Letter from Melbourne

That’s twenty years, ten editions per year.
A monthly public since September 1994
The BumpityBump Edition

22 December to Australia Day, 2015, plus a bit.

Inside
A difficult Legislative Council, similar to Canberra ♦ Clever Schools
Religion in Schools ♦ No cash for containers ♦ Cattle off again
Chief Commissioner retires ♦ Windsor Hotel next chapter
Alistair's early career was mostly in the coal industry, but he became aware of the workings of Washington D.C. and had many opportunities to become aware of the workings of Washington D.C. 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.

For 30 years, he listened every Sunday evening to the late Alistair Cooke and became aware of the workings of Washington D.C. 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.

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.

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Editorial

BumpityBump government

The New Victorian Government will have similar difficulties as the Government in Canberra, as it works to progress its legislation and budgets through the Parliament over the first and subsequent years. Nearby, we are still to get to know the detail of how the (former) Victorian government’s major project The East West Link will be settled.

The Editor was brought up to respect the role of unions in our Society, if not the extremes to which some unions and some of their leaders might go. With such a clear involvement of several unions in the last state campaign and the relationship of the Premier and some of his senior team with unions, discussions over the next year will allow many voters and others to understand more clearly the role of the union movement in the Australian Labor Party.

In the Queensland Election result, we can see what distain or lack of care so many Australians have for politicians. Politicians are humans and politics has always had its way of doing things, but now with the media and SociaMedia, so many cannot take a long-term view on the important issues for Australia’s future.

All of this give so much more power to another arm of Government, the Public Service.

May they be good.

Front cover: cyclists at Barwon Heads

Cadel Evans is the first Australian to have won the Tour de France. He lives in Barwon Heads. As a part of his retirement from 'serious' cycling, the Geelong and Barwon Heads community and others have brought together the First Cadel Evans Graet Ocean Road Cycling Race.

Four helicopters overhead and many too many policemen as two days of cycling starred and then wound its way around Geelong and Barwon Heads and Torquay. Evans, and serious cyclist Australia’s prime minister were in the action. The Cover photo has one large group coming through Barwon Heads. Inspiring. Hard work. Good Luck.

As one might drive into Geelong through Norlane (named after northern Geelong WW2 soldier survivor Norman Lane), one can see the Oppie’s Lounge sign outside the Norlane Hotel, just before Ford Motor Car complex. Hubert Opperman a federal member of parliament for Corio, and a federal minister back in the 1960’s. And a successful cyclist on the international circuit!

State government & politics

We Want Bruce

It was the first act of the new upper house and it was a quick reminder to the Labor Government that the Legislative Council will not be a rubber stamp. According to The Age, the new Government lost the first vote in the upper house, after its candidate for president of the Legislative Council, Gayle Tierney, was defeated 21 votes to 17. The five Green MPs and the Seat’s Party Fiona Patten voted for the Coalition’s candidate, Bruce Atkinson. Mr Atkinson was president in the last parliament, and is well respected, with a reputation for independence and fairness.

State of the State

State Labor may have won the election with a majority of seats in the lower house, but it comprehensively lost the battle for the upper house. To pass legislation, the new government will need to wrangle at least seven extra votes from a group so diverse that it might resemble the bar scene from Star Wars, according to analysis in The Age by Josh Gordon. Results for eight upper house regions show that Labor will control 14 out of 40 Legislative Council seats.

The remaining positions will be held by 14 Liberals, two Nationals, five Greens, two Shooters and Fishers Party MPs and one each for the Sex Party, the Democratic Labor Party, and the ‘Vote Local Jobs’ Party. One of the ALP’s first acts will be to call legislative to set up a $100 million fund, offering payroll tax incentives for companies who hire unemployed young people, retrenched workers and the long-term unemployed. According to the new Greens MP for the seat of Melbourne, Ellen Sandell, this will only be supported by the Greens in the upper house if the incentives are extended to companies who employ people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Rare Labor Left Unity

The Victorian Left has unified for the first time since the 1990s, handing the faction 42 per cent of the party and by far the biggest group of votes in the Australian Labor Party. Sections of two key unions were re-admitted to the faction recently, which means that there are no major splinter groups outside the Left faction, party sources say. The unification comes less than a month after the Left’s Daniel Andrews was made Premier, and poses challenges for the ALP’s first acts will be to pass legislation which has underpinned factional pre-selection deals in Victoria for several years.

Oh dear

Controversial state Labor MP Cesar Melhem spent nearly $30,000 from his ‘union slush fund’ on himself without reimbursement, and some of his evidence to the Royal Commission into Union corruption was not to be believed, an interim report from the commission says, according to The Age.

