The Royal Melbourne Show, 20 September to Sunday 5 October
Three months out. ♦ East West Link. One way or t’other, maybe
Tape recording. Nothing new recently ♦ Baillieu resigns, And Replacement
Geoff Shaw stays in Parliament ♦ Fringe Festival ♦ Health Summit in town
Cannabis reform confusing ♦ Chinese trains, not Ballaratrians
Transport department corruption ♦ Union integrity ♦ Caretaker period
So much bloody Ice ♦ Ambo pay still unsettled ♦ Melbourne retail not perfect yet
Letter from Melbourne

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About the editor

Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB

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

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

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

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

About the publisher

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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:
   22 September *(How to pitch to public affairs groups in Birmingham)*,
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Editorial  

Time for more reflection  

This Cover photo was taken from the verandah area at the back of the State Parliament House, where the editor was recently having coffee, with others. He found himself reflecting on a theme of honesty in Government, fairness in Government. Recently, Victoria University hosted one of its Governors- General Lecture Series, with The Right Honourable Dr Peter Hollingworth AC OBE, addressing a fairly serious audience on ‘Civil Society-Religion and The Rule of Law’.

Religion plays so much a lesser part in Australian Society’s thinking these days, which Dr Peter remarked was a part of the problem, or a part of a Society which now works less together. And here stands iconic St Patrick’s Church, standing here as it has for 120 years or more. For most of this time it was the part of the reflective elements that must have been in the minds of many Victorian, and for twenty seven years, federal parliamentarians, even the Presbyterian ones!

And then this great idea come to me. Let’s drown the politicians with facts. Many, many many facts. The media are not the best medium to do this but they can help with the task. And we all must get more facts out there, which will make our politicians stick closer to the truth. Tack the cannabis debate (!) as an example.

Then your editor spent seven hours at an IPA, Institute of Public Administration of Australia (Victorian Division), with some two hundred other members, most being members of the Victorian Public Service. Topic. Integrity in Government. Exhausting. Too000 rules for establishing honesty and integrity in Government were discussed, in my honest opinion. Let’s get some more good quality general and specific education into our Society.

State government & politics  

Napthine given 100 Day Warning  

With 100 days to the state election, a Herald Sun/ Galaxy opinion poll revealed Labor’s Daniel Andrews is on track to be Victoria’s next premier with the ALP holding a 52-48 per cent lead over the Napthine Government. According to the Herald Sun, the poll result, which Liberal and Labor strategists said was in line with their own polling, sets the scene for a bitter political fight in the lead-up to the November 29th election.

Still more problems for Napthine  

Life hasn’t got discernibly easier for Denis Napthine, whose government – facing the task of winning back Labor MPs frustrated with both the handling of the incident and the damage it was doing the Opposition’s chances of success at the November state election.

Bracks tags in  

According to the Herald Sun, former premier Steve Bracks, who led Labor to a narrow victory in 1999, said he was happy to help Daniel Andrews battle the government.

Dodgy advice  

According to The Age, the Commonwealth Bank continued to employ Geoff Shaw as a financial planner despite official findings exposing his misconduct, which included a rebate from the Financial Ombudsman Service and suspension from the peak professional association. Before being elected as a state Liberal MP in 2010, Mr Shaw was an accountant and financial planner out of the Frankston offices of his firm, Geoff Shaw & Partners. He was licensed as a planner but through Bongiorno Financial Advisers (AIF) and then Financial Wisdom, a subsidiary of CBA.

How to avoid the FBT  

Suspended MP Geoff Shaw has backed claims that some state MPs have been submitting false declarations to Parliament to avoid Fringe Benefits Tax, alleging a senior cabinet minister told him about the scam. According to the Herald Sun, some MPs travel interstate and charge Parliament for expensive fully flexible airfares with a return date less than five days later. It is alleged that MPs are then extending their stay without telling Parliament, putting the Victorian Parliament at risk of avoiding Fringe Benefits Tax.

Shaw expulsion assured  

The Napthine government examined expelling Geoff Shaw from the Victorian Parliament on September 2 to end nearly 4 years of chaos across the party after the government had its strongest three days in Parliament for years - partly because of Shaw’s absence while under suspension. According to The Australian, the plan received strong backing across the party after the government had its strongest three days in Parliament for years - partly because of Shaw’s absence while under suspension. To stay in the Parliament, Shaw had to make a full and genuine apology and repay nearly $7,000 in fines by 1pm on September 2.

If his apology was accepted by Parliament, Shaw could remain in Parliament and expose the government to losing votes on the floor of the lower house in the last three sitting weeks before the November 29th state election. However, Premier Denis Napthine has made it clear that, unless Mr Shaw’s apology was genuine and remorseful, he would be expelled.

Shaw gave his full apology, then went to the media and made a joke of it. The Government did not have the numbers, to then expel him from Parliament.
**Bailieu resigns**

Former premier Ted Baillieu will not contest the seat of Hawthorn at the November election. Because of the proximity to the election, the administrative committee picked a candidate. In an announcement that appeared to catch the government off-guard, Baillieu told Premier Denis Napthine he would not be recontesting his seat after 15 years in Parliament.

Baillieu told Channel Seven he only made the decision to step down earlier in the week, and it had nothing to do with the dictaphone scandal. Facing mounting internal pressure, Baillieu stood down as premier in March 2013 after Frankston MP Geoff Shaw quit the Liberal Party and said he had no confidence in the Hawthorn MP’s ability to govern.

**Bailieu (2)**

Baillieu’s announced that he would quit politics, potentially exposing the Liberal Party to an untimely and potentially messy preselection ballot in the run-up to the November 29 election. Baillieu rang his closest -allies to say he would no longer run. The surprise move raised serious questions why he had not surrendered his seat earlier to resolve a damaging pre-selection battle in a nearby seat. Several high-profile Liberals were mooted as candidates for his safe inner-eastern Melbourne seat of Hawthorn, including two ministers and the head of the Institute of Public Affairs, John Roskam.

Health Minister David Davis did not rule out running in the seat from the upper house and Community Services Minister Mary Wooldridge refused to comment. John Pesutto, the incumbent premier's legal counsel, won the seat. In March Ms Wooldridge was forced to contest an upper-house seat in the coming election after losing a preselection ballot for the inner-eastern lower-house seat of Kew. Several high-profile Liberals were mooted as candidates for his safe inner-eastern Melbourne seat of Hawthorn, including two ministers and the head of the Institute of Public Affairs, John Roskam.

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**Facebook fight**

According to a report in The Age, Multicultural Affairs Minister Matthew Guy may ask police to investigate a series of Facebook posts purporting to be one of his staffers making highly racist and sexist comments about senior Liberals. A spokesman for Mr Guy, who is also the state’s planning minister, insisted the statements were fabricated, an assertion the minister’s office is now considering whether to refer them to police on the grounds of fraud and defamation.

But the fact they were distributed in the first place - and the considerable effort it would have taken to get them looking like genuine Facebook material - paints a worrying sign of the battles now being waged in politics using social media.

**Mea culpa**

Geoff Shaw is preparing to apologise to State Parliament after repaying almost $7000 for misusing his parliamentary vehicle. After years of parliamentary chaos - much of it linked to Mr Shaw - Coalition strategists are desperately hoping an apology will provide “clear air”, allowing the government to sell its agenda in the remaining weeks before the November 29 election.

**Uneasy peace**

Controversial balance-of-power MP Geoff Shaw will remain in Parliament after delivering a carefully worded apology. And with fewer than 90 days before the November election the Frankston MP continues to rattle the Victorian government, which failed to put forward its legislative agenda for the week to avoid it being defeated by Mr Shaw’s vote. The apology was heard in silence and appeared to pass the test, with no MPs objecting in Parliament after his long-awaited statement.

**Ready to banish**

The government spent the final parliamentary week of Geoff Shaw’s 11-day suspension with a flurry of tough-on-crime announcements. Mr Shaw’s expulsion from Parliament is now being viewed as a serious option as the Coalition enters a final phase of the political cycle focused on marginal electorate campaigning. ‘There is nothing left on the legislative agenda that could make much difference,’ a senior source said. “His time in the sun is over”.

Shaw’s expulsion would leave the government without the numbers needed to protect against any no-confidence motion, although there is now no chance of an early election because of the proximity to the general election. The MP was suspended from Parliament in June and will face permanent expulsion if he fails to deliver a satisfactory apology and repay almost $7000 for misusing his parliamentary vehicle when he returns on September 2.

**Romance in mind**

With less than two weeks before Geoff Shaw was due to end his parliamentary suspension, senior Victorian minister Louise Asher antagonised the Frankston MP by revealing private details to Parliament including his plans to propose to his girlfriend in Paris and get married in London.

The taxpayer travel request was denied - under the terms of his suspension he is banned from parliamentary travel. Without the Frankston MP in the lower house, the government has had to rely on the Speaker’s casting vote for any legislation opposed by Labor. If Mr Shaw returns, he will regain the casting vote.

**Musings**

Josh Gordon in The Age: ‘The political equation that convinced Labor to oppose a government motion to expel Geoff Shaw – despite demanding expulsion in June “because Victoria deserves better” – is probably as simple as this: Geoff Shaw = chaos. As long as there is chaos in the parliament, it damages the government more than the opposition.’

**Political shootout in Euroa**

A Liberal Party decision to choose a candidate to run in the northern Victorian seat of Euroa is set to inflame tensions with its Coalition partner, the Nationals, in the months leading up to what is expected to be a tight state election. The Liberals endorsed physiotherapist Tony Schneider as their candidate for the newly formed country seat, in defiance of repeated objections from the Nationals that such a move would be in breach of a long-standing Coalition agreement.

On Friday, Nationals Leader Peter Ryan expressed frustration about the Liberals’ decision. ‘We’re very unhappy about this, we’re angry about in fact,’ he told Fairfax Media. ‘But on the other hand we need to concentrate on the principal task, which is to win this election.’ Ms Ryan, 28, who is not related to the National leader, has been door knocking across the electorate for months and is regularly in the local media.

**Young candidate profiles for the State election (The Age)**

Stephanie Ryan (28, Nationals Candidate for Euroa)

Ryan grew up on a berry farm, worked as a journalist at the Riverine Herald, and later became a media and policy adviser under the Baillieu/Napthine governments.

Neil Pharoah (30, Labor Candidate for Prahan)

Pharoah quit his job as Director of Partnerships at the Foundation for Young Australians in

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February to stand as a candidate in the seat of Prahran, now held by Liberal Clem Newton-Brown with a margin of 4.7 per cent.

