similar levels…The Australian Workers Union and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union have been in talks with the short-listed bidders’. Treasurer Michael O’Brien has warned any company offering unions ‘sweetheart deals’ will risk being banned from the project.

**Justice & police**

**24 hour stations, sometimes**
Police stations that will cost Victorians almost $40 million to build are unlikely to have 24-hour rosters, or be staffed to capacity for years, despite Coalition government commitments made before the last election. According to The Age, the Victorian government promised four suburban stations - two in marginal seats - that would operate around-the-clock as part of its tough-on-crime agenda. Somerville and Forest Hill police stations are under construction, with the projects to cost a combined $28.3 million.

**Pests lectured**
According to the Herald Sun, a magistrate lectured East West Link protesters about the project’s benefits as he convicted anti-tunnel activist Anthony Main of wilful damage. Magistrate Jonathon Kledstadt told Main and co-accused Ashley Hall that as a ‘long-term resident of the western suburbs’ he was ‘acutely aware’ of the need for a road connecting Melbourne’s east and west. ‘Irrespective of one’s political allegiances or personal views, I cannot be serious about such a need doesn’t exist,’ he said.

**IBAC investigates**
According to the Herald Sun, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission will examine evidence from July 21 at its first public hearings since it was established last year. It is probing allegations that state transport bureaucrats set up and controlled companies that later won taxpayer-funded contracts. The Age reports that the ‘alleged serious corrupt conduct the IBAC is investigating is said to have been committed by an officer or officers of the state’s Department of Transport and Public Transport Victoria.

**Defensive homicide**
Recently the Victorian government announced it wanted to abolish the offence of ‘defensive homicide’ on the grounds that it hadn’t worked as intended. Why does the crime of murder need nuance - or political intervention? What is defensive homicide? According to The Age, defensive homicide was an offence that sat between self-defence and murder. It’s a form of murder where the killer truly believed their life was in danger, when in fact the circumstances of the killing did not support that belief. People convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of defensive homicide, which carried a maximum prison term of 20 years, receive a lesser sentence than if they had been convicted of.

**Radical plan**
According to the Herald Sun, Chief Commissioner Ken Lay has produced a ten year plan that if accepted would produce the greatest reform package for Victoria Police in nearly 50 years.

**Opposition**
The radical plan to overhaul Victoria Police faces fierce opposition from both sides of politics and the Police Association with Coalition MPs concerned moves to cut frontline police and close stations will hurt its ‘tough on crime’ credentials.

**IBAC**
According to the Herald Sun, the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission has executed 56 judge approved warrants as it ramps up investigations into dishonesty in the public sector. The Agency, which in addition probes police misconduct, has said it is also investigating the misuse of information by public officials.

**Bikies**
Outlaw motorcycle gang Bikes has been ordered to tear down fortifications to its Yarraville clubhouse, according to the Herald Sun.

**Women in majority**
The demographic change that is transforming the legal profession has given the Law Institute of Victoria a female majority. Women make up 51 per cent of the Law Institute’s 18,430 members, and are an overwhelming 62 per cent of the Institute’s Young Lawyers section.

**Fines**
Chief Commissioner Ken Lay wants every speed camera to get new technology so they automatically fine the driver of every unregistered car that passes them. The futuristic plan could boost Government coffers by hundreds of millions of dollars.

**Drug dealers on the trains**
Drug dealers regularly use Victoria’s public transport to traffic illicit substances, police say. According to The Age, a conductor at a station in Victoria’s north monitored the movements of one dealer for six months. He said alarm bells went off when he spotted wads of $100 notes in the pocket of a man who was paying for a second-hand train ticket to a healthcare card.

**Fiery feud**
According to the Herald Sun, fire-fighters have hit out a their bosses, claiming out-of-service vehicles led to property damage worth more than $1 million last year alone. The paper revealed the MFB’s entire reserve fleet
was currently out of action prompting fears of an increased risk of loss of life and property damage.

Fire-fight
The cost to fire-fighting authorities of fighting the 45-day blaze in the Hazelwood open cut coalmine has been revealed - $32.5 million. According to The Age, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley revealed the figure during the 14th day of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry, and said the costs had been borne by the CFA and MFB.

Legal aid
Thousands of Australians living in poverty are missing out on free legal help because state and territory legal aid commissions cannot afford to provide it, Victoria Legal Aid says.

Saying no
Led by its Rotary Club, Maryborough residents are working to curb family violence. In The Age, Garry Higgins, President of the local Rotary: ‘It’s about having the conversation no one wants to have.’

Zero tolerance
Welfare workers and Victoria Police have adopted a New York-style zero tolerance response to paedophile gangs preying on children in state care to drive offenders off the streets and away from their targets. The strategy includes picking up perverts who commit minor offences such as traffic infringements and loitering in a bid to make it more difficult for paedophiles to operate.