Wynne winning

The Age announced that new Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne has had a minor heart attack and is recovering in hospital after surgery. He has been temporarily replaced by Finance Minister Robin Scott and is expected to return to his portfolio later in January. A father of two, Mr Wynne holds the seat of Richmond for the ALP, and served as Lord Mayor of Melbourne in 1991. He was housing, local government and Aboriginal affairs minister in the Steve Bracks and John Brumby governments.

Just a Lad

Luke Hilakari is the new and youngest-ever secretary of the Trades Hall, Shane Green reports in The Age. While Hilakari had been acting in the job, it was already full time ahead for his new strategy for the Trades Hall. In essence, that meant shifting the Trades Hall from an administrative role to a place of campaigning. ‘I’ve been thinking about this election campaign for about four years and before that I’d been thinking about community organising.

It’s a bottom-up theory of building a grassroots movement of “real” people around an issue, rather than being directed by politicians and party activists.’ Under Hilakari’s leadership the Trades Hall was transformed into a community organising base. Hilakari spent time in the United States of America, with the Service Employees International Union, membership 1.3 million, getting hands-on experience.

Fair Point

Outgoing Victorian Nationals leader Peter Ryan has lashed out at federal ministerial colleague Barnaby Joyce, accusing him of undermining the party’s bid to hold onto a regional Victorian seat as per The Australian. Mr Ryan said that Mr Joyce’s comments on the $25 million SPC Ardmona bailout, which were reported during the election campaign, had hampered the party’s ability to hold the state seat of Shepparton.

Behind the scenes

The secret weapon in Daniel Andrews’ campaign was made in the USA – in the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 – and transplanted to the sprawling suburbs of Melbourne to snatch an improbable victory from a first-term government. Revealed to The Australian, the secret weapon was rolled out in 25 marginal seats to unleash a phone-calling and door-knocking blitz.

Labor’s Community Action Network was credited with underpinning Andrews’ win and with matching a clutch of seats from the Liberal and National parties. Along with a revamped advertising strategy, the so-called field program allowed Labor to out-manoeuvre the Coalition, despite the fact that it needed to cope with a much smaller budget. It helped to reinforce the way Labor campaigns.

Who are the State Liberals?

The Liberal Party is facing an ‘identity crisis’

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in Victoria, with its vote eroding, the federal leadership seen as too Sydney-centric, and the party failing to connect with a state which is undergoing demographic shifts and a population explosion. A number of key Liberal Party figures from Victoria also believe that the absence of Victorians from Tony Abbott’s leadership team is having severe consequences on the party brand in the state.

Former Premier Jeff Kennett said that Victoria was the birthplace of the party and needed a stronger presence to help the party. ‘Our last leader of substance was Andrew Peacock and he didn’t win the election that he expected him to win.’ He said that, although the party had Andrew Robb and Kevin Andrews as senior ministers, neither of the Victorian MPs had a leadership position nor had that ‘personality that has them as charismatic figures.’

Kennett said there had been a ‘massive switch’ to NSW, which had become the centre of the party’s universe. In The Australian, Mr Kennett said that John Howard had been better at connecting with all Australians.

Advice for the Abbott
According to columnist Andrew Bolt in the Herald Sun, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews is desperate for cash. He’s promised more than the sick Victorian economy can afford, and Labor’s string-pulling public sector unions are likely to be onto him for big wage rises as thanks for their support. Andrews needs Abbott, and Abbott should realise that he needs Andrews. Undoubtedly, this is Abbott’s big chance. He can be Victoria’s best friend. He can be the healing figure his soul craves.

Secret Operation
Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has been accused of striking a secret pay deal with the paramedics’ union before the election, to boost his chance of winning government. In December, Premier Andrews announced one of the longest industrial campaigns in Victorian history had come to an end, with the government agreeing to deliver paramedics a pay rise of about 3 per cent a year.

According to The Age, the deal which follows more than two years of bitter negotiation between the paramedics’ union and the former government, includes a $3,000 sign-on bonus and a 6 per cent pay rise, which began on 1 January.

Federal

Attention
Strong opinion polling and Daniel Andrews’ defeat of a one-term Coalition government have given federal Labor parliamentarians from Victoria fresh hope of a return to power in Canberra in 2016. The seat of Melbourne Ports – safely held by Labor by Michael Danby since 1998 – has emerged as the most likely focus of a preselection challenge. Ari Suss, a staffer to Steve Bracks during the latter’s 1999-2007 premiership, and now a senior executive working for transport tycoon Lindsay Fox, is the most likely successor.

The timing of Mr Danby’s departure is the only question. One group within Labor’s Right faction expects an orderly handover from Mr Danby to Mr Suss, as reported in The Age.