Ellen Sandell (29, Greens candidate for Melbourne)

Sandell trained as a scientist and began her career as a research with the CSIRO. She worked on climate change policy for former Labour Premier John Brumby’s Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Slater became the Chief Executive of a national climate change nonprofit organisation, ‘the old parties of failing to tackle the big issues,’ she says.

Sean Armistead (37, Liberal Candidate for Frankston)

Born in Darwin (his mother is a Ngunga Aboriginal woman), Armistead could become the first indigenous person elected to the Victorian Parliament. A manager for indigenous programs at Crown, Armistead was raised in Frankston.

Department corruption

Victoria’s public transport authority is shaking off a culture inherited from the former Transport Department that put greater value in getting work done than applying checks and balances on corrupt staff behaviour, on of the state’s top public servants has told the state’s corruption watchdog. Mark Wild, the chief executive of Public Transport Victoria, said PTV ‘inherited serious cultural problems’ when it replaced the department in 2012.

Fisherman’s friend

According to the Herald Sun, Labor has concerns about the planned Fisherman’s Bend redevelopment, but won’t ditch it if it wins office. Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews accused the Victorian government of boutching the process.

Registered

The Democratic Labor Party of Australia, Shooters and Fishers Party and Animal Justice Party recently registered with the VEC ahead of the state election in November.

Jack Bails Out

A liberal candidate at November’s State election quit last night after party officials were told of hundreds of offensive sexist and racist posts on his Facebook page. Jack Lyons was standing for the marginal seat of Bendigo West.

Guidelines on the Caretaker Conventions

There are seventeen pages of detail. Just go online. Herewith the first couple of items.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The caretaker period spans the time the Legislative Assembly expires until the election result is clear or a new Government is appointed. The caretaker period for the 2014 Victorian election will commence at 6pm on Tuesday, 4 November 2014, unless the Legislative Assembly is dissolved before this date.

The business of government and public administration continue throughout the caretaker period. However, the caretaker conventions seek to ensure that the Government does not take action during the caretaker period that will bind an incoming government or limit its freedom of action. This means that, during the caretaker period, the Government should avoid:

• implementing major policy decisions that are likely to commit an incoming government;
• making significant appointments; and
• entering into major contracts and undertakings.

The caretaker conventions also help ensure that the Victorian public sector remains, and is maintained.

What is the ‘caretaker period’?

The period between the expiration of the Legislative Assembly and the appointment of a new Government is known as the ‘caretaker period’.

The caretaker period begins at the time the Legislative Assembly expires or is dissolved and continues until:

• the election result is clear; or if there is a change of Government, until the new Government is appointed.

Successive Victorian Governments have accepted that, during the period preceding an election for the Legislative Assembly, the Government assumes a ‘caretaker role’. The business of Government continues throughout this period. However, the caretaker conventions seek to ensure that the Government does not take action that will bind a future government.

The caretaker period recognises that:

• with the expiry or dissolution of the Legislative Assembly, the Executive Government cannot be held accountable for its decisions in the normal manner; and
• every general election carries the possibility of a change of Government.

The caretaker period for the 2014 Victorian election will commence at 6pm on Tuesday, 4 November 2014 (the day that Parliament expires), unless the Legislative Assembly is dissolved before this date.

The ‘caretaker conventions’

1.6 The practices followed by successive Governments in conducting Government business during the caretaker period are known as the ‘caretaker conventions’.

1.7 During the caretaker period, the business of Government continues and ordinary matters of administration still need to be addressed. However, the circumstances of an election campaign require special attention to ensure the apotitical nature of the VPS is maintained.

1.8 The caretaker conventions set down procedures to guide the actions of Government, limiting the Government’s ability to act in a way that would bind an incoming Government or limit its freedom of action. In summary, during the caretaker period, the Government should avoid:

• implementing major policy decisions that are likely to commit an incoming Government;
• making significant appointments; and
• entering major contracts or undertakings.

1.9 The caretaker conventions reflect the practices followed by successive Governments, but are not legally binding. Adherence to the conventions is ultimately the responsibility of the Premier and the Government collectively. Agency Heads have responsibility to ensure that the business of Government proceeds at the direction of Ministers and in a manner that is consistent with the caretaker conventions.

Federal

PUP and Napthine musings

According to James Campbell in the Herald Sun, ‘the force that has played out in Canberra — has meant it has been very difficult for the State Government to get much coverage, or
Abandoning the talkfest
Senior Liberals from the federal and Victorian governments made a sudden withdrawal from a controversial right-wing conference due to public pressure.

Effigy burn
According to The Age, student activists burnt an effigy of federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne during a rally in the city opposing education changes. The rally was part of a national day of protests in opposition to deregulation of university fees.

Chaplains in schools
The state government said they would not consider running the schoolkids program, which funds the right to free speech for school children.

Montsalvat
According to a report in The Age, Sigmund Jorgensen is ‘aware of the wonderful irony’ that today Montsalvat derives $600,000 a year – more than 50 per cent of its annual income – from weddings held on the grounds. It’s more commerce than art, but Sigmund, who took over as Montsalvat leader from Justus in 1969 and continued for 37 years, says: ‘One has to be practical. If one wants to live in peace and tranquillity on a piece of land worth $22 million, one has to find ways of supporting it.’

Bullying
A major anti-bullying conference in Melbourne was told more work is needed to stop youngsters growing into adult aggressors. According to The Age, 92.8 per cent of early childhood educators believe young children are capable of bullying.

Homework
According to The Age, the Inquiry into the Approaches to Homework in Victorian Schools recommended that the Education Department consider training teachers to help them set more challenging tasks.

Plagiarism software
Victorian schools are increasingly using plagiarism detection software to help mark students’ work and ensure assignments are not copied from the internet.

Agriculture
Good job
The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is looking for a Director, Agriculture and Food Industries Policy. Bridie Butcher, bridie.butcher@futurestep.com.

Arts
Royal audience
After four countries in less than a week, the fifth country on the MSO’s brief but highly successful European tour was Denmark. The orchestra played at the splendid Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen’s Tivoli Gardens, with Princess Mary of Denmark in the audience.

Triumphant
The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra’s Prom on Tuesday night was No.44 out of 76 at the Albert Hall in London. There are many other orchestras in the season. There may be many Proms in any one season, but they would be hard-pressed to match the MSO’s triumphant performance under its chief conductor, Sir Andrew Davis.

Back to the future
Twenty-two years after the Kennett Government closed Richmond High, Labor has announced it would build a new school if elected according to The Age. While Melbourne Girls’ College has opened on the old Richmond High site two years after it closed, boys in the area are forced to travel to Auburn High in Hawthorne, Collingwood College or Kew High.

Education
High turnover for new teachers
Almost two thirds of Victorian state school teachers met first five years of teaching a short-term contracts, leading to job uncertainty and high staff turnover. According to The Age, the Australian Education Union’s annual survey of new teachers showed 65 per cent were on fixed contracts - almost 10 percentage points more than last year. Of the 1043 teachers survey, only half saw themselves teaching for more than a decade.

NAPLAN results fall
According to The Age, preliminary NAPLAN results show some students were stumped by writing task that asked which law or rule should be made better. Victorian students in years five, seven and nine recorded markedly worse scores than three years ago in persuasive writing. Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority chief executive Rob Randall said that has not been overall decline in writing standards. He said the writing task ‘didn’t engage’ some students. But the authority is also investigating whether the decline in persuasive writing occurred because for the first time schools were not told in advance whether the writing test would include a narrative or persuasive task.

Chaplains in state schools
A spokeswoman for Education Minister Martin Dixon said the state government would work with the Commonwealth to ensure federally funded programs continued to support Victorian schools and students.

Chaplains in state schools
The Victorian government appears set to accept federal funding to continue employing religious chaplains in state schools. According to The Age, the funding issue has proved divisive with two other state and territory education ministers saying they would not consider running the program unless they can use the funding to hire secular welfare workers.

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on class sizes, finding many principals treat them as targets when organising staffing. According to the Herald Sun, the commission estimates government schools could save around $300 million a year if those able increased class numbers to maximum levels specified.

Get an Asian partner
A fifth of Victoria’s 1,500 also government schools have foreign sister-school links. The Education Department last month issued advice for schools on how to establish such ties. It includes strategies to overcome possible obstacles, information on hosting reciprocal visits and examples of schools that have successful affiliations in place.

Education Minister Martin Dixon sent providing an internationally focused education was increasingly important as the world moved further into the Asian century. Out of Victoria’s 292 government sister schools, 140 have ties in China.

Eduextras
Education department executives have been awarded millions of dollars in performance bonuses over the past two years - while school programs have been cut and hundreds of jobs have been lost across your seat. According to The Age, government data obtained under freedom-of-information laws reveal that senior department staff were paid bonuses totalling $2.1 million between 2011 and 2013 while millions more were spent on travel, meals and accommodation. Even food.

Adults
Victorians are turning to vocational training at more than 10 times the rate of school leavers. Enrolments among those aged 45 to 64 have surged 70 per cent in just four years. According to the Herald Sun, their numbers now rival those of older teens. The figure is tipped to rise further as industry changes force workers to re-skill.

Federal cuts
The federal government will examine slashing billions of dollars worth of research funding from universities if Parliament blocks its sweeping higher education changes. University vice-chancellors are alarmed by the ‘doomsday scenario’, which they say would damage Australia’s $10 billion export market for higher education.

TAFE losses
The finances of Victoria’s TAFE sector have deteriorated, with a report by the financial watchdog revealing a $16.2 million net deficit in 2012/13. According to a report in The Age, the Victorian Auditor-General said the “main driver” of the poor financial results was a $116.3 million - or 15 per cent - cut in government operating and capital grants. The report said five TAFEs had a high rating of financial sustainability risk, while eight were assessed as medium risk. Only four TAFEs reported a surplus and improved financial performance for last year.

Childcare costs
Inner-city families spending more than $100 a day on childcare fees are likely to be worse off under the Productivity Commission’s preferred new model. According to The Australian, the commission wants to replace the present scheme with a new early care and learning subsidy, paid directly to childcare centres rather than to parents and based on a deemed cost of care.

Prayer group ban
Lunchtime prayer and bible study groups run by teachers or volunteers have been banned at state schools in Victoria under a new education department policy. According to a report in The Age, the new policy has angered Christian groups who say it could be in breach of human rights and religious freedom. The ban, which has taken many by surprise, came into effect on July 14, as part of changes to the controversial special religious instruction requirements.