New Ombudsman
The Victorian government has announced the appointment of a new Ombudsman following the retirement of George Brouwer. Her name is Deborah Glass OBE, born in Bega and raised in Melbourne, she studied law at Monash University and has held senior positions in government regulatory organisations in Hong Kong and Britain. She joined the UK Police Complaints Authority and in 2004 became a commissioner of the new Independent Police Complaints Commission of England and Wales. She has been appointed for a ten-year term. Deborah Glass was appointed for a ten-year term as Commissioner of the new Independent Police Complaints Commission of England and Wales. According to the Age, “IBAC’s review will look at the reporting and record-keeping systems in place at council works depots to see where there are examples of good practice…” IBAC has been running two reviews into local government, focusing on council works depots that may be open to fraud, and whether tendering rules are being followed.

Drug debate
A Melbourne City Council report has called for a debate decriminalising and legalising illicit drugs. The radical idea is part of council’s draft Safe City strategy councillors are due to consider.

Locked up
According to the Herald Sun, a disqualified rural councillor has been jailed for eight months for threatening a senior council official to try to get her to drop a misconduct complaint against him.

My council
Local Government Victoria is seeking feedback from its members about its MyCouncil style website, to inform the functionality and content for the proposed site.

Good jobs
Mildura Rural City Council is looking for a CEO, www.sacsconsult.com.au/candidates. Maryborough Council is seeking feedback from its members about its MyCouncil style website, to inform the functionality and content for the proposed site.

Police protection
The Age reports that the Victorian government has announced that anyone who attacks emergency services workers will face at least three years behind bars and those who kill police officers an average of 30 years in jail.

Prison-led recovery
The Victorian government has announced a major expansion of the prison system, following on from a tough-on-crime policy that includes stricter baseline sentences and tougher parole laws. Among the new advertising campaign aimed at recruiting 750 prison and community corrections officers over the next year, corrections minister Edward O’Donohue said the prison expansion ‘gives Victorians a behind-the-scenes look at the state’s corrections system and highlights the huge range of job opportunities on offer across Victoria. More than 1300 prison beds have opened since the 2010 election, with 2700 beds in the pipeline, including the new 1000-bed medium-security prison at Ravenhall in Melbourne’s west.

Good job
Victoria Police is looking for highly qualified applicants for the position of Assistant Commissioner.

Local government
Local councils want the controversial local government referendum back on The Agenda, despite the federal Government saying the issue is dead. The City of Yarra is leading the push for a poll at the ‘earliest opportunity’, with a majority of councils backing its stance at the recent Municipal Association of Victoria state council. A referendum on constitutional recognition of local government was supposed to be held last September, but was dumped after Kevin Rudd became PM.

In praise of councils
In its Herald Sun column, former premier Jeff Kennett goes to bat for local councils and the key role they play in our lives. As he writes: ‘Think of rubbish collection, libraries, maternal and child care services, some aged care services, maintenance of local roads, the condition of our local parks, gardens, playgrounds, bridges – and so the list goes on...In short, councils are important contributors to our quality of life’. He notes however that this might be about to change. From July 1 the federal government will freeze indexation of its grants to councils for three years. And so, ‘for 40 councils in Victoria, more than half the total number, Commonwealth grants represent more than 10% of their total revenue, so the freezing of indexation will have a profound impact’.

Tip dumped
According to the Herald Sun, Melton Council voted against a tip expansion after receiving 6600 objections to expand the Boral Western Landfill at Ravenhall.

Cat curfew
A local council crackdown has been met with a fierce backlash. Yarra Ranges Council is resolutely sticking to a new bylaw that requires cats to be confined to their owners’ property at all times, despite an online petition against the 24-hour cat curfew climbing to more than 2500 signatures. The curfew - to be imposed in a 2470 square-kilometre shire that stretches across the Yarra Valley into the Dandenong Ranges - has prompted enraged protests from resident cat owners, and also appears to be causing cracks in the council’s ranks.

Watchdog sweeps
Investigations have been launched into claims of corruption including contract rorting, cronyism and ‘ghost jobs’ in Victorian local government. According to the Herald Sun, corruption watchdog IBAC has twice tasked the Victorian Ombudsman to investigate a litany of incidents at the Latrobe City Council. Whistleblowers have complained a group of managers - dubbed ‘the boys club’ - abused their access to lucrative council contracts. Latrobe City Council Deputy Mayor Dale Harriman said he was deeply concerned about the culture in the public body and the backlash faced by those who tried to speak out. ‘It seems there has been a ‘jobs for mates’ culture at the council and the victimisation of anybody who challenges that culture,’ Cr Harriman said.

*Crackdown on Councils*
The Herald Sun reports that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission has been aiming at practices that are susceptible to bribery, kickbacks and theft. A report on the strength of anti-graft policies at councils across the state may be handed down later this year. IBAC spokeswomans Hazel Pentfold states: ‘IBAC’s review will look at the reporting and record-keeping systems in place at council works depots to see where there are examples of good practice...’ IBAC has been running two reviews into local government, focusing on council works depots that may be open to fraud, and whether tendering rules are being followed.

Drug debate
A Melbourne City Council report has called for a debate decriminalising and legalising illicit drugs. The radical idea is part of council’s draft Safe City strategy councillors are due to consider.

Locked up
According to the Herald Sun, a disqualified rural councillor has been jailed for eight months for threatening a senior council official to try to get her to drop a misconduct complaint against him.

My council
Local Government Victoria is seeking feedback from its members about its MyCouncil style website, to inform the functionality and content for the proposed site.