Toll bill bull
Prime Minister Tony Abbott is under pressure to redirect funds promised for the East-West Link, after the scrapped project’s business case raised serious doubts about its financial viability. The initial financial case for the project was so tenuous that the former Victorian government decided not to submit it to Infrastructure Australia, for fear the figures ‘may be used for justification not to support the project.’

The new Victorian government has released 9,000 pages of previously secret documents, including revelations that the tunnel would have taken 56 years of toll revenue to pay for construction costs according to The Age.

Abbott Reform Steadfast
Tony Abbott believes that his agenda to reform the tax system and the federation should not be derailed by the election of a Labor government in Victoria. Now facing Labor premiers in South Australia and Victoria, and a Labor Chief Minister in the ACT, The Australian reports that all oppose an increase in the GST, whilst Mr Abbott said the fundamental problems with the tax system and federation remained and needed to be fixed.

Agriculture

‘Allo
Australia’s fifth biggest dairy company, the Italian-owned Parmalat Group, has ended the year with another major acquisition, buying Victorian dairy exporter Longwarry Foods for $67 million. The move will take Parmalat Australia, formerly an Italian company that is now controlled globally by French dairy giant Lactalis, close to third position among Australia’s major six producers, currently held by Japanese-owned Lion.

More importantly for Parmalat, the Victorian purchase gives its Australian milk business an enhanced focus, after years of having 90 per cent of its turnover reliant on the volatile domestic fresh milk market through its Pauls brand as reported in The Australian.

Paws for Thought
The next micro party to be - the Animal Justice Party - used the forum to put the major parties on notice, particularly in the upper house, where the balance of power is up for grabs according to The Age. Labor announced new plans to discourage the establishment of puppy farms by limiting the maximum number of female breeding dogs living in facilities to ten, by the year 2020.

Victoria has about 100 large dog breeding businesses, but it is believed that some farms contain hundreds of female dogs living in substandard conditions. Opposition agriculture spokeswomen Jaaia Pulford said the policy was designed to “smash the puppy farm business model.” The Animal Justice Party failed to gain any seats at the state election last year.

Education

Sad
Macedon Grammar School has been closed by the State Government, amid allegations of serious financial mismanagement and impropriety at the troubled private Christian school. The decision to cancel the school’s registration has also doomed a rescue plan by a foreign investment syndicate led by Chinese entrepreneur Wang Hua, who, according to The Age, hoped to transform Macedon Grammar into an elite boarding school for the children of China’s wealthy and powerful.

Mt Scopus Domination
Girls’ schools have dominated the 2014 VCE but a co-educational college has claimed top spot. Non-selective government schools have also punched above their weight – some ranking alongside counterparts that cost parents thousands. A state-wide analysis, based on each school’s median VCE study score and the percentage of study scores of 40 and above, shows Mount Scopus Memorial College to be the most successful. The Jewish co-educational school mustered a median study score of 38. A whopping 40.1 per cent of study scores were 40 and above.

NAPLAN Predicts VCE
Students starting VCE can look back to their...
NAPLAN results for a prediction about their chances of gaining entry to university, research shows. A new study by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research has found that NAPLAN results for Year 9 students provided a strong indication of how they would perform in the VCE. The report, by Moshe Justman and Brendan Houng, showed that students’ socio-economic status also substantially influenced their final results.

**International VCE Flexibility**

Students will be able to study the VCE, according to an American and UK-style academic calendar in a major shift reported in the Herald Sun. The Australian-first option, in which school timetables will run from September to June, will begin next year. It’s designed for overseas schools offering the qualification, but those in Victoria will also be able to adopt it.

**Miracle required**

The future of SRI (Special Religious Instruction) in government primary schools is in doubt, with state funding uncertain, and also with new data revealing that overall, only around one student in six is enrolled in the program. The popularity of the weekly 30-minute classes fell dramatically in the past six months – from 92,808 students to 53,361 – a 42 per cent plunge in enrolments, according to The Age.

The new Education Department figures are the latest blow to the main provider of religious instruction, chaplaincy organisation Access Ministries, and more bad news could be on the way. Earlier in the year the government pledged $2 million funding to the program over four years, but a spokesperson for new Deputy Premier and Education Minister James Merlino pointed out this week that the new government had not made any similar election pledge.

**Religious Education, Not Instruction**

It is time to fix the unholy nonsense of under-the-radar religious indoctrination. Most reasonable people would see a place in the school curriculum for ‘general religious instruction’, according to The Age. Dr Meredith Doig is president of the Rationalist Society of Australia.

www.careers.vic.gov.au

According to The Age, the Infrastructure and Sustainability Division of the Department of Education and Training is seeking up to 6 experienced VP55 Senior Project Officers to support the development of educational infrastructure.