New guidelines allowing principals to cease offering special religious instruction if there are insufficient resources, such as teachers or classrooms, have been widely publicised. However the policy also states that lunchtime prayer groups and religious clubs cannot be conducted by staff, parents, visitors or volunteers. This affects all state secondary schools, as well as primary schools, where special religious instruction is typically provided.

The policy says legislation requires that government schools are secular and special religious instruction is the only exception to this. The distribution of religious texts such as the Bible or Koran by any person is also prohibited.

Parent power
Parents will have the power to formally assess how principals perform and school councils will get new authority to shape the way classrooms are run, under a controversial shake-up of the education system. According to a report in The Age, under the changes, school councils will get financial incentives to merge into ‘federated’ boards that oversee two or more schools, in a bid to streamline the way they are managed.

Membership will be broadened to discourage ‘token teachers’ being appointed simply to represent them, in favour of staff with wider expertise, business leaders and community members. And school councils will also get a bigger say in the way education is delivered, by shaping the curriculum, for instance, or choosing subject specialisation.

Country students
Victorian students at government schools in the country are almost seven months behind city students in reading as early as year 3, according to research delivered, by shaping the curriculum, for instance, or choosing subject specialisation.

Energy
More than ever
According to the Herald Sun, energy bills for hundreds of thousands of Victorian households have exploded beyond $3000 a year. Companies are profiteering from customers who don’t shop around, charging an annual premium of up to $920 for electricity and up to $410 for gas compared with the cheapest offers.

Tactics slammed
Gas and electricity customers struggling to pay their bills are being signed up to unrealistic payment plans, subjected to aggressive debt collection tactics and are having their accounts disconnected without warning, research shows. According to The Age, survey of more than 100 financial counsellors revealed hardship programs run by energy retailers to help vulnerable and low-income people pay off their accounts are plagued with problems, despite the number of Victorians asking for help being on the rise.

The Rank the Energy Retailer report, released by the Financial and Consumer Rights Council, focused on the state’s three biggest retailers - Origin, AGL and Energy Australia - but also rated smaller companies’ hardship policies. Of the 13 retailers ranked, Origin received the best score, of 5.5 out of 10.

Pre-paid electricity bills
Victorian households could be offered a controversial prepay electricity scheme to avoid bill shock. The state government is investigating the possibility of a widespread option, someone to prepay mobile phones, being linked to smart meters. Prepaid systems operating interstate overseas raised concerns about cash-strapped customers ‘self-disconnecting’ if they run out of credit.

Energy Minister Russell Northe told the Herald Sun he would consider any measures to help households manage bills, but would want to avoid disconnections. Card-activated meters are used by some Tasmanian customers who can recharge $5-$200 of credit. Millions in the United Kingdom use recharge tokens, keys or cards.

Electricity: we have too much
According to The Age, evidence that Australia will have an oversupply of electricity for at least a decade has fuelled expectations that the government will be advised to wind back the national renewable energy target. Forecasts by the Australian Energy Market Operator found that there will be more electricity generation than required until 2024.

Hazelwood fire
The cost of the devastating Hazelwood mine fire - described as a foreseeable risk in a damning report - is estimated at more than $100 million, a cost borne by taxpayers, the local community and the mine’s owner and operator, GDF Suez. According to The Age, the cost of the blaze - which burnt for 45 days before it was declared safe - is revealed in the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry report, tabled in State Parliament recently.

Good job
The Department of State Development, Business and Innovation is looking for a Director of Energy Efficiency.

Environment & conservation
Clean state
Victoria has been named Australia’s most litter free state, according to the Herald Sun. Keep Australia Beautiful’s independently researched National Litter Index found the state contained 28 items of litter per 1000sq m in the past financial year – the lowest count since reporting began in 2005.
Renewables
The Victorian government has been accused of systematically destroying renewable energy as green groups prepare for a ground offensive targeting key electorates ahead of the November 29 election. According to The Age, a report by Environment Victoria claims the government has made 25 attacks on clean energy, including ‘extreme’ restrictions on wind farms, removing the 20 per cent emissions reduction target from the Climate Change Act, cutting and restricting the solar feed-in tariff, scrapping a commitment to replace street lights with energy efficient light bulbs, cancelling the solar hot water rebate and opposing the carbon tax.

Spring
An 8 page guide titled ‘Spring into Nature’ outlining ways to explore a host of private conservation properties across Victoria was released recently.

Good job
Mt Hotham is looking for a Chief Executive Officer. Contact Ian Nankivell, ian@fnow.com.au.

Events
The Royal Melbourne Show, Wednesday 20 September to Sunday 5 October. Nearby, Fine Food Australia, 15 to 18 September at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

The Melbourne Fringe Festival, 17 September to 5 October will bring the city to life with over 400 events, performances and exhibitions across a range of art forms. Join in the celebration at venues across the city and North Melbourne.

NYE
Melburnians will again have access to five locations to celebrate New Year’s Eve. Treasury and Flagstaff Gardens, Docklands and Kings Domain, while Yarra Park will host a special program for families.

Waste Expo
On 15 and 16 October at the Convention Centre. www.wasteexpo.com.au. Nearby, in one sense at least, the Stormwater 2014 National Conference ,13 to 17 October in Adelaide. Worth the trip,

25 years
The Port Fairy Spring Music Festival will be held on the 10 to 12 October, and is celebrating 25 years in 2014. This is different to the folk music festival held in April in the same town.

Country racing

Gaming
Good deal
Tabcorp has locked in a 50-year, low-tax wagering licence in its $105.5 million deal to buy ACTTAB, which it can use as a bargaining chip in licence negotiations or to boost profits in future, analysts have said. According to The Age, as the winning bidder in the privatisation of the national capital’s wagering business, Tabcorp will receive a 50-year totalisator licence, a 15-year sports bookmaking licence and approval to offer its Keno and Trackside products.

Unlike in Victoria and NSW, where Tabcorp is the exclusive retail wagering provider, in the ACT the company will have minimal tax liabilities on betting. Tabcorp will pay a $1 million annual fee for the totalisator licence and a tax of 1 per cent of sports bet turnover. It will pay no tax on tote betting.

Crown
According to the Herald Sun, Crown Casino will get more pokies and gaming tables, and have its licence extended to 2050, to compensate for a multi-million dollar tax hike. The in-principle deal would end nine months of talks and would see the casino expand its business and add about 100 more poker machines. The Victorian government will get hundreds of millions of dollars in licence payments to spend on transport, schools or hospitals in the lead up to November’s election.

Kennett once pro, now anti-gambling
The man who, as Victoria’s Premier 1992-99, did more than any previous state politician to facilitate legal gambling now regrets having subjected the TAB to privatisation in 1994. Addressing recently a meeting of Racing Victoria, Jeff Kennett was in apocalyptic mode, denouncing corporate bookmakers for having become ‘a cancer in our society.’ In a front-page story for The Age, Mr Kennett was quoted as saying on that occasion:

‘If I had known 20 years ago that in privatising the TAB it would bring an influx of corporate bookmakers to Australia I would not have privatised the TAB.’ Mr Kennett’s main concern with corporate bookmakers was that they lower royalty rates, which imperilled the financial future of racing. He attended the meeting in his capacity as chairman of the mental health charity, Beyond Blue. And he also condemned the barrage of advertising from corporate bookmakers for ‘indoctrinating the public about gambling and the reasonableness of gambling.’

Health
The World Medical Association will join with the Australian Medical Association and AMA Victoria to host a High level summit in Melbourne to highlight Health issues on 13 and 14 November, prior to the G20 Leaders’ Summit.

The WMA, our 106 Member Associations and their 9 Million members caring for Billions of people across the globe, advocate for Health and Healthcare access for the people of the World.

Health of Nations is a core component of the Wealth of Nations. It has been said that “Health is the greatest social capital a nation can have”. A productive society depends on a healthy engaged and confident workforce.

The summit will address:

1) Health as a wise investment: Physicians and Health Professionals provide to improve Health.
2) The burden of Non-Communicable Diseases and
3) Highlight Social Determinants of Health
4) Health effects of Climate Change and how to tackle these.

Ban ads?
Alcohol ads on receipts should be banned, doctors say. According to the Herald Sun, it is time for archaic communications between hospitals and GPs to be overhauled, the
Australian Medical Association says. AMA Victoria, in putting its wish list before political parties in the lead-up to November’s state election, is warning that alcohol advertising on shopper receipts could encourage irresponsible drinking. It also could constitute marketing to children, it says.

**False signing**

According to the Herald Sun, a prominent young Liberal Party member is among more than 50 people who incorrectly signed a petition as medical practitioners so they could oppose a controversial abortion law. Victoria Young Liberals President and senior Institute of Public Affairs member Simon Breheny signed his name to a parliamentary petition of doctors and nurses opposing regulations requiring them to refer women to seeking abortions.

**Refusing to commit**

According to The Age, the Victorian Law Reform Commission has joined calls in urging the government to go to the second hand facility for mentally ill offenders in a bid to keep the community safer. With 116 beds, the Thomas Embling Hospital is the state’s only secure mental health centre to treat mentally ill people in the criminal justice system, as well as those who have been found not guilty due to mental impairment. But the hospital, opened in 2000, has seen three deaths in three years, increased waiting lists, and the average list, and the average length of stay stretch out to more than a month.

**Singer questions suspension**

Ethicist Peter Singer has questioned the Medical Board of Australia’s decision to suspend euthanasia campaigner Philip Nitschke’s medical registration, and says the only way to protect vulnerable people from him is to legalise voluntary euthanasia. According to The Age, the Professor of bioethics at Princeton University said it would be both ‘concerning’ and ‘extraordinary’ if the medical board suspended Dr Nitschke because he believed people without a terminal illness could make a rational decision to die.

‘I think suicide can be rational in the absence of terminal bonds and I think I could find you thousands or hundreds of philosophers who would think that… I think if you know you are going to spend the next 20 years in prison, suicide is a rational option - not for everybody, but for some people,’ he said, referring to the case of Nigel Brayley, a Perth man who communicated with Dr Nitschke before taking his own life while he was being investigated over his wife’s death.

**Cannabis reform**

Medical cannabis will be legalised in Victoria if Labor seizes power at November’s state election. According to The Age, under the proposal, Victorians with terminal illnesses or life-threatening conditions such as cancer, Parkinson’s disease and multiple sclerosis would be able to access medicinal marijuana without breaking the law. Opposition leader Daniel Andrews said that Labor would overhaul ‘outdated’ legislation that forced parents to flout laws in order to save their children’s lives.