Good jobs
Mildura Rural City Council is looking for a CEO, www.sacsconsult.com.au/candidates. Maryborough Council is seeking feedback from its members about its MyCouncil style website, to inform the functionality and content for the proposed site.

Police protection
The Age reports that the Victorian government has announced that anyone who attacks emergency services workers will face at least three years behind bars and those who kill police officers an average of 30 years in jail.
A new entrance for Westpac Bank is being built between the Scots Church and the Presbyterian Assembly Hall in Collins Street. The rest is out the back. Just across the road is the newish BHP Billiton headquarters. A difference from the Docklands choice for position.

Lionel Boxer, serious bagpiper friend of the editor who happened to be posing for a photograph for a WW1 story outside Scots Church as the editor was taking a photo for the front cover.
Ferry service on board
The Herald Sun reports on ‘a bold new Melbourne City Council transport plan’ that will enable passengers to use Myki on a ferry for a 30-minute trip between Flinders Street station and Docklands, including two stops on the way. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said that a water transport system was Melbourne’s ‘one gaping hole’.

The Herald Sun also reports that a new commuter ferry service between the city and western suburbs is set to go ahead with a fleet of catamarans, running out of zero emission at Collins Landing. The paper states that it can ‘reveals a business identity with a shipping background’ preparing to run a catamaran service between Werribee South and Docklands. It will cost about $25 return and take up to 50 minutes per trip, with more stops to be considered depending on the venture’s success. A ferry terminal will be built at Collins Landing in Docklands, which has nearby tram services and the new hi-tech Library at the Dock and community hub.

Wild weather
Melbourne was battered recently by the wildest weather the state has seen this year, with the bayside suburbs belted by storm surges and high winds and the Yarra River spectacularly breaching its banks, flooding several parts of the city. The dangerous weather lashed much of Victoria without mercy leaving people injured, train lines suspended, homes without power and roads closed as temperatures plummeted to below freezing with wind chill. The cold snap was going news at least for the state’s snow fields. Mount Baw Baw received 40cm of snow with falls recorded all day.

Big grants, small business
The City of Melbourne announces the funding of ten grants worth close to $180,000 as part of the small business and social enterprise grants program. The chair of Future Melbourne Economic Development portfolio, Cr. Kevin Lord, said the eight small business grants and two social enterprise grants aimed to support innovative and emerging businesses and the development of a vibrant social enterprise sector. Recipients include Independent Disability Services — an organisation that trains and employs people with disabilities.

Vic market surveyed
According to the Herald Sun, too many stalkholders at Queen Victoria Market sell junky Australian souvenirs says a new survey commissioned by the Melbourne City Council. Survey respondents also called for the planned underground car park, part of the market’s $250 million redevelopment, to offer cheaper prices.

Planning
Mall size
Victoria has removed floor space limits across a swag of suburban shopping centres, giving a boost to the development pipelines of landlords. Major property players, including Westfield, GPT Group, ISPT and CFS Retail property, Lend Lease will see the upside. The space’s caps have been removed from 22 sites across Melbourne, including at Westfield Doncaster, Highpoint and Forest Hill Chase.

High rises
Melbourne’s newest high-rise towers are overrun by bad-quality apartments, but the investors who buy them do not care - as long as they get the rent. According to The Age, a Melbourne City Council study has estimated 55 per cent of the city’s tallest apartment buildings over 15 storeys are of ‘poor’ quality, with common design flaws such as cramped layouts and a lack of natural light. Windowless bedrooms exist in almost a quarter of new residential developments studied. Some Melbourne architects are so unhappy with the result of buildings they have designed that they have refused to have their name associated with them, the Australian Institute of Architects has said.

The group’s president, Melbourne architect Jon Clements, is backing calls for minimum apartment design standards to be legislated. ‘The general feeling among architects is that it’s ridiculous to be forcing architects to produce buildings that don’t deliver appropriate quality and amenity standards,’ he said.

The Melbourne City Council’s Future Living report, which analysed the design of 25 of the city’s new residential developments, found poorer quality apartments to be more likely to be located in taller apartments.

Illegal in other cities
Melbourne is becoming a city of ‘super-dense’ towers, packed with tiny apartments that would be banned in Hong Kong, New York and London. According to The Age, a scathing report from Melbourne City Council shows some of the city’s newest developments are up to ten times as dense as permitted by law - in some of the world’s most urbanised centres. Sydney, London and Adelaide all have rules that ban new one-bedroom apartments smaller than 50 square metres. But in Melbourne, 40 per cent of the city’s newest apartments are smaller than this.

Council not happy
Most of the 13 high-rise applications made by developers to Planning Minister Matthew Guy for the redevelopment of Fisherman’s Bend are too high and do not match the government’s draft vision for the area, Port Phillip Council says. Mr Guy’s approval for the projects would add millions of dollars of value to land on which developers want to build. Mr Guy’s office declined to respond to questions about Fisherman’s Bend.

Former ‘Age’ site
Melbourne’s hotel stock is set to get a high-end boost with the addition of a Ritz-Carlton at the top of an 85-level residential tower that developer Far East Consortium is planning for Spencer Street.