**Affirms Mediocrity**

The education system does not prepare young people for the reality check of the VCE, according to Dale Hughes, English teacher at Lilydale Secondary College, in The Age. ‘Unfortunately, our education system is designed to shield you from failure until you begin VCE. From Years 7 to 10 there is little accountability and not meeting learning outcomes, and you have not actually progressed in spite of the fact you might have thought otherwise in these years.

On one day more than 47,000 Victorian students received a Year 12 score. Those 47,000 students will be competing for university courses, TAFE courses, apprenticeships and jobs, among other of the things. They’ll be doing so when youth unemployment is at record highs, and when the forces of globalisation mean an influx of able migrants also compete for valuable positions in our highly competitive society.

Top 10 Government Schools (No. of scores above 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne High</td>
<td>555</td>
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<tr>
<td>MacRobertson Girls’ High</td>
<td>385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glen Waverley Secondary</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balwyn High</td>
<td>337</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nossal High</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinnon Secondary</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Monash Science</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University High</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne Cory High</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Waverley Secondary</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Top 10 Non-Government Schools (No. of scores above 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotch College</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penleigh and Essendon Grammar</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Ladies’ College</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haileybury College</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kevin’s College</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Grammar</td>
<td>233</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caulfield Grammar (Caulfield Campus)</td>
<td>220</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xavier College</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat Clarendon College</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Grammar</td>
<td>143</td>
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</tbody>
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**Energy**

**Bishop Pulls And Tugs**

The Age has announced that Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has backed down on her demand that a new climate change deal should be legally binding, but that she is now caught up in a new row at United Nations talks in Peru over the way in which Australia’s emission target is calculated.

**Almost everywhere**

Hybrid cars are so last year; it’s time to start thinking hybrid houses. As cost-of-living pressures increase, home owners are moving to solar power and even hybrid power systems, using solar panels and batteries to minimise bills according to The Age. Industry experts estimate that by 2030, every second detached home in Victoria could have solar panels, and increasing numbers will have hybrid systems.

Ian Wilson considers his $200,000 hybrid solar and battery power system a retirement investment, reducing his everyday expenses. Since installing the system, the household power bill has dropped by two-thirds and the house in now immune from blackouts.

**Environment, conservation & agriculture**

**Go tell it on a Mountain**

As reported in The Age, cattle-grazing in the Alpine National Park is over (again), with the new State Government fulfilling a long-standing election promise to ban the practice. The government has ended, effective immediately, a scientific trial involving about 60 cattle which, during the Baillieu-Napthine administration, was being used to test claims that grazing can reduce fire risk. The new Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Lisa Neville, will also put a ban on such trials into legislation. She thereby hopes to stop future governments (even if they happen to be non-ALP governments) reversing the policy.

**Amazing**

The Climate Council has warned that Victoria faced ‘significant challenges’, in The Age, as its residents moved away from city centres and built homes on the outer fringes and deeper into forested areas. Some of the key findings of the council’s report, released in early December and titled Be Prepared: Climate Change and the Alpine National Park is over (again), with the new State Government fulfilling a long-standing election promise to ban the practice. The government has ended, effective immediately, a scientific trial involving about 60 cattle which, during the Baillieu-Napthine administration, was being used to test claims that grazing can reduce fire risk. The new Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Lisa Neville, will also put a ban on such trials into legislation. She thereby hopes to stop future governments (even if they happen to be non-ALP governments) reversing the policy.

**I Feel the Earth Move**

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in plasterboards, cornices were separating from bowing ceilings, and skirting boards were coming off. ‘Slab heaven’ is thought to have affected thousands of new homes in Melbourne’s outer north-west, where volatile soil movements cause walls to crack, doors and windows to jam, and floors to tilt as reported in The Age. Instead of just repairing the existing architecture, the state planning tribunal has ordered Metronic to knock down (the home) and build (a) new one(s).

Cash for Containers Canned
A cash-for-containers scheme has been all but ruled out by the Victorian Government, despite NSW and the ACT recently announcing they would introduce it. The state’s Environment Minister, Lisa Neville, said she was unconvinced can and bottle-deposit laws were the best option for Victoria. She was worried the move would jeopardise its recycling industry, to the point it was no longer financially viable.

Ms Neville said Victoria’s beverage-container recycling rate was already more than 73 per cent, better than the national average of 73 per cent, and better than in South Australia - which has had a bottle deposit scheme in place since 1977. She said Victoria had the lowest litter rate in the country. Her comments come after the NSW government indicated it would adopt the cash-for-containers initiative, after failed negotiations to introduce alternative national schemes. This decision is still on hold.

Bit rough
Ruffy, near Eureka, lost a house before Christmas when the Creightons Creek bushfire swept through, also taking three other nearby houses, burning more than 6000 hectares and killing stock. Now farmers fear excessive rain.