**Doubts**

According to The Age, forensic testing of medical marijuana has revealed dramatic variations in the contents of the product, which is often spruiked over the internet by unregulated producers who make bold claims about the benefits. A Victoria Police analysis suggests up to 40 per cent of vials bought by Victorian families contained just methylated spirits, pure alcohol and water. The results suggest in the remaining 60 per cent of vials tested, THC acid – the active component of cannabis – varied dramatically, ranging from low to high levels. The worrying analysis comes after an election pledge from Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews to legalise access to medicinal marijuana for Victorians with life-threatening conditions.

**Panned**

A Victorian government plan to make clinical trials of medicinal marijuana easier to conduct will do little to expand access to the drug, an expert on drug law reform says. In response to growing calls for cannabis to be legalised for people with certain illnesses, including children with intractable epilepsy, Victorian Health Minister David Davis said that he would amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act to make it easier for doctors to conduct clinical trials of medicinal cannabis. He would also consider removing a prohibition on the ‘cultivation of narcotic plants for therapeutic purposes in the context of approved clinical trials’ and gave ‘in principle’ support for Victorians to be part of an international trial of Epidiolex - a cannabis-based pharmaceutical being tested overseas in children with epilepsy. However, it is unclear when such a trial could begin.

**Patients killed off**

More than 200 Victorian patients were temporarily written off as dead after a major metropolitan hospital accidentally sent out death notices to their general practitioners. According to the Herald Sun, the error resulted in GPs mistakenly being sent a fax to say their patient had died following their hospital visit. All affected GPs were contacted by the Austin Health within hours to apologise and inform them of the mistake. The Australian Medical Association Victoria said the incident was unacceptable and may have been distressing to patients and their families.

**Good job**

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians is looking for a CEO. Contact Marina Lunt marina.lunt@futurestep.com.

**Business & investment**

**Closing down**

Energy Brix released a statement recently confirmed that the Morwell factory would close at the end of the month. According to the Herald Sun, the company, which makes briquettes for power generation, blamed a poor outlook on wholesale electricity prices for the closure. ‘The current manufacturing operations at Morwell will temporarily cease at the end of August 2014, with the majority of Energy Brix’s 37 employees to leave on redundancy packages.’

**Alcoa**

At the end of July, Alcoa closed down. The last shipment of alumina unloaded from the pier, the fires extinguished in the furnace, smoking pots shut down and no more jobs for life.

**Ambo deal**

An updated government offer, which included a $3000 sign-on bonus for about 3000 ambulance workers – double the previous bonus – was put to the union recently. But Ambulance Employees Australia state secretary Steve McGhie said the increase would not solve the dispute, which has now dragged on for 23 months.

**Suburban strips**

The arrival of a host of international retailers and the opening of Melbourne’s swank new Emporium shopping centre has taken a heavy toll on traditional suburban retail strips, with vacancy rates soaring on once-bustling streets. According to a report in The Age, Richmond’s Bridge Road recently recorded its highest vacancy level in 10 years, with one Alcoa five shops empty. Vacant stores in the once-popular strip jumped from 16.5 per cent a year ago to 19.3 per cent this year, with 46 standing empty. Chapel Street in South Yarra, Burke Road in Camberwell and High Street in Armadale were also out of favour with tenants, reaching their highest vacancy levels in five years, Knight Frank research shows. Research director Richard Jenkins said suburban strips were struggling following the success of the CBD and Emporium in attracting leading offshore retailers and customers. Emporium Melbourne, completed and opened in April, will have its official Baz Luhrmann-inspired launch. Other new international arrivals include Swedish giant H&M and Japanese fast fashion brand Uniqlo. ‘The prime CBD retail market now has a vacancy of just 3.0 per cent, while the overall suburban strip rate was 7.7 per cent,’ Mr Jenkins said.

**Local maker culled**

Scores of manufacturing jobs in Ballarat - which covers two of Victoria’s most marginal seats - are under threat after a local train builder was quietly culled from the shortlist to make 25 new trains for Melbourne. According to The Age, two Asian rail giants remain in the bidding to build the trains, putting about 70 jobs in Ballarat under threat. Both of the corporations left bidding on an estimated $376 million project have links to Metro’s parent company in Hong Kong, MTR. MTR is the lead partner in the consortium delivering a $2 billion-$2.5 billion boost to the Dandenong rail corridor, including 25 “next generation” trains with capacity for 1100 passengers. French company Alstom has a factory in Ballarat where about 70 staff are employed to build Melbourne’s current train model, the X’Trapolis. It was cut from the tendering last month, and it was predicted the project would continue to assess eight X’Trapolis trains until mid-next year but Alstom has no manufacturing work booked after that time. Alstom spokesman Sheldon Young declined to comment on the tendering process but said the company had put in a “very strong offer”. Bombardier is the only other domestic train maker, with a factory in Dandenong. It did not bid and has instead opted to be a subcontractor to China North Rail so the Chinese company’s...
Around Melbourne in photos

The Editor at work

Pelligrini’s for good coffee, since 1960

Bike time in Lennox Street Richmond, City of Yarra.

Annual a report time at Parliament House

IPAA Seminar

On the campaign trail
bid satisfies manufacturing laws that mandate 30 per cent local content.

**Taking Care of Business:** Better training, stronger skills & more jobs

**By Mark Stone**

Recent labour force statistics point to continued weakening in employment across many parts of Australia, including Victoria where unemployment now stands at seven per cent.

Reducing unemployment and building new job opportunities is a key platform of our Taking Care of Business 2014 state election agenda.

Our message to both major parties is simple: Creating enduring employment and business growth will depend on a series of integrated reforms.

In the education and training area, Victoria needs a well-funded and properly regulated system that is driven by business and monitored to identify shortfalls in workplace skills.

VECCI calls on both major parties to:

- Strengthen youth employment pathways by redirecting $20 million of Victorian Training Guarantee funding to boost hospitality, administration, retail and tourism apprenticeships.
- Support students to undertake additional training by increasing the School Based Apprenticeship target from 3200 to 5000 commencements per year, focusing on traditional skill shortages.
- Establish a low cost business foundations short course, delivered by industry, to help start-up SMEs develop the skills needed to establish and operate a successful business.

Continued effort is also needed to reduce business costs and strengthen the capacity of employers to hire. Recommendations include:

- Reducing the payroll tax burden by increasing the threshold at which businesses start paying payroll tax to $850,000.
- Red tape reform, to ensure that out-dated, overly prescriptive regulatory burdens are removed.
- Further cuts to Workcover premiums, to reward Victorian employers for operating safe workplaces.

Major infrastructure projects, which are vitally important to business and the state economy, also need to have a clear focus on job creation during both their construction and ongoing operations. That is why, in addition to commencing construction of the East West Link, VECCI calls for the fast tracking of outstanding regional infrastructure projects such as the Ballarat Railway Station project, Geelong’s Yarra Street Pier and Bendigo Airport.

There must also be a stronger focus on projects benefiting regional SMEs and supporting youth employment, which is why VECCI recommends both major parties commit to a 20 per cent local content target for all major government projects and purchases.

There is no quick fix to reducing unemployment. Coordinated and integrated policies, such as those advocated by VECCI, are needed to provide better training, stronger skills and more jobs.

VECCI urges members and supporters to play a crucial role in this state election campaign by pressing their local candidates to commit to our Taking Care of Business recommendations and making business a priority in the next term of government.

Simply visit vecci.org.au/tcb and enter your postcode to access the contact details of your local candidates and a letter that you can send them highlighting the priority areas.

Strong policies that drive greater investment, business activity and employment prospects are needed, so I encourage you to act now to influence The Agenda.

**Mark Stone is the Chief Executive of VECCI.**

**Industrial relations**

**Building industry**

Eight of Australia’s biggest construction projects are being probed for the existence of ‘phoenix scams’, with regulators preparing to file criminal charges. According to *The Age*, the Tax Office, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the Fair Work Building and Construction Inspectorate are co-operating on the problem of contractors sending their companies into liquidation to avoid debts to employees, the Tax Office and others.

Phoenix scams - when a company goes bankrupt and a second company (the phoenix) is started up overnight with the same directors - are regarded as a serious problem facing construction, labour hire, meat processing and horticulture companies. Consulting firm PWC estimated in 2012 the problem costs the economy between $1.8 billion and $3.2 billion a year.

**More building strife**

The Age announced that Victoria’s construction industry is bracing for a strike for reasons connected with federal issues. A powerful union – the Electrical Trades Union – has warned that talks with employers are at a stalemate over federal workplace deals that cover 11,000 electricians.

The union’s state secretary, Tony Gray, warned that industrial action was possible after the talks with electrical contractors had stalled, due to a tough federal building code that is designed to limit the sorts of claims which unions can make in the industry. At present, employers can be prevented from bidding for federal government work if they do not abide by the rules.

**Thirteen year high**

Victoria’s jobless rate has soared to a thirteen year high of seven per cent as the state suffers from weak economic growth and a sharp rise in the number of people seeking work.

**Youth jobless**

According to *The Age*, some very clear maps of regional and suburban Victoria highlighting some big changes in unemployment for 15-24 year olds – in particular a 9.2% increase in the North West to 15.3%.

**Youth jobless (2)**

An analysis of youth unemployment data reveals that the situation has deteriorated in 12 of the state’s 17 regions in the past year. Thousands of young Victorians from all backgrounds are finding themselves caught up in a spiral of unemployment, and the situation is particularly dire in socially disadvantaged suburbs of greater Melbourne and rural areas.

**Last year**

A security guard claims he was pinned against a laneway wall and violently threatened by union bosses blocking Melbourne’s Myer Emporium worksite at the height of an industrial dispute. Graham Smith, of Monjon Security, was contracted by construction giant Grocon in August 2012 to guard the Emporium site and another site in Footscray, where he claims a union boss also threatened to stab him.

**Manufacturing less work**

According to the *Herald Sun*, Victoria’s west and southeastern suburbs are becoming unemployment hotspots as manufacturing jobs losses continue. More than 10 per cent of people in Geelong are now unemployed, according to the latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In Warnambool and Victoria’s southwest unemployment rate hit 9.5 per cent last month after it had peaked at 9.9 per cent in May.

In Melbourne’s southeastern suburbs, which takes in the manufacturing centres of Dandenong, Hallam and Cranbourne, the unemployment rate is now a 8.3 per cent. It’s the highest unemployment level seen in the region, according to the ABS statistics dating back to October 1998. Victoria’s regional unemployment rate was 6.5 per cent over the three months to July, the lowest of the nominating states.