Prison upgrade
According to The Age, Heritage Victoria is deciding if a developer can bulldoze H-Division of Pentridge prison to build an apartment block. But if it goes the go-ahead, part of Australia’s social and penal history will be demolished too.

Up and up
According to the Herald Sun, energetic Planning Minister Matthew Guy has approved plans for 100 tower blocks for the CBD, with eight to reach heights of at least 200m. He proclaims the central city as ‘the right place for skyscrapers.’ The Victorian Government has issued permits for 20,000 apartments, which the minister says ‘will protect the quieter suburbs’. Melbourne will need an estimated 720,000 homes over the next 20 years as its population nears six million.

Sinkhole suburbs
Thousands of near-new homes are cracking up in Melbourne’s western and northern suburbs, leaving their owners facing financial ruin and long battles to fix them. Estimates range up to 4300 homes in Wyndham, Melton and Hume local government areas may be suffering from ‘slab heave’ where volatile soil movements under a home’s foundations cause walls to crack, doors to tilt. According to The Age, a report revealed in a legal case shows Melton Council knew about extreme soil conditions in the new housing estate but did nothing to inform builders or potential home owners.

New bar
A new multi-million-dollar project being built along Flinders Walk is expected to be finished in time and will hold several hundred people and 60 per cent will be al fresco. The Arbery Bar and Eatery will stretch 120m along the Yarra River and is being built on the disused Sandridge railway line. Owner Tim Botterill said New York’s famous High Line was used as a creative concept for the project that had taken three years to get on track.

More debate
Christine Wyatt, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, appeared recently at the industry briefing, staged by the Planning Institute’s Victoria chapter, held at the department’s Spring Street headquarters, saw Ms Wyatt encourage planners to ‘celebrate’ the new strategy, which supersedes those such as Melbourne 2030 and Melbourne @ 5 Million developed under previous state governments. According to The Age, speaking after Ms Wyatt was Rob Milner, a long-time Victorian planning consultant and former state and national Planning Institute president. Mr Milner said Victoria’s planning bureaucrats needed to follow the lead of Victoria Police chief commissioner Ken Lay - who last week produced a radical blue paper that proposes volunteers to beef up police resources, private companies to manage police cells and underperforming officers sacked - by producing a ‘bold’ and ‘provocative’ reform package that would open a debate about Melbourne’s future.

Tree change
According to The Age, as the conversation turns to the death of Melbourne’s trees the city’s influential head planner, Professor Rob Adams, chokes up. He takes a moment, then continues. ‘The evidence is so obvious,’ he declares, ‘You don’t have to go to the scientists, you just have to look at the trees in Melbourne.’ Adams is talking about climate change. And despite its cleaner lungs, Melbourne’s city heart is not immune to its impacts. Nor is its contribution to the problem insignificant. In response the Melbourne City Council has set perhaps the most ambitious climate change goal in Australia — to produce zero net emissions from the CBD and surrounding suburbs under its oversight by 2020. Needless to say, it is a level of ambition
not matched by state and federal governments.

In fact Adams – credited with revitalising the CBD over recent decades – is upset about what he describes as the federal government’s retreat on the issue.

Open for bids
According to the Financial Review, the Victorian government is looking for developers to take on a 400-hectare parcel of land for a mixed-use precinct with 7000 new homes in Melbourne’s fast-growing south-west. The Metropolitan Planning Authority has completed a precinct plan with a town centre, a lake, waterways and commercial and residential areas.

Suburb change
One of the more ambitious goals of Plan Melbourne was the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods - where jobs and amenities are embedded throughout the metropolitan area rather than centralised in the CBD. But as the devil in the policy’s detail comes into focus, it is clear that growth has been so constrained that Melbourne will not swell evenly. It will be tightly constricted - so where it can grow, it will bulge. Hugely. Yet at the same time, the minister promised that at least 50 per cent of the suburbs would be ‘protected’ from development and gave local government the responsibility for determining the proportion of their suburbs they would like to allocate to each of the new residential zones.

Top suburbs protected
The Age runs with a story claiming that many of Melbourne’s richest suburbs are being protected from high-rise developments as a result of the approval of new residential zones by planning minister Matthew Guy. Two-storey height limits have been extended to Kew, Hawthorn, Camberwell, Brighton, Sandringham and Black Rock. Some planning experts see this as a victory for the Nimby’s – the Not In My Back Yard – brigade.

Palace reprieve
The Age reports that planning minister Matthew Guy has dumped plans for a luxury hotel tower on the Palace Theatre site at the top of Bourke Street, just days before Melbourne City Council was tipped to finally approve the demolition of the former music venue. Shortly before that decision was due to be taken, the minister introduced an interim 12-month mandatory height limit for the Bourke Street heritage precinct and as a consequence the developers, Jinchan Investments, will have to reduce the planned height of their 50-metre W-Hotel by at least half. The Age notes that this is the second time the minister has prevented Melbourne’s first W-Hotel being approved, after he knocked back an even taller application for the Bourke Street block earlier this year.

Water war
The Age reports that a proposal to build a luxury spa and hotel next to the historic Point Lonsdale lighthouse ‘has sparked a passionate reaction from locals and a new group has formed to fight any development at the site’.