Preserve Gough Birthplace
A Chinese couple who bought the birthplace home of Gough Whitlam will consider their legal options after the State Government moved to protect the building. Work to demolish the house at 46 Rowland Street, Kew, incidentally coincided with Mr Whitlam’s death. Neighbours described the move as a ‘cultural disgrace’ and had considered rallying for its survival.

City of Boroondara spokeswoman Deb Ganderton said that the council recognised the three-bedroom house was the birthplace of Mr Whitlam, after a resident pushed to have the property heritage-listed, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Nearby
Mr Whitlam’s legacy came amid speculation over whether his brain would be donated to research, as per the Herald Sun. Mr Whitlam was the first person to sign up to Sydney University’s brain bank program in 2003. A son said he thought this had not happened.

Gaming
Guns Loaded, Tabcorp
The Herald Sun noted that Tabcorp is heading to the High Court, in an attempt to recoup the $686 million that it claims it is owed by the State Government. The move comes after Tabcorp lost a Victorian Supreme Court battle over the compensation which it maintains that it is owed, following the expiry of poker machine licences.

Crown Safety Net
More than 20 years after opening in Melbourne, Crown Casino will start analysing the gambling behaviour of individuals, including gambling intensity, duration and frequency, as a tool to identify potential problem gamblers. The move, reported in The Age, comes as pressure mounts on the casino operator to better identify those gambling with criminally acquired money.

VIP Airport Travellers
Billionaire James Packer’s Crown Resorts says VIP travellers should be able to use a dedicated path at Australia’s airports, separate from the mass tourist queue. Sydney Airport is also calling for a ‘premium’ model for passengers willing to pay. This would make Australia more attractive to ‘premium’ tourists, where Customs could provide a better service with fast-tracked arrivals at major international airports.

In a submission to a Productivity Commission research paper, Crown Resorts suggests that people could pay to use a dedicated VIP path, which would recover the government’s extra costs of providing more immigration and Customs resources.

Health
Milk Sales Banned
The State Government launched a federal investigation into labelling of unpasteurised milk and a possible ban on its sale. This investigation was started following the death of a Melbourne toddler, as reported in The Age. New regulations requiring a gag-inducing chemical used in anti-freeze to be mixed into all batches of raw milk sold in Victoria have since been introduced.

Salvos Hiring an Army
The Salvation Army has expressed concerns over the safety of charity workers after four attacks on staff by ice users in the past two months according to the Herald Sun. Ice addicts face being banned by one of Melbourne’s main welfare groups after the recent spike in unprovoked drug-related assaults. Commanding Officer Major Brendan Nottle said that he had been attacked twice, where he had otherwise not been touched for the past 11 years of service to the organisation.

Andrews Dismisses McCritics
Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews has dismissed calls for the Royal Children’s Hospital to dump its contract with McDonald’s as ‘nanny statism’ and says public health experts behind the push should ‘get over themselves.’ Mr Andrews, a former health minister, has also opened the door to the new Monash Children’s Hospital including a McDonald’s when it opens in 2017.

Last month, public health experts, including former head of VicHealth Rob Moodie, called for Victoria’s two main paediatric hospitals to exclude fast-food outlets because it creates “health halo effect” around the food and is inconsistent with the values of a health service treating weight related problems. With one in four Australian children now overweight or obese, Professor Moodie and others said Australian hospitals should be following the global trend of dumping junk food retailers as reported in The Age.

Business & investment
Round the Bend
Melbourne-based property developer MAB Corporation has put its Fishermans Bend development site onto the market, one month after receiving permission to build three apartment towers on the site. The 250-hectare Fishermans Bend area is close to the central business district of Melbourne and will be transformed from its industrial usage to a residential precinct.

In July 2014, which was still during Denis Napthine’s premiership, Planning Minister Matthew Guy released a five-volume structure plan for the area, and said that Fishermans Bend would become the country’s biggest urban renewal project. It will be developed over the next 40 years and will eventually become home to 80,000 residents and accommodate 40,000 jobs. Evidently, the apostrophe is disappearing from ‘Fishermans’s Bend’.

Fishermans Bend
Twenty years before architect Shannon McGrath became a director at Places Victoria, he helped the fledgling Jeff Bennett Government draw up early ‘dreamings’ of Docklands. He says the village-like ‘dreamings’ for Fishermans Bend are an almost exact replica.

But as reported in The Age, he notes two big challenges: ensuring public amenity to cater for a large population in a confined space; and a diversity of population through affordable housing. Affordability specialist Dr Judith Stubbs, a former government housing adviser, has called for 20 per cent of new housing to be set aside to ensure that lower-income Melburnians are able to live in the precinct.