**Justice & police**

**Integrity**

According to Josh Gordon in *The Age*: "Revelations by *The Age* that a Victorian Labor Party figure is facing weapon charges and has received several thousand dollars in donations from people or companies connected with the Calabrian Mafia once again shine a light on the state’s deficient and limp integrity regime.

The allegations might also create a fresh headache for Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews, who is already under pressure over factional links to the building union, which has been dogged by claims of nefarious behaviour, and over the dictaphone scandal.

Under the current laws - which the Victorian government recently promised to strengthen after a couple of years of pressure - Victoria’s Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission is limited to investigating only the most serious indictable offences. It also faces a high threshold for inquiries, with legislation requiring it to possess prima facie evidence of serious corrupt conduct."

**Legal Aid and Victoria’s vulnerable young**

Vulnerable young people who have been in child protection or endured family violence are more likely than other people – according to an Age report – to clash with the law as adults, needing frequent Legal Aid assistance.
Research released in mid-August shows 35 per cent of Victoria’s Legal Aid’s top 100 clients received free legal help from the organisation for family violence and child protection issues as children.

**Scandal in the Force**

A senior legal figure with knowledge of the police informants scandal is poised to give evidence to Victoria’s anti-corruption watchdog. That evidence, if given to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, could expose serious mishandling of informers. The forces “human source” division was shut down after a review. This could shed light on a high risk strategy that has led to a review of up to 20 major cases and which had the potential to engage lives according to the Herald Sun.

**Top issue**

According to the Herald Sun, Chief Commissioner Ken Lay predicted crime rates will rise if politicians continue to just want to invest in more uniform officers and more police stations.

He revealed the outdated technology his officers have to use has left Victoria Police stuck in the last century. Giving the Lord Mayor’s Melbourne Day Oration, Mr Lay today challenged politicians on both sides to get behind his Blue Paper vision for the future of the force.

‘Our political masters can’t afford to just invest in a geographical uniform and police station response to crime, now or in the future,’ he said. ‘But a modern police organisation needs increased flexibility in how police resources are used to tackle the greatest drivers of harm in our changing community.’

**Williams first**

One of the state’s most experienced homicide detectives has agreed inducements sought by Carl Williams’s eligibility for a $1 million reward paid George Williams’s tax bill in return for $100,000 to the Penington Institute for annual research and assessment. The announcement was later amended, with the money to be allocated to two organisations that were not named.

**Ice plague**

An unprecedented analysis of waste water has revealed the extraordinary extent of the use of the drug ice in Victoria. According to the Herald Sun, testing at one Melbourne sewage treatment plant on just one day showed that one hit of methamphetamine had been consumed for every twenty people. Further damning details about the destructive grip of ice on Victoria are expected to be revealed in a report of a state parliamentary inquiry.

Victoria Police will get $4.5 million extra so all state highway patrol officers can test drivers for drugs, including ice; Experts found the highest traces of methamphetamine in sewage in the area taking in Melbourne’s west and CBD; and the Victorian Government will now roll out waste water drug testing statewide.

**DIY firement**

A vigilante firefighter league is uniting across rural Victoria as farmers declare they are fearful government authorities will do nothing to stop a blaze from wiping out their animals and land this summer. According to The Age, the state’s Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley has called for unity but the farmers have vowed to plough ahead with their plan after losing faith in the Country Fire Authority.

Rural land holders are spending up to $15,000 each to “armour up” with fire trucks, radios and protective clothing so they can form teams to beat the CFA and police to a threatening blaze before it gets out of control. Negotiations are underway with sponsors including insurance companies and equipment suppliers. One man behind the plan, Kevin Butler, said farmers appreciated the work of CFA volunteers, but he is fed up with systemic failures he blames largely on government red tape.

**Public the losers**

Two mid-level public servants who rigged tenders and inflated contracts for Victorian public transport projects in effect stole taxpayers’ money and damaged public confidence in the government, Victoria’s anti-corruption watchdog said. According to The Age, the alleged corrupt conduct also deprived the department of funds that should have been spent on transport infrastructure, Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission chief Stephen O’Bryan, QC, said.

Barry Wells, a project officer at Public Transport Victoria, and his former colleague in the Department of Transport, Albert Ooi, are being investigated by IBAC over allegations they awarded $25 million in contracts to businesses they controlled, and diverted about $3 million into personal accounts, from 2006 until late 2013.

**Proceeds of crime**

Police are seizing coins and cash from beggars in Melbourne’s CBD as proceeds of crime, according to reports from homeless people and welfare workers. According to a report in The Age, youth Projects say they have had up to $300,000 in the past year in police confiscations, or the ‘meagre proceeds’ of the homeless after they were charged with the offence of begging alms.
City worker Philip Staindl said a homeless man who begs near his office on Little Collins Street had $20 from his coffee cup taken. He said the man was told that he was breaking the law, could be taken to court, and that his morning’s takings were the ‘proceeds of crime’. ‘I was incredulous,’ Mr Staindl said.

Sexting laws
According to The Age, people who send or threaten to distribute explicit images without consent could soon be charged, with the Victorian government introducing Australia’s first ‘sexting’ offences into Parliament. The new laws, which will be introduced into Parliament, will ensure that young people who receive or send raunchy but non-exploitative sexts are spared from child pornography offences and being placed on the sex offenders register.

Child sex laws
According to the Herald Sun, victims of child abuse will find it easier to make a case against their abusers under a major reform of Victoria’s sex crime laws.

Official in Victoria
One of the senior British bureaucrats who failed to prevent the systematic rape and physical abuse of children in the English town of Rotherham has moved to Melbourne and been appointed a deputy secretary in Victoria’s Department of Education. According to The Age, an independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham this week detailed the ‘collective failures’ of political and officer leaders to prevent abuse of a conservatively estimated 1,400 children in 16 years.

Sonia Sharp, Deputy secretary of Victoria’s Early Childhood and School Education Group, was named in the report as the director of children’s services at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council between 2005 and 2008. Dr Sharp admitted she was partly responsible for the abuse, saying: “You can’t be a director of children’s services and not take responsibility for what happens to children.

Onus on pet shops
Victorians with animal cruelty convictions would be banned from running breeding businesses under new laws to be introduced to Parliament. According to the Herald Sun, the RSPCA will also get new powers to force pet shops to hand over detailed records of animal sales to prove they are not being supplied by dodgy operators.

Police increased powers: bikies
Police are about to use new laws to outlaw several gangs and individuals within them - and they aren’t all bikies. Detectives have spent more than a year building up evidence to be used against the gangs and gang members. Victoria Police assistant commissioner Steve Fontana yesterday confirmed the force was prepared to take legal action against targets as soon as amendments to the Criminal Organisations Control Act passed through Parliament.

Local government
Bums banned
Wyndham Council has voted to strip nudists of their right to bare all at a Werribee South beach.

Council roads
According to the Herald Sun, a council has been accused of giving a roads contractor exclusive access to contracts worth $400,000 a year without seeking other quotes. According to complaints to the Ombudsman, Hobsons Bay Council gave special treatment to a contractor who supplied speed humps and other minor road improvements. It was also accused of ‘awarding contracts exclusively to the company’ employing a salesman with close links to a council officer, raising concerns that ratepayers were not getting value for money. The Ombudsman referred the complaints to council as they lay outside its jurisdiction.

Palais Theatre
Port Phillip Council wants Victorian taxpayers to pay $15 million to save St Kilda’s Palais theatre from ‘imminent risk of closure’. Scaffolding is being erected around the venue and will remain there indefinitely.

Rates grab
According to the Herald Sun, Victorian councils want to retain control over their budgets and rates, rejecting a Labor plan to cap rates. Municipal Association of Victoria President Cr Bill McArthur said whichever party wins in November state election needs to respect councils’ financial autonomy.

Mafia claims
According to the Herald Sun, a Melbourne councilor has described a report he is connected to the Calabrian mafia as ‘laughable’ and says he is considering legal options. Michael Teti, who has been a councillor at Moreland since 2008 and is also a senior Labor figure, has broken his silence over weapons offences and political donations.

Good job
Moreland City Council is looking for a Chief Executive Officer. Contact Jarrod McLaughlan, 03 8622 8524.

Melbourne

Library fight
Melbourne lord mayor Robert Doyle has vowed to fight ‘all the way to the minister’ against plans for a skyscraper that would overshadow the State Library forecourt. His council recently became aware that a 77-storey tower proposed for the former Carlton and United Breweries site would result in the popular public plaza being in shadow for hours during winter. But their battle is unlikely to be straightforward, because of a tricky discrepancy in Melbourne’s planning scheme.

According to The Age, Clause 22.02 dictates that developments should cast no additional shadows on the State Library forecourt between 11am and 2pm on June 22. However, in 2007 the Carlton Brewery Comprehensive Development Plan was incorporated into the planning scheme by then planning minister Justin Madden. It set the preferred height limit of a tower at 156-172 Victoria Street at 302 metres. A skyscraper of this height would easily overshadow the library forecourt, creating a significant conflict in the planning scheme.

City of Literature
The new Library at the Dock in the Docklands is a fitting venue to photograph the newly appointed, inaugural director of the Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature office. According to The Age, as the inaugural director of the office, among his duties will be to work with local and international partners to help ensure Victoria is well represented at the Wheeler Centre, David Ryding is keen to preserve and expand upon our reputation as a world leader in reading and writing.

Wheel fight
The Japanese company behind Melbourne’s biggest white elephant, the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel, is suing the company that reconstructed it for more than $6 million. According to the Herald Sun, in August the wheel came under fire by Docklands residents because of noisy maintenance work being carried out in the early hours of the morning.

Flat tax
According to the Herald Sun, city apartments could be hit with a $900 tax under a new city council plan. Councillors voted unanimously to ask Planning Minister Matthew Guy to introduce the $900 per apartment developer levy. If approved, it would affect all new apartments from September 1 built in the Hoddle grid.

Getting their ideas
According to a report in the Herald Sun, several Melbourne City Councillors have taken or applied for overseas trips this year. The latest proposal is for Greens councillor Kathy Oke to fly to the Netherlands for a four day cycling tour that will cost more than $6000. ‘The tour will provide a first hand look at Dutch bicycling culture, safety initiatives … that have resulted in some of the highest participation rates in active travel and some of the lowest road trauma rates for cycling and pedestrians globally’.

Melbourne magazine
A twenty page issue, featuring Spring Fashion week, Arts House creative boundaries and housing for the growing city.

Planning
Getting the nod
Victoria’s planning minister has signed off on $320 million worth of development around Melbourne’s CBD, including apartments and office towers. Among the three projects is the $888 million new development proposed for the former Carlton and United Breweries site.