Hitting the heights
Approval has been given for a 100-storey apartment tower in Southbank, set to become the southern hemisphere’s tallest building. ‘Australia 108’, the name given to the project, will stand at 319m – 25m higher than the Eureka Tower – and have more than 1100 units, the Herald Sun reports.

Heritage challenge
The Financial Review reports that all is not well on one of Melbourne’s most expensive and prestigious suburban streets, St Georges Road, Toorak. Specifically the row revolves around number 16, bought in September last year by a wealthy Asian investor, Xiaoyan Bao, for $19m and three months later he applied for a permit to demolish the house, a historic art nouveau villa. Stonnington Council, which oversees blue-chip South Yarra to Malvern East, has sought approval from state planning minister Matthew Guy to amend the local planning scheme and extend permanent heritage protection over 19 properties in St Georges Road, including Bao’s property, but also over the properties of some of the city wealthiest residents.

Changes for Link
The Age carries a report about the 5.2 kilometer East West Link tollway. On the basis of an announcement by the planning minister Matthew Guy, it will certainly go ahead but with big changes. According to the report, ‘Some elements of the controversial road project have been culled following the recommendations of a 30-day planning panel hearing held in March and April. Mr Guy rejected many of the planning panel’s recommendations, including the following: that the Hoddle Street flyover be deleted; that the eastern tunnel portal should be shifted east of Hoddle Street and the South Morang Hurstbridge railway line; that a temporary road running north of Alexandra Parade during construction be deleted; that the entire port connection – an elevated four-lane road running parallel to CityLink between Travancore and Footscray Road called ‘Part B’ – be deferred while further planning work is done to clarify the impact of the recently announced $800m Tullamarine Freeway widening project.

Premier plans
The Age runs a story that Premier Lynne Kosky, one of Melbourne’s oldest traditional markets, is slated for a radical overhaul costing at half a billion dollars. There are proposals to build a 28-storey apartment blocks on the market site, comprising 1500 new homes, each retrofitted with Darabin Council, seeking an exemption to the current 10-story height limit in the area.

Religion v Sport
In The Age, a full page by Jill Stark discussing how the AFL Commission has controversially approved the scheduling of football matches on Good Friday. On the same theme, The Age’s Nick Toscano writes that religious leaders have condemned the AFL’s decision to go ahead with Good Friday football as ‘a greedy cash grab taking precedence over important cultural traditions. Bishop Philip Huggins, of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, has stated that after a series of meetings between his church and the AFL, particularly its chief executive Gillon McLachlan, he was left with the understanding that the AFL would stay committed to keeping the religious holiday free of footy. AFL Commission chairman Mike Fitzpatrick said there had been a ‘growing appetite’ to hold a game on Good Friday and that ‘on balance we believe the time is right’.

Huge state-wide boost
The Herald Sun reports that the Victorian government will provide almost 4,000 extra train, tram and bus services state-wide, starting July 27. ‘Train passengers on the Dandenong, Cranbourne, Pakenham and Frankston lines will see major changes to their networks. And regional passengers will start to experience the benefits of the Regional Rail Link. Bendigo and Ballarat trains are due to start travelling on the new tracks between Southern Cross and Sunshine after the July school holidays’.

Transport – ports
The Age reports that Michael O’Brien, the Victorian Treasurer, has attacked Clive Palmer and the Greens as ‘economic troglodytes’ for opposing a federal plan offering bonus payments to states that agree to build a new port at the Port of Melbourne. Both the Palmer United Party and the Greens are set to use their votes in the Senate to oppose a plan to pay states a 15% bonus if they sell assets and reinvest the proceeds in new infrastructure. The deal, announced by the federal Treasurer Joe Hockey in the May budget, is now likely to depend on Labor’s support.

Melbourne’s Catholic Archbishop, Rev. Denis Hart, writing in the Herald Sun, has made a plea for keeping Good Friday special, and not just another day for footy. His intervention follows a decision by the AFL Commission to overturn the tradition of respecting the day as a public holiday and a sacred day for Christians. The Bishop wrote: ‘Keeping Good Friday as a public holiday free from obligations or distractions is a symbolic acknowledgment of our need for time and space to enrich our lives with reflection, depth or to spend time with loved ones’.

Facing the pressure of religious groups to maintain Good Friday as a no-footy day, some clubs have proposed an alternative – use the games as opportunities to raise money for charity, the Herald Sun reports. The AFL Commission has paved the way for at least one fixure on the day but made no decision about which teams would play, or when and where the first match would be. The Western Bulldogs and North Melbourne have vowed to make Good Friday football all about the Royal Children’s Hospital appeal.

In the Herald Sun, Shaun Carney wrote: ‘There’s a ritual of coming with new rules and trashing them in pre-season games. How about just leaving the game alone?’
Webb Dock changes  
*The Age* reports that ‘Melbourne Port’s Webb Dock automotive terminal – the nation’s busiest port facility for importing and exporting cars – is reportedly about to fall into Norwegian hands, raising fears of job losses. Sources have told Fairfax that Norwegian shipping and logistics giant Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistographics has won the right to operate the terminal, beating a bid from the existing operator Australian Amalgamated Terminals. AAT, a joint venture between Asciano and the Chris Corrigan-haired Qube, runs the existing 16-hectare car terminal at Webb Dock West. The terminal handles more than 300,000 imported and exported cars annually’. That terminal is being replaced by an adjacent facility that can handle twice as many cars and will open in stages from next year and be fully operational by late 2016. The long-term lease of the new terminal – part of a $1.6b redevelopment of Webb Dock – will expire in 2040.