Places Going Places
Victoria’s state property developer, Places Victoria, has sold two growth corridor development sites to Lend Lease and Western Australia-based Satterley Property Group, netting a combined $180 million. The sale of the two sites forms part of Places Victoria’s plans to divest its growth corridor sites and focus on urban renewal projects. Places Victoria chief executive Gregory Anderson said that the sales were a ‘sound commercial outcome’, according to the Financial Review.

Tit might mean tat
Victoria’s new government could have to raise taxes – breaking a key election promise – if wages blow out under its lenient new policy on employment, sector pay claim reports in The Age. New State Government calls for the Royal Children’s Hospital to dump its contract with McDonald’s as ‘nanny statism’ and says public health experts behind the push should ‘get over themselves.’ Mr Andrews, a former health minister, has also opened the door to the new Monash Children’s Hospital including a McDonald’s when it opens in 2017. A son said he thought this had not happened.

Justice & police
Chief Lays Down Baton
The shock departure of Chief Commissioner
Ken Lay on 30 December – due to his wife’s ill-health – has sparked an international search for his replacement, according to the Herald Sun. Mr Lay is known for returning stability to the force after the 2011 police crisis, and his emphasis upon specialised units rather than more general-duty uniformed police.

Although a strong tradition of internal appointments exists, with Deputy Commissioners Lucinda Nolan and Tim Cartwright being leading contenders, Mr Cartwright has a critical advantage over Ms Nolan, in the form of the caretaker role which he now fills. He is being given the opportunity to act in the position until an appointment on a permanent basis is made.

Record Fire Settlement
A supreme Court judge has formally approved a record $500 million settlement over the Kilmore East-Kinglake Black Saturday bushfires, which claimed the lives of 119 people and destroyed or damaged 1772 homes and properties. Justice Robert Osborn said the background to the case was unfortunately because of the scale, complexity and difficulty of the litigation, which involved a fiercely contested 16-month civil trial.

According to The Age, about 5000 Victorians will share in a total payout of $494 million: the largest class action settlement in Australian history. The no-fault settlement had been announced in July but needed to be formally approved by the Supreme Court. The payout will include $76 million in legal costs. Power company SP AusNet, which this year changed its name to AusNet Services, will have to pay $378.6 million, the State Government $103.6 million and power maintenance contractor UAM $12.5 million.

Breaking the Ice
The State Government has delivered on its election promise to set up a taskforce within its first 100 days to tackle Victoria’s ice epidemic. Daniel Andrews will chair the 16-member Ice Action Taskforce, which includes ministers, senior police, law and drug experts. Salvation Army and Drug Court representatives will also sit on the group which will work to reduce ice-related violence and crime and develop support for families of users and frontline workers.

Mr Andrews said that trafficking ice to school students, allowing premises to be used to make it, and publishing instructions on how to manufacture ice would now carry penalties of up to 25 years in jail according to the Herald Sun.

Prisons Bursting Forth
Victoria’s prison population surged in the past four years, climbing from around 4,500 to a peak of 6,100 – the biggest jump on record. New Bureau of Statistics figures point to a system at breaking point, unable to cope with such a rapid increase. They show Victoria’s prison population to have been fairly stable until the late 1990s, when it began to grow by 1 per cent per year. It jumped 9 and 14 per cent for 2012 and 2013 respectively, according to The Age.

Insider Trouble Overflows
Victoria Police faces a massive legal backlash from its own members over allegations of widespread bullying and stand over tactics that have been ignored or covered up by force command. According to Victoria Police, more than 100 police from across the state have been forced to take stress leave – but the Police Association says the figure is 500, according to The Age.

Name ‘Em and Shame ‘Em
New laws empowering survivors of family violence came into effect in November. According to the Herald Sun, Carla’s Law allows victims to name and shame attackers if they breach a family violence intervention order or safety notice. It is named after Carla Gagliardi, who was attacked by her former partner three days after she obtained an intervention order.

Government Sets Cops Loose
A police taskforce will be unleashed on rogue unions including the CFMEU in an unprecedented strike against criminality in the construction industry. Prime Minister Tony Abbott and then Premier Denis Naphine revealed the establishment of a joint police taskforce to focus on union officials and others who were said to have been engaged in blackmail, cartel behaviour, extortion, boycotts, kickbacks and intimidation.

The Herald Sun revealed that the taskforce will pursue criminal activities uncovered by the royal commission into trade union corruption. It will focus on unions, but will also pursue corrupt employers, debt collectors and mediators.