Renting the norm
According to a report in The Age, more than one million people now live in private rental housing in Victoria. The report, from the Tenants Union, finds the persistent perception of tenants as a lone person or a student living in share housing as ‘increasingly misguided’. Instead, the research shows renting for a decade or more has become the norm for a generation of families and middle-aged people.

It is in stark contrast to 1981, when single people living by themselves made up almost half of Victoria’s renters. Families at that time represented only a quarter of all rentals.

Stagnating Homes
In The Age, the 1950s suburban ideal of a large dwelling quarter-acre block does not only become financially and environmentally unsustainable, but that it is fundamentally
blocking the development of a range of options we require. Professor Shane Murray is the Dean of Art Design and Architecture at Monash University, a department that is be running a project called Space of Ageing, dedicated to rethinking housing and neighbourhoods.

Developer ban
Donations by developers should not be banned in Victoria, Planning Minister Matthew Guy says, arguing that following the NSW lead in banning them would ‘criminalise one part of the business community’. But an expert in political donation law and athrop said Victoria needed to stop developers handing money to parties in a bid to affect the planning process, according to a report in The Age.

Apartment boom
Melbourne’s apartment building boom is delivering poor outcomes for the city, with a third of new units badly designed and almost half too small, a forum on city planning will hear.

Evolve development
According to the Herald Sun, Evolve Development, co-owned by businessman Ron Walker, wants to build up to 800 apartments and townhouses for its $200 million Nelson Place Village project. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal has allowed Evolve to demolish Nugget Factory on the historic Port Phillip Woollen Mills site.

West Gippsland
Baw Baw Shire in West Gippsland is also one of the fastest-growing areas of country Victoria, and is experiencing a housing and a baby boom. Now, after years of planning, the local council has locked in a plan to manage its growth over the next 50 years. If approved by Planning Minister Matthew Guy, the road map for growth expands town boundaries in the shire by a massive 2500 hectares, with most of the increase in Warragul and Drouin, the shire’s two biggest towns.

More new housing estates, which have emerged rapidly in recent years around Warragul and Drouin, will be established to accommodate that growth. The council estimates the enlarged urban boundaries will accommodate at least 22,000 new homes built over coming decades. The shire’s population is expected to surge from about 45,000 today to more than 74,500 by 2036.

Hands up
Persons who suffered damage as a result of the Kilmore bushfire, which commenced on Black Saturday, 7 February 2000, should take notice of a proposed settlement of the class action in the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Tower inferno
According to the Herald Sun, Lord Mayor Robert Doyle has taken a swing against the Victorian Government’s skyscraper policy, saying the high-rise inner-city apartment boom would peter out within a few years. Cr Doyle also said the towers going up in town weren’t ‘iconic’ — a gibe at Planning Minister Matthew Guy, who uses the term when describing some projects.

Guy has approved close to 100 central city towers, including eight more than 200m tall, under a policy to take population pressure off quieter suburbs. But Cr Doyle said the city couldn’t afford to keep building skyscrapers. ‘And they’re not iconic towers by the way, they’re just towers,’ he said. But Mr Guy hit back, saying he had heard doomsday predictions about the residential market for years.

New suburb
According to the Herald Sun, Harpley in Wyndham Vale will eventually have 4000 homes for 12,000 new residents. Planning Minister Matthew Guy said the $1 billion 435ha development, Lend Lease was guided by the Black Forest Rd South Precinct Plan. Local MP Bernie Finn said the planned community would provide three schools, a community centre, sports and recreation facilities and more than 60ha of waterways.

No bust
According to the Financial Review, a new Labor government in Victoria would retain the 25,000-square-metre size threshold above which proposed developments bypass the City of Melbourne and go straight to the state government for approval.

Striking a chord
Developers building apartments around Melbourne’s live music venues will be obligated to soundproof under new rules announced by the Victorian government.

Rooftop gardens
According to The Age, Colliers International’s Matthew Stagg said rooftop gardens were becoming more popular as the city’s apartment market matured. “Traditionally, apartments in Melbourne have been catered towards singles and couples,” he said. ‘Buyers and tenants are now looking for additional amenities that are available exclusively to residents, particularly Asian buyers and an increasing number of families with children seeking larger apartments and amenities.”

Melbourne is catching up with the latest international trend popular in New York, Singapore and Shanghai. Gail Hall, project co-ordinator of urban landscapes at the City of Melbourne, and co-author of the Growing Green Guide, has seen an increase of green developments over the past year. She said inner-city councils encouraged the uptake of green roofs as it helped make the city more resilient to the negative impact of increased density and loss of greenery as population increased.

Not only the inner city is recognising the need for more green space. Earlier this year Stonnington Council indicated it would consider creating more parks in its suburbs, which have only 6.7 per cent as public open space. The council is also looking at creating “pocket parks” in dead-end streets and roof gardens. As well as improving aesthetics and creating open space, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects Victorian premier Jon Shinkleff said rooftop gardens should also be functional.

Super square
A new landmark site connecting Melbourne’s sporting and cultural icons will be built next to Federation Square with the Victorian Government set to give the prime land open to market. Global developers will be invited to submit expressions of interest to build the long-mooted Federation Square East, which would include a deck over the Yololmal rail lines and new public space on the Yarra’s edge. Commercial components — including shops, bars and even accommodation — would be allowed to help pay for what is likely to be a multi-billion dollar project. Premier Denis Napthine said the project was a “unique opportunity to develop a fantastic precinct in the heart of the world’s most livable city”.

Chaddy
Chadstone shopping centre will undergo a $580 million expansion, which will include 40 new retailers, a 10-storey office building and even a hotel. According to the Herald Sun, at least 2700 jobs will be created during construction alone. On top of retail, office and accommodation, the expansion plans includes 800 more car park spots and new transport links.

Tower plan
According to the Herald Sun, Heritage Victoria recently said it permit to demolish part of the 125 year old Melbourne railway shed for a $250 million office tower. Lorenz Grollo’s construction firm wanted to demolish seven bays of the Collins St shed to make way for the 34 storey tower.

Fishermans Bend
According to the Herald Sun, more than 2800 new apartments will be built in Fishermans Bend following approval of five planning permits.

Epping Market
Minister for Major Projects David Hodgetts recently said contracts had been finalised to build around 72,000 square metres of warehousing at Melbourne’s new state of the art fruit, vegetable and flower wholesale market in Epping. ‘It is anticipated that over 200 jobs will be created during the construction of warehousing, leading to significant expenditure in and around Epping,’ Mr Hodgetts said. ‘Hansen Yuncken, a Victorian based builder/developer, will collaborate with Propertylink Australian Industrial Partnership, the Australian property venture between Goldman Sachs (USA) and the Grosvenor Group (UK).

Sport
F1 deal
According to the Herald Sun, the man who brought the Formula 1 GP to Melbourne has praised its five year extension. Former premier Jeff Kennett said the reputation and economic benefits of the race were massive. ‘This is a very good deal for us (Victoria) financially’. His comments came as the Australian Grand Prix night race was ruled out in a new contract that keeps Formula 1 at Albert Park until at least 2020.

Year of the fan
Collingwood president Eddie McGuire has called for 2015 to be the ‘year of the fan’ following the issues the AFL has had with crowds in Victoria. ‘Dedicate next year to the supporters.’

Junction Oval
According to The Age, the AFL has pledged $10 million to secure the return of St Kilda to its heartland. In a complex multi-sport agreement backed by the Victorian government and masterminded by AFL chief Gillon McLachlan
the Saints would train permanently at a redeveloped ground opposite the Junction Oval in Fitzroy Street. Essendon Shield cricket would move from the MCG to the Junction Oval.

**ALP on the field**

According to *The Australian*, the Gillard government wanted Essendon stripped of premiership points and club employees sacked amid growing concern they ‘over-egged’ the release of an Australian Crime Commission report into drugs in sport on the so-called ‘black book’ in Australian sport. Revealing the level of political involvement in the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority and AFL’s joint investigation of Essendon, former ASADA chief executive Aurora Andruska recounted to the Federal Court former sports Minister Kate Lundy’s determination to strike a deal to punish Essendon.

**Renovation funding renewed**

Sports clubs will be able to trade volunteer work for state finance and cut red tape to fast-track repairs and renovations of their facilities under a new community funding system for Victoria. According to the *Herald Sun*, the Victorian government will today announce the plan, paving the way for football, cricket, netball, soccer and tennis club to fund lights, change rooms or playing surfaces in a public-private partnership.

Clubs will be encouraged to recruit qualified tradesmen to carry out work for free or at cost price, fundraise and source donated or discounted materials. They will then be able to apply for state government grants to match ‘in kind’ labour and material costs and their own redevelopment kitty dollar for dollar up to $50,000.

**Let the games begin**

Melbourne should bid to host the Olympic games once more, business, sport, tourism and political leaders say. Premier Denis Napthine has vowed to investigate pitching to bring the games back to Melbourne, which hosted the games in 1956. Committee for Melbourne Chief Kate Roffey says we should not stop there. She said in the *Herald Sun* that the city should campaign to host a major new golf tournament, NBA basketball matches, and major league baseball games.

**Big V**

As of two weeks ago…Victoria had staked its claim on premiership glory with five of the state’s teams clinching spots in the eight.

**Transport – ports**

**Giant pier**

According to *The Age*, Labor is considering building a giant, hook-shaped pier stretching about eight kilometres into the sea as a way to make good on its proposal to build a new container port in the west of Port Phillip Bay near Geelong. The new port would be built at one of three possible spots west of Melbourne in a shallow part of the bay between Werribee and Geelong.

**Roads shock**

According to the *Herald Sun*, Melbourne’s busiest arterial roads, the Monash Freeway and Ring Road, could grind to a halt should the Port of Hastings become a second container port. An extra 40,000 trucks a day would hit the roads, according to two independent reports on the impact on traffic of the new port.

**Train crash**

Investigations are under way to determine the cause of a crash of two trains at Altona. According to *The Age*, the V/Line and Metro trains were separated. The Metro train had been travelling east towards the city but was stopped, unexpectedly, at the Maidstone Street level crossing near Ajax Road in Altona. About 7pm, a second train, travelling from Geelong, rear-ended the suburban train at low speed. It is understood that debris on the track may have caused the Metro train to stop, according to a source.

**Rail link**

The Victorian government has committed to pledge the proceeds from the $6 billion Port of Melbourne sale to the $1 billion Melbourne Rail Link Project, according to the *Financial Review*.