Transport – air  
**New tenant**  
Melbourne Airport has welcomed AirCalin to the list of airline operators, with a twice weekly service between Melbourne and Noumea, New Caledonia.

Transport – rail  
**Revamp**  
According to the *Herald Sun*, the Preston Workshops, a 7.3ha depot that from 1934, built and maintained Melbourne’s iconic fleet of Preston and Aid tram lines will be redeveloped as part of the E-class tram project. It will become a major training centre for E-class drivers with a new $1.7 million full-cabin tram simulator.

**Bog down**  
The $11 billion Melbourne Rail Link underground tunnels are being redesigned to avoid cracking the city’s major sewer. According to the *Herald Sun*, maps of the proposed route released with the State Budget show that Melbourne’s main sewer, which carried the equivalent of 140 Olympic swimming pools of human waste a day, may be in the way of the new underground tunnels.

**Delays**  
Delays plagued four major train lines - Pakenham, Cranbourne, Frankston and Sandringham - from first to last service recently, with Metro forced to reduce its services as crews tried to repair damage caused by the blaze. Rail workers said the likely trigger was rats chewing through the cable cover and exposing high-voltage wire. ‘Rats have got a penchant for gnawing into PVC,’ Electrical Trains Union organiser Gerry Glover said.

**On time**  
Metro’s practice of skipping stations when trains are running late is sometimes a justifiable way for the operator to improve its on-time performance, Victoria’s Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder said. According to *The Age*, Metro met its monthly punctuality target for a record 25th consecutive month in May, prompting Mr Mulder to boast that Melbourne’s trains are rarely more reliable than they were under the former Labor government. A total of 92.7 per cent of Metro’s trains ran on time in May, an improvement of 10 percentage points on the May 2010 figure of 82.7 per cent. Metro is contractually obliged to run 88 per cent of trains on time each month, or be financially penalised. It receives bonuses for meeting its targets. Mr Mulder said Melbourne’s trains were not yet as punctual as they should be, because the public invested huge sums of money in public transport and deserved a ‘dividend’. He would now push Metro to run 95 per cent of trains on time.

**Suicide hot spots**  
Millions of dollars is being spent fencing off open sections of Melbourne’s railways where people are regularly taking their own lives. According to a report in *The Age*, suicide by train has become so common Metro plans to build a dedicated train wash, called a ‘biopit’, to clean train exteriors after a person is hit. The biopit will cost an estimated $3.4 million to build.

**Delays plagued four major train lines**

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**Metro met its monthly punctuality target for a record 25th consecutive month in May.**

**Suicide hot spots:**

**Millions of dollars is being spent fencing off open sections of Melbourne’s railways where people are regularly taking their own lives.**

**13 Years late!**

*The Age* reports that a plan to replace Melbourne’s manual train control system has had its target date for completion pushed back yet again due to ‘technical glitches during testing’, following thirteen years of delays. According to the paper, ‘The 32-year-old Metrol system that controls Melbourne’s trains is obsolete but has been kept alive in recent years while a new $88 million automatic system is introduced. The new system’s terminable rollout goes back to 1999, when the Bracks government said it would be replaced by 2001. Metro directs all Metro, V/Line trains through and out of Melbourne’s inner-city rail network, controlling the points and signals. If it were to fail, all trains would soon grind to a halt, with potentially dangerous consequences’.

**Need for new Trams**

Melbourne needs 110 new bumper-sized trams by 2020 to avoid chronic overcrowding and to address public safety concerns caused by *The Ageing tram networks, according to Yarra Trams and reported in *The Age*. The Naphine government is committed to adding 50 extra trams to the network in the next four years but has still to secure all of the land it needs for new electric substations that must be built to power the larger, modern trams. The 1970s-era trams have capacity for 70 passengers and performed poorly in Melbourne’s recent summer heatwave.

**Corruption allegations**

*The Age* has carried a story with allegations of corruption within Metro Trains, prompted by a statutory declaration provided to the paper by a former service provider to the company, Mark Boulton. Metro denies the claims after what they claim is an extensive investigation.

**South Morang extension**

*The Age* reports that a campaign is growing to extend tram route 86 from its terminus opposite RMIT’s Bundoora campus, on the corner of Plenty Road and McKimmies Road, about five kilometres north of South Morang railway station.

**Hiring from UK**

*The Herald Sun* reports that Yarra Trams is recruiting foreigners to manage its depots even though many locals are looking for work. The operator has posted job vacancies for positions of tram driver and depot manager on job websites in Britain with generous salary offers. The Rail, Tram and Bus Union spokesman Phil Altiere said local workers were outraged. Yarra Trams spokesperson Simon Murphy said it employed workers on merit ‘regardless of nationality’ and the jobs had been advertised locally – ‘Of the 30
roles currently being recruited, 28 of them are being advertised only in Australia”.