Government Firm Punished
A waste firm owned by Melbourne City Council has been fined for operating several unsewered trucks. VicRoads prosecuted Citywide, the firm involved, after having officials inspect the company’s Ringwood depot. The VicRoads officials issued nine vehicles with major defect notices earlier in 2014. Citywide has been fined $8,000 in the Ringwood Magistrates’ Court after pleading guilty to roadworthiness and maintenance offences, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Discrimination
Anti-discrimination authorities are being urged to investigate a flood of online jobs ads offering positions exclusively to temporary migrants on one-year visas as reported in The Age. The Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission is considering a landmark investigation into whether the ads - offering jobs online to overseas workers - are in violation of state anti-discrimination law.

Parents Victimised by Children
Crime statistics reported in The Age reveal that more than 6000 family violence reports were made by parents against their children aged from under 10 to 24 last year. Of these cases, 32 related to boys under 10, and six to girls under 10. Detective Superintendent Rod Jouning, head of the Victorian Police Sexual and Family Violence Division, said a disturbing number of youths had seen their fathers abuse their mothers or siblings and had repeated the behaviour.

Attacks by children have increased by almost 50 per cent in three years, but Superintendent Jouning said parents were reluctant to call police.

Local government Cap
Council rates will be capped next year with the state government forcing councils to justify any increases above the rate of inflation. The new Minister for Local Government, Natalie Hutchins, wrote to mayors and council chief executives last week advising that the cap would be introduced before the start of the 2016-17 financial year. Inflation measured to an average assessment of $1725.

The Municipal Association of Victoria’s task-force has met the new government and wants to commission a “top tier consultancy” to create a cost index to “reinforce that CPI has no bearing on the changes to councils’ underlying costs,” Mr McArthur said. However, according to The Age, the MAV would work with the government “to achieve a sustainable outcome.” The Kennett government capped rates in 1995 after cutting the number of councils from 210 to 78 and forcing rates down by 20 per cent in 1996.

Beer Bans Brewing
Another council banned alcohol from public parks in time for New Year’s Eve. Consequently Melburnians were forbidden from drinking in parks in some inner city parks and beaches on 31 December. Alcohol was banned for the first time in 2014 in Fitzroy’s Edinburgh Gardens, and in all other public parks within the City of York. Meanwhile, another council in Melbourne’s suburbs, namely the City of Port Phillip, again banned alcohol from its beaches and public spaces on New Year’s Eve, including St Kilda beach.

Hobsons Bay Council has expanded its alcohol ban in Williamstown and Altona this summer, and the City of Melbourne has banned alcohol from its public concerts in Treasury Gardens, Kings Domain, Flagstaff Gardens and Docklands. The City of York voted for the ban after Edinburgh Gardens was trashed by tens of thousands of people drinking freely until early on New Year’s Day 2014, leaving behind piles of rubbish and a $30,000 clean-up bill. For the last day of 2014 the council provided extra lighting, bins and toilets in Edinburgh Gardens.

Ballarat Beer Festival
On Saturday the 24th January 2015, the Ballarat Beer Festival got underway with a temperature of 28 degrees. In its second year running, brewers experienced long queues with supplies emptied by the end of the festival according to The Courier. There were more than 40 brewers with a games garden, children’s area and education sessions held throughout the day.

Melbourne Homeless Pressure Increases
Charities say the demand for homelessness support is at its greatest level in more than a decade, as growing numbers of Victorians face life on the streets for the first time according to The Age. In the past year, there has been a rapid increase in the number of people visiting free inner-city meal programs. The Salvation Army’s Major Brendan Nottle said that people also seemed more distraught by the time they reached out for help.

Bogus Beggar Import
A third of Melbourne’s beggars are international tourists looking to boost their travel funds, according to the Herald Sun. Victoria Police,
Melbourne City Council and the Salvation Army have raised concerns over a spike in numbers of bogus beggars during the holiday season.

**Argus is Alive**
The refurbished Argus building in Melbourne’s city centre, on the corner of Elizabeth and Latrobe Streets, will become the headquarters for the Melbourne Institute of Technology business that specialises in the teaching of information technology and accounting, mainly to foreign students, as reported in the Financial Review.

**1840s CBD Makeover**
Melbourne’s oldest surviving shop, located at a prime CBD address, is set for a new tenant and makeover. Known as Job Warehouse, the building near the top of Bourke Street dates to the 1840s and is considered a key link to pre-gold rush Melbourne. But the historic site has been run-down for years, and will need a major upgrade to regain its former glory. According to the Herald Sun, it was originally a butcher’s shop and a slaughter yard.

**Remove Road, Fitzroy**
The City of Yarra is investigating closing Brunswick Street to through traffic, and expanding space for pedestrians and traders. All this is part of a plan to remake one of Melbourne’s most iconic shopping strips. The proposal to phase out the ability to use Fitzroy’s most famous street as a thoroughfare is part of a long-term council project to remake the ‘Brunswick Street and St Georges Road corridor.’