**Charity bins**

More than 100 charity bins have been removed from Melbourne’s railway stations and replaced by bins from a private for-profit recycling company. According to *The Age*, Southern Cross Recycling, which Metro hired to exclusively manage charity recycling bins on railway lines, now owns and manages all 220 bins at stations for its own income. Michael Rawlinson, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria’s retail operations manager, said it was ‘disguising’ that Metro allowed commercialisation to replace charity. St Vincent de Paul had about 20 bins at railway stations five years ago, he said, but was asked to remove them all.

**Good jobs**

The Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure has several good jobs at director level. Careers.vic.gov.au

**Transport – rail**

**Bendigo trams**

According to *The Age*, more than 40 years after commuter trams stopped running in Bendigo - a move that saw about 10 kilometres of tram lines covered in bitumen co-rigged up - a $120,000 study will examine whether they could return to the goldfields city. Consultants will investigate whether Bendigo’s 4.1-kilometre tourist tramway could serve tourists and local commuters in the same way that cable cars and other trams do in cities such as San Francisco and New Orleans.

**Fare evaders**

According to the *Herald Sun*, ticket dodgers caught from August 10 will have the chance to pay a $75 fine immediately by using their credit card, rather than the full $212. ‘The introduction of on-the-spot penalty fares will speed up the enforcement process and allow authorised officers to check more tickets and catch more fare evaders’.

**Network links poor**

Services on Victoria’s public transport network are poorly co-ordinated and little is being done to improve the situation, a scathing auditor-general’s report has found. According to a report in the *Herald Sun*, about 45 per cent of weekday Melbourne bus services don’t connect to train services, the Auditor General, John Doyle, found. Of those that do, almost half have to wait for more than ten minutes for the connection. ‘Public transport services are poorly co-ordinated,’ Mr Doyle said. ‘Progress on improving public transport co-ordination has been slow.’
According to *The Age*, it will rely instead on an act from 2009 modified last year to streamline the procurement process. But Michael Crommelin, the Zelman Cowen Professor of Law at Melbourne University’s Law school, said it would be highly unusual for a project of its scope to be launched without specific laws supporting it. According to the *Herald Sun*, protests have cost 36,000 police hours and a $1.6 million overtime bill.

**East West musings**

In *The Age*, Kenneth Davidson wrote: ‘Victoria’s major political parties are so confident the East West Link project is stitched up, there’s no longer even a pretence that proper process has been followed. Instead, the Coalition government is following the dodgy precedent set by the previous Labor government’s Wonthaggi desalination plant evaluation – eyes wide shut, no public business case, no cost/benefit analysis, no independent environmental impact statement, no mandate from the electorate, and no legitimate reason offered as to why the public-private partnership contract to build the road couldn’t be delayed until after the November state election.

It’s a case of full speed ahead. Any bodgie argument will do. The Labor opposition is as committed to the project as the government, but it pretends to oppose it because it realises that if it openly supports the link, it stands a good chance of losing up to three inner-Melbourne seats directly affected by the road to the Greens. Labor has adopted the position that if it wins the election, it won’t cancel the link if the contract is signed by the Coalition government before the election.

Labor’s Treasury spokesman, Tim Pallas, originally said Labor in government would not cancel the contract because to do so would involve “sovereign risk”. When it was pointed out that this was incorrect, Pallas claimed a government could not break a signed contract because it would lead to heavy financial losses if the state lost its triple-A credit rating as a result.

**A definition**

The East West Link, Stage 1 is a cross-city road connection extending across Melbourne from the Eastern Freeway to the Tullamarine Freeway.

Planning and procurement is underway for the first stage of the East West Link, a six kilometre section connecting the Eastern Freeway with CityLink.

Stage 2, Westlink, moves on to connect Stage 1 to the Western Ring Road. BOTH/ALL political parties agree with this section.

**But wait**

The Leader of the Opposition has come out against the Link and has clearly said that his government would stop any contract(s) that might have been committed before the election. A Morgan Poll has said this has sent Labor’s approval figures down quite a few points.

**Hello Epping**

A group of business and property heavyweights in Melbourne’s north is pleading for government action to fix the area’s growing traffic crush, issuing a warning to the major parties that congestion has become so bad it is hurting the local economy. According to *The Age*, the group, which includes some of the state’s biggest property developers, has written to Premier Denis Napthine and Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews to warn them the opening next year of the vast wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Epping threatens to unleash gridlock if local roads are not boosted.

The market’s relocation from West Melbourne will bring it with an average 8000 vehicles a day, 3000 of them trucks, the group predicts.

“The will crip traffic flow and has the potential to seriously impact on the economic viability of the area,” chief operating officer of property developer MAB, David Hall, wrote to the two leaders, on behalf of five large investors in Melbourne’s north.

**Anger on the buses**

Changes to Melbourne’s bus network have lately left commuters annoyed amid claims – noted by the *Herald Sun* – that transport users weren’t adequately consulted about discontinued or changed routes. The services changes, coming into force three months before November’s state election, have also vexed several parliamentarians in Melbourne’s east, who have been inundated with complaints. In June, the state government announced a major overhaul of train, tram, and bus services.

The overhaul included 3,260 extra bus services, 470 new tram services, and more than 200 train services per week. But commuters say that bus operators failed to communicate the changes to those who most needed to be informed of them.

Result: many passengers stranded at bus stops, particularly in the Manningham area. Public Transport Victoria is now trying to organise a series of public forums in the city’s eastern suburbs, to inform commuters about the new changes.

Updated timetables with the altered services were put into place during July.

**Q/C you in court**

If you live in Melbourne and have incurred a parking fine, then disputing it in court could prove costlier than you ever supposed. Municipal governments wanting to collect the relevant revenue are more and more likely to have their interests represented in court by Queen’s Counsel and Senior Counsel.

Some of the invoices concerned amount to more than $21,000 each. Councillor Richard Foster, in central Melbourne, likened the act of ‘unleashing’ QCs on the public to using a sledgehammer to crack an egg.

He went on: ‘I think it’s in our interests to have a more sympathetic approach rather than unleashing QCs on people.’ Outgoing Melbourne City chief executive Kathy Alexander told the *Herald Sun* that the council was routinely represented in court to prosecute parking infringements where drivers elected to have the matter heard in front of a magistrate.

‘We acknowledge this has been an expensive process,’ she said, ‘but it has been a necessary one to ensure that the court understands the evidence.’

**Parking push**

The Melbourne Zoo wants large parts of Royal Park dug up to create 1000 more parking bays, and indicated it wanted the plan included as part of the East West Link bidding process. According to *The Age*, the zoo has also started a long-term study of six species - elephants, giraffes, tigers, mandrills, cassowaries and pygmy hippopotamuses - to monitor what, if any, effects construction of the road has on them.

The information is contained in a freedom-of-information request released to a campaigner concerned about the impact of the East West Link on the zoo. The East West Link is a new $14-$18 billion freeway planned to link the Eastern Freeway in Clifton Hill to CityLink in Flemington. The road would pass near the zoo.

**Private land**

At least eight kilometres of new streets and roads will slice through numerous private land holdings under the Fishermans Bend ‘strategic framework’ adopted as planning law. According to *The Age*, the bulk of the new road network will divide dozens of privately owned industrial allotments north and south of Plummer and Fennell streets, plans for the 250-hectare urban renewal zone just south of Melbourne’s CBD show. Most of the new streets will be 22 metres wide with dedicated bike lanes but the extension of Woolboard Road will span 30 metres and potentially include tram tracks. Properties occupied by the Port Melbourne Industrial Estate, National Tiles and Australian Container Freight Services will be bisected by a new 22 metre wide road.

Other holdings with multiple small to medium sized businesses in several blocks between Gittus and Johnson streets also occupy land earmarked in the strategic plan for a new street.

**New clearways**

Motorists who park in peak-hour clearways will run a bigger risk of having their vehicle impounded, as a result of a $1.1 million funding boost to VicRoads. According to *The Age*, more than 10,600 vehicles were towed from peak-hour clearways within a 10-kilometre ring of Melbourne’s CBD in 2013-14. And VicRoads warns drivers the number will climb in the next 12 months, after the Victorian government increased funding for clearway patrols from $1.4 million to $2.5 million in 2014-15.

Some of inner Melbourne’s busiest roads were blitzed by tow trucks last month, ending a more permissive phase in VicRoads’ policing of the problem. Sydney Road in Melbourne’s north, for example, had 95 vehicles towed in July, up from just nine in June, and 64 for the first six months of the year. The High Street that goes through Malvern and Armadale in Melbourne’s south-east, where illegal parking in clearways is prolific, had 126 vehicles towed in July, up from 32 in June.

**Cycle lane**

According to the *Herald Sun*, it cost $13,000, only 30m long and runs against traffic, but Bayside Council says its new bike lane is a success. But local traders are less enthusiastic about the European-style bike lane in Hampton. The Thomas St ‘contraflow’ track is the first in Bayside, with concerns it could confuse riders or road users. Bayside infrastructure director Steven White said the contraflow lanes allowed cyclists to travel in both directions on one-way streets.

**St Kilda Rd**

The Victorian Government will consider a $12 million plan to have separated bike lanes down

1 July to 8 August, 2014  
Letter from Melbourne
the entire length of St Kilda Rd. According to the 
**Herald Sun**, two vehicle lanes would be lost for most of the day, but the City of Port Phillip said traffic capacity would not be affected and the project would boost safety and have big health –benefits. Under the plan, a 2m-wide Copenhagen-style bike lane would be built in the lost of the separate roads in the space currently used for –parking. Parking would be moved to one of the vehicle lanes on each side, but the lanes would become available for traffic during peak times.

**Room to improve?**
More than 90 per cent of Victorians believe that local councils should improve their performance, says a key State Government survey. According to the **Herald Sun**, the list of concerns was maintenance of unsealed roads, planning permit bureaucracy and management of population growth.

**Oversized trucks**
All traffic will be blocked from entering CityLink tunnels if over-height trucks are approaching, under a new electronic detection system. According to the **Herald Sun**, the system is in response to the millions of dollars in damage and congestion costs that occur each year when trucks higher than 4.65 metres smash into tunnels. Under the new system, to operate from August 5, if an over-height truck approaches a tunnel then speed limits on electronic signs will be lowered, red traffic lights activated, and a boom gate brought down to ‘effectively close the tunnel for all drivers’, CityLink’s Road Operations Manager Peter Doran said.