Transport – road
Cycling rules
Victoria’s road rules for cyclists could be changed based on the weight of public opinion about how motorists and cyclists ought to share the road. The Victorian government will survey the public over about its knowledge of cycling-related road rules and its attitudes about interaction between people in vehicles and on bikes. The results, from a VicRoads online survey that will run from Sunday until July 27, will be used to inform a review of the state’s cycling-related road rules.

Regulate cyclists?
In a Herald Sun opinion piece Susie O’Brien argues that ‘the days of the anonymous cyclist must end’. She maintains that if every driver and motorcyclist needs to be identified via a license plate, the road should be treated differently. Not exactly a position likely to endear her to the cycling fraternity.

P-Plate changes
According to the Herald Sun, there are changes coming to law stating which cars p-platers can drive. Police and the RACV are backing the changes, which scrap the blanket ban on p-platers driving VRVs and turbocharged cars. Power-to-weight ratios will determine which vehicles they can drive from July 1.

Taxi revolution
The Financial Review carries a feature on the taxi industry and commends Allan Fels who has headed a two-year Victorian government review of the sector. One key change was to replace a system of limited-release perpetual licences with an open-entry system, with leases from the government for $22,000 a year. Mr Fels ‘has long argued that the national taxi industry lacks competition and that customers are ultimately worst off if change is not made to break the stranglehold of a select number of taxi-related companies’. Fels says ‘There is huge public support against that little, really powerful taxi lobby’.

Light rail a priority
According to the Herald Sun, most tram routes will eventually be separated from cars and other vehicles under the Victorian government’s 40-year blueprint. Plan Melbourne says improved travel times and reliability can only be achieved by trams operating in their own dedicated corridors.

Labor split
State Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews faces internal dissent over Labor’s decision not to support the western stage of the East West Link. According to The Age, six months before the Victorian election, some MPs have questioned the move, fearing it could cost votes, not just in the party’s western heartland but in sensitive regions such as Geelong and Ballarat, which could benefit from less traffic heading into Melbourne.

Doored cyclist
A cyclist has died after a driver opened his car door into the rider’s path on a notoriously narrow busy shopping strip in Melbourne’s southeast. Police allege the driver had pulled over and parked his Commodore station wagon when he opened the door without looking as the cyclist passed on Highett Rd, near View St in Highett, just after midday on May 26.

Cyclist compo rising
The Herald Sun reports that cyclists hurt in road crashes in Victoria have claimed approximately $200m in compensation over the past five years. In 47 cases involving deaths, from almost 10,000 Transport Accident Commission claims, $8.6m was paid out.

Gridlock
According to the Herald Sun, new VicRoads and Chairman at RACV in the RA Magazine on a UN resolution that recognised that traffic injuries are a major public health and development problem that have a broad range of social and economic consequences which if unaddressed, may hinder the development of countries. About 90% of all casualties occur in developing countries, underlying the role Australia can play to improve road safety in the Asia Pacific region.’

Second stage
The state opposition says it does not support the second stage of the East West Link, regardless of whether the first stage is built, in effect turning the November election into a referendum on whether the western section of the project goes ahead. According to The Age, opposition transport spokeswoman Jill Hennessy was repeatedly asked whether Labor would build the second stage of the project if it wins the forthcoming state election. She was also asked whether residents in the west would get the second section of the project if they voted for Labor. Ms Hennessy replied: “We need to make a determination as to what our contractual obligations are after the election if we are so lucky to win.

May need to move
The Princess Freeway - one of the busiest roads in country Victoria - may need to be moved to allow the safe rehabilitation of part of the Hazelwood colliery at Morwell. According to The Age, high-voltage power lines and a large drain serving the town may also need to be moved. All three important items of infrastructure lie between the northern edge of the mine and the southern edge of Morwell, which is only about 400 metres from the mine’s edge.

Getting worse
Some of Melbourne’s most chronically clogged intersections have been left to gradually get worse for several years, in breach of state guidelines that traffic lights must be reviewed every five years to keep pace with congestion. According to The Age, a report by Auditor-General John Doyle, found the state’s transport authorities are failing to make the most of technology such as intelligent traffic light phasing and tram and bus tracking systems to minimise congestion.

Councils
According to the Herald Sun, key roads would be tolled and a congestion charge introduced under a plan being considered by councils to deal with inner-city traffic congestion. A report for the Inner Melbourne Action Plan also called for 40km/h speed limits in all activity centres and more priority given to public transport, cycling and walking. IMAP includes the city’s five inner municipalities: Melbourne, Yarra, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Maribyrnong.

Two left for Link
The Herald Sun reports that the number of construction giants bidding for the first stage of the East West Link has been reduced to two: East West Connect and the Inner Link Group. East West Connect includes construction giant Lend Lease, while Inner Link Group is backed by Macquarie Capital in partnership with the Spanish transport developer Cinta. An unsuccessful third company will be given $12m in compensation. Momentum Infrastructure, a consortia between John Holland, Leighton and The Bank of Tokyo, did not make the list.