**Registrations**
Outdated technology at VicRoads stops millions of drivers paying soaring car registration bills in instalments. According to the **Herald Sun**, the 26-year-old vehicle registration identification system can recognise codes for concession card holders and truck drivers but not codes that would allow for part-payment of the annual fee, which from July rose to a record $757.70. The antiquated system has also caused other problems.

**Licence glut**
Hundreds have rushed to lease one of the Victorian government’s new cut-price taxi licences since they were released on July 1, prompting a warning from industry that Melbourne’s streets could be swamped with empty cabs prowling for fares. According to the **Herald Sun**, which was unable to obtain crucial data for the report, the product of 12 months of extensive research, stakeholder consultation and member engagement across the state about transport needs in metropolitan Victoria, the report presents the road and public transport improvements needed to strengthen the links.

**Speed Camera ads a ‘flop’**
Speed camera commissioner Gordon Lewis has been shocked to discover almost 70 per cent of motorcyclists nabbed by speed cameras escape being fined. According to the **Herald Sun**, they get away with it because motorcycles don’t have frontal identification and many motorcycle rear number plates are too small to be legible to speed cameras. This lack of identification resulted in police having to let off 55,465 speeding motorcyclists in the past five years because they couldn’t use number plates to track them down.

Mr Lewis has made the frontal identification for motorcyclists, more point-to-point cameras and free traffic camera photograph recommendations previously and the Victorian Government said it is still considering what action to take on them.

**Bike share**
The maligned Melbourne Bike Share scheme will limp on unchanged for another year after the Victorian government quietly dropped plans to sell it to a private operator who could invigorate and expand the system.

**Hoon blitz**
A crackdown on hoons has been exposed as a sham with courts bungling cases and failing to send the worst drivers to a reform program. Internal documents reveal at least 417 dangerous drivers avoided the Victorian government’s much-hyped hoon school between May and November 2013, despite coping court convictions. According to the **Herald Sun**, explosive emails also reveal resourcing problems.

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**RACV thoughts**
In the September issue of **Royal Auto**, Ross Herron, President and Chairman of the Board wrote: ‘RACV has more than 2 million members across the state, with almost a third in regional Victoria. This month (saw) the launch of RACV’s Growing Pains in Regional Victoria report, the product of 12 months of extensive research, stakeholder consultation and member engagement across the state about transport needs in metropolitan Victoria. The report presents the road and public transport improvements needed to strengthen the links.

**Green dream...**
The RACV motoring group says that political parties vying for power in November’s state election must commit themselves to building the ‘missing link’ between the Metropolitan Ring Road and the Eastern Freeway, if they want the RACV to support them. An Age report revealed that lately the RACV had released a state election report card, judging the Coalition, Labor, and the Greens for their respective stances on more than 30 transport projects.

Specifically the RACV wants the parties to ‘announce the route and timing for the Metropolitan Ring Road completion from Greensborough to the Eastern Freeway and EastLink.’ The link’s cost has been estimated at $6 billion, and at present, neither the government nor the ALP opposition is championing it.

**The Knowledge: not yet of benefit to Victorians**

Every would-be cabbie in Victoria who has sat the tough new driving knowledge test has been The Age recently announced – failed. Government figures show that a large majority of taxi drivers (4,250 out of 16,000) have been in their job for fewer than five years. Denis Naphine’s government instituted the test in June, hoping thereby to weed out the state’s worst cab drivers, including ‘those who don’t know their way around Melbourne, give poor service and have bad attitudes.’

Graeme Samuel, Taxi Services Commission chairman, was quoted as saying that early results showed applicants were consistently failing the driver behaviour module.

He said also that the test was ‘not a huge departure from the Certificate II training drivers previously had to complete to gain accreditation, which confirmed the commission’s belief that training schools were waving applicants through without testing them. “The Certificate II was being administered by the major companies and for were absolutely satisfied that they weren’t doing it properly, that they were passing people without proper training and without proper assessment”, he said.’

**Utilities**

**Ombudsman’s view**
Victoria’s recently abolished water agency deliberately flouted procurement rules and backdated documents to award contracts worth millions to consultants in a manner that implied a ‘jobs for mates’ culture, the Ombudsman has found. According to The Age, in a major setback for Water Minister Peter Walsh, Ombudsman Deborah Glass has found The Agency he created, the Office of Living Victoria, to be rife with undeclared perceived conflicts of interest and having lacked respect for ‘public sector values and accountability for its use of funds’.

**Society**

**Such a place**
Victoria is proving the place to be for international tourists with visitors to the garden state up 10 per cent - the highest in Australia. According to the **Herald Sun**, almost two million tourists visited Victoria over the past year as a third of all overseas visitors Down Under including Victoria on their travel itinerary.

**Increased Herald Sun Readership**

Official figures from emma - the industry’s contemporary readership survey - showed that print readership across the **Herald Sun** and the **Sunday Herald Sun** rose in the year to June 30. Monday-to-Friday readership rose by 6000 to 1,452,000. Saturday readership shot up 12,000 to 1,205,000 while Sunday **Herald Sun** readership increased by 26,000 to 1,156,000.

The monthly print and digital monthly audience in June 2014 was 4,323,000 up 139,000 since March. **Herald Sun** editor Damon Johnston thanked Victorians for the support of the **Herald Sun**’s print and digital journalism.

**Creepy Crawlies**

Experts believe that so many Australian insect species yet to be identified that the average suburban garden, even in major cities like Melbourne or Sydney, is home to tiny, six-legged creatures never before described by science. According to the **Herald Sun**, Australian Museum entomologist Dr Dave Britton said
it was an example of the hidden diversity of invertebrates creeping, crawling and buzzing across almost every part of the planet.

**Chapel Street Ghost town**

The strip once lauded as Melbourne’s premiere shopping area has hit struggle street. Chapel Street, South Yarra, has at least 22 stores with ‘For lease’ signs between Toorak and Commercial Roads. According to *The Age*, retail sources say dwindling foot traffic - Down at least 30 per cent over the past six months - and rents of up to $200,000 a year have lead to an unprecedented number of ghost stores along the strip.

Retailers are also being stretched with the revamped Chadstone and the new Emporium precinct in the city, which officially opened on August 20. Luxury bag brand Oroton is the latest high-profile retailer, following Australian fashion designer Wayne Cooper, to vacate Chapel Street, closing its doors a fortnight ago.

**Pell editorial musings**

In *The Age* regarding Cardinal George Pell, ‘His performance throughout the slow and painful emergence of evidence during the past few decades of rape and other abuse of children by Catholic priests on occasions has been disgraceful. Up until it was announced in November 2012, then-Archbishop Pell had argued that the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse was not needed. His latest failure to show leadership, let alone empathy or compassion, came last Thursday when he appeared before that commission.

He asserted that by setting up its internal investigations, compensation and counselling unit, known as the Melbourne Response, in 1996 when he was archbishop of Melbourne, his church had been “ahead of the curve”. While the Melbourne Response was indeed an improvement on the church’s earlier failure to do other than try to conceal the crimes, it was shown by the experience of victims to be far from adequate.’

**Too many**

According to a report in the *Herald Sun*, more than 100 Victorians in one year died at home, and were undiscovered for more than a week. For the first time, the Victorian Coroner has released data on closed cases where a body was not found for a period of time. The data, which excludes suicides and homicides, showed it took more than one week to discover 104 people over *The Age* of 50 who died in 2011.

**And they called them puppy farms …**

Online sites such as Gumtree and Trading Post are carrying increasing numbers of advertisements for factory-farmed puppies. As a consequence, animal welfare groups have renewed their calls for a crackdown by the state government upon puppy farms, where dogs are often kept in sub-standard cages as they produce litter after litter.

The Victorian ALP, for its part, has urged both Gumtree and Trading Post to stop carrying ads for such sales, these ads being a key feature of the whole supply chain. Particularly outspoken on the topic has been Jaala Pulford, who holds Western Victoria for Labor in the Legislative Council.

In a related report from *The Age*, the ALP has increased its calls to ensure that cosmetics manufactured in Victoria and in the rest of Australia are made without any animal testing. But at the moment, its representatives admit that Australian regulations are ‘a big factor standing in the way of any possible ban.’ Currently cosmetics and their ingredients are treated as industrial chemicals in Australia.

As a result, animal test data are sometimes needed by the regulator, the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme, NICNAS.

**Pet abuse and human violence: link suspected**

The *Herald Sun* reported in mid-August that 300,000 pets are abused in their homes in Australia each year, but that this abuse leads to only 300 convictions, ‘because of a lack of scientific tools to diagnose animal abuse.’ Dr Lydia Tong of the University of Sydney has released a study which found five key features of fractures vets could look for, to distinguish confidently between accidents and deliberate maltreatment. ‘It’s what doctors have been doing for decades with child abuse,’ Dr Tong said.

In a blind analysis, Dr Tong examined the X-rays of 235 dogs, of which 20 had definitive injuries from abuse. The study was published in *The Veterinary Journal*. Domestic Violence Victoria’s chief, Fiona McCormack, welcomed the findings, saying that threats of harm towards animals often stopped women from leaving dangerous situations.

**Library gets world’s best billing**

Which is the International Public Library of the Year? It’s not in London, Amsterdam, or Copenhagen. No, it has been officially judged to be Craigieburn Library in Melbourne, which received the world-wide award for 2014 sponsored by Denmark’s Agency for Culture.

**Good job**

Lort Smith animal hospital is looking for a Chief Executive Officer. E-mail Spencer Stuart at melb@spencerstuart.com.

**Vale**


Job, George Macarthur (Mac) OAM Dr John McLaren Emmerson QC.

Sr Mary Farrell RSM. Fewster, Loris Vivienne Phil Franet. Lindsay Freemantle.


Lloyd Summerlad, 95. Newspaperman.

Rosalie Trower OAM. Theodore Van Kirk, 93. Crew member on the Enola Gay B-29 Superfortress that dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

Alexander Venables.

Lt Col John Willson, 93. Clement Hardingham passed away (ex 39th Btn). Actor, producer and director Sir Richard Attenborough passed away recently, aged 90.

Vale Peter Sculthorpe Acclaimed Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe, age 85, admired for pieces like his 1960s series Irkanda - “scrub country” - and later work such as Rites of Passage (1972-73), Kakadu (1988) and Memento Mori (1993).

Spire-building Cardinal The man who completed Sydney’s St Mary’s Cathedral by having it Spirals built and elected to thousand, died yesterday aged 90 after 65 years service as a Catholic priest. Cardinal Clancy lead the archdioceses of Sydney as Archbishop under Pope John Paul II from 1983 to 2001.
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