Utilities
Water profit
According to the Herald Sun, La Trobe University’s Centre for Water Policy and Management analysed financial results for the state’s nineteen water businesses from 2005-06 to 2012-13. Metropolitan water companies accumulated before tax profits of $3.1 billion, and regional businesses made $110 million. But rural businesses lost $462 million.

Grant for Chinese coal
The Age reports that a Chinese state-owned company, Shanghai Electric, has been given $25m by the Victorian and federal governments to develop more Latrobe Valley brown coal. The company is promising to build a $119m demonstration plant to process coal into briquettes. The state government wants wider
development and export of Victoria’s vast brown coal reserves. But environmentalists want brown coal phased out because of it high greenhouse gas emissions when burnt, even compared with more common black coal. The Shanghai Electric proposal, which processes 1m tonnes of coal a year into 580,000 tonnes of briquettes to be exported for use in a Shanghai power station.

The company is promising 100 construction and 40 ongoing jobs. A spokesman for state energy minister Russell Northe said a transport strategy would be developed to determine the export point for the coal. A 2012 transport plan created by industry suggested the first 2m tonnes of exported brown coal could be through the Geelong or Melbourne ports.

Liveable communities

In Sustainability Matters, Adam Lovell, Executive Director at the Water Services Association of Australia, contributed an interesting piece on how water contributes to liveable cities.

Society

Backpacker labour

Backpackers and tourists are being given free flights to Melbourne to work as charity collectors on city streets. Charity marketer Cornucopia Consultancy offers to pay $1500 for return flights so Britons, other Europeans, and Americans can work for six months as ‘chuggers’ (or charity muggers) at intersections and footbridges in Melbourne and other capital cities. Donations are collected on behalf of Red Cross, Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières and The Fred Hollows Foundation.

Guide dogs for Asia

Guide Dogs Victoria has reached a five-year agreement with the Guide Dogs Association of the Blind Singapore under which guide dogs will be bred and raised in Victoria before being sent to Singapore where they will receive training with their new owners. GDV CEO Tas Hay says that Singapore is coming to terms with the needs of an ageing population: ‘For cultural reasons the use of guide dogs is still a rather new concept in Singapore’.

Extremism in Bendigo

The Herald Sun reports that Bendigo City Council approved the construction of a $3m mosque amid fierce protest from local residents. The Council received more than 350 objections to the development which will include two prayer rooms, a shop and a community sports hall. The Age carried a long feature analysing a extremism in Bendigo over plans for a mosque. The story reads: ‘The sinister black balloons started appearing in Bendigo in May. Then [in June]…. A cluster of them were tied to the home and business of a local councillor who supports the building of a controversial mosque. The councillor, Mark Wergadoga, was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Bendigo in the 1980s. He says the unrelenting and increasingly veneful campaign against the Bendigo mosque, which has been approved by the council but faces a tribunal appeal, is the first time he has faced racial hatred in the regional Victorian city’. It is believed that the main influence generating the hatred is a Queensland-based organisation called Restore Australia. The Herald Sun reports that Bendigo’s local business leaders believe the mosque will generate millions of dollars for the city, not least as a tourist magnet, attracting Muslims from across Australia.

Checking clerics

The Herald Sun reports that ministers of religion in Victoria will have to submit to working with children checks under laws introduced in state parliament. The laws were recommended in last year’s Betrayal of Trust report of a parliamentary inquiry into handling of child abuse by religious and non-government groups.

New role

Dr Phillip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne, has been announced primate and spiritual leader of the Anglican Church of Australia. This supplements his present church role.

Vale

Lorraine Elliott. A wonderful person and friend of many. Former member for the Victorian parliament seat of Mooroolbark. Wife of John Kiely. She had been ill with cancer.

Former wife of businessman John Elliott and mother of three children including columnist and media commentator Tom Elliott.

Lorraine and the Letter From Melbourne’s editor had a laugh the other year when she rang to say she had been in a Washington DC restaurant and a fellow dinner had leaned over and asked if she knew Alistair Urquhart in Australia.

Raymond Adams OAM. Haadi Akhtar, 7, died due to an accident involving snow while on holiday at Mount Buller. Dr Paul Antonis. Maya Angelou, author, human rights activist. David Armstrong, leading philosopher and Challis professor at Sydney University, formerly at Melbourne Univ. Richard Austin. Farmer and community leader and much else.


Father Thomas Vincent Daly SJ, 89. Dr John Dawkins, 89. Dr Olympia De Sousa, 89. Ken Doubleday. Kosta Dourou.


John Fielding, 58.


Dr Benno Ihle, ICU director at Epworth hospital for more than a decade.

Frank George Jensen, 97, WWII Flight Lieutenant, ‘a brave and generous man’. Peter Jeppesen, 69, noted broadcaster with the ABC for 30 years. Douglas Jordan.


Assoc Prof Martin Lachmann Charles Laidlaw. Per Brun Larsen AAM, 71. Gratton Wilson Leonardo AO MSC.


Glen Ochre, 70. Facilitator.


Lesley Quaile, musician and educator.


Winifred Vaughan.


Father Thomas Vincent Daly SJ, 89. Dr John Dawkins, 89. Dr Olympia De Sousa, 89. Ken Doubleday. Kosta Dourou.


John Fielding, 58.


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