A council survey has found that fewer than 30 per cent of visitors to Brunswick Street come by car, with the rest walking, travelling by tram, or cycling.

**Email Your Local Tree**
Melbourne City Council says that 70,000 trees can be, after a fashion, contacted and wants more people to join the ‘correspondence program’ set up to connect people with the green environment. The concept is the brain-child of the City of Melbourne’s Urban Landscapes team. Manager Ian Shears said to date, 140 people had taken part. As reported in the Herald Sun, each tree could be emailed individually, due to a complete database, including details on each tree’s life expectancy and species, and an ID, allowing the program to be run at very little cost. The City of Melbourne plans to plant an additional 30,000 trees within the next decade to double the city’s tree canopy coverage to 40 per cent.

**Media, multimedia & IT**

**White Ribbon Hijacked**
A men’s rights group has been accused of ‘hijacking’ the name of a prominent anti-domestic violence group and using it to publish ‘misinformation’ about violence against women. White Ribbon is considering taking legal action to stop the group, which uses the same name and similar branding. White Ribbon Australia is an anti-violence organisation that appoints high-profile men to make a public stance against violence and encourage other men to do the same. The alleged fake website is owned and operated by A Voice for Men, as reported in The Age.

**Planning**

**Windsor to Haunt New Government**
The redevelopment of the heritage-listed Windsor Hotel, an issue that damaged the Brumby Labor government four years ago, has returned to haunt the Andrews Administration. The hotel developer has conceded it will not complete the $330-million revamp before the legal deadline of January 2017. The new Victorian government is now likely to be asked to grant a special time extension to complete the project - including a 93-meter tower to the rear of the hotel, which was slammed by former planning minister turned opposition leader Matthew Guy as a “disgrace” and a “scar” on Melbourne’s heritage.

According to The Age, the early works would include creating access for removal of hazardous material from the 1960s-era northern wing on the Bourke Street corner, where the Hard Rock Cafe used to be. Demolition of the Bourke Street corner building would follow later. However, the bulk of the redevelopment - including the Denton Corker Marshall-designed 26-level tower and refurbishment of the 19th-century hotel interior - is some time off - detailed planning and design are incomplete, finance is not in place and no major builder has been contracted.

**Promote Health, Ban Junk**
Public health experts are calling for the new Monash Children’s Hospital to exclude fast-food outlets. They say that the Royal Children’s Hospital should dump its contract with McDonald’s because it is creating a ‘healthy halo effect’ that sends the wrong message to families, according to The Age.

**Park Please**
Bird lovers and environment groups are pushing for a new Bellarine Wetlands Nature Reserve south-east of Geelong. They fear that urban sprawl will destroy popular bird habitat visited by about 20,000 birds a year. The Geelong Environment Council, the Queenscliff Environment Council and the Queenscliff Environment Forum want the new, 2,000-hectare reserve established before ‘population growth and development, new infrastructure, effects of climate change and population from run-off’ cause irreversible damage.

**The Planning Guy**
In The Age, the legacy of former planning minister Matthew Guy is being questioned by Michael Buxton. Guy’s main legacy is that of reshaping inner Melbourne as a high-rise city. In four years he approved about 90 inner-city high-rise towers with about 85,000 apartments completed or planned between 2011 and 2021.

**Dandenong Slaughter House**
A new $30 million abattoir is expected to create more than 230 jobs in its first few years, and eventually more than 370 jobs according to the Herald Sun. Former Premier Denis Napthine said the State Government had made a ‘modest contribution’ to the project to attract jobs.

**Convent Cracking Up**
The Abbotsford Convent is seeking $11 million from the State Government to rebuild dilapidated areas, along with fundraising and other grants. Chief executive Maggie Maguire said the convent was a national heritage site. Since 2004, almost $13 million has been spent getting facilities up to scratch.

There are 113 leases, 107 of which are used by small businesses or social programs, and more than 500 businesses are on the waiting list for a lease as reported in the Herald Sun.

**Sport**

**Card Fees Chopped**
Footy fans will be able to buy cheaper tickets to matches at Etihad Stadium when buying seats online next season, according to the Herald Sun. Transaction fees for ticket purchases at the Melbourne Stadium will be slashed from $7 to $2.50 next season in another win for fans.

The 64 per cent cut to contentious card fees charged to fans just to buy tickets at Etihad
Stadium comes amid a concerted effort by the AFL and stadium chiefs to be more fan friendly. Etihad Stadium chief Paul Sergeant said that the price cut was a win for the football public.

**Family Friendly Footy**

Sunday footy will be free for children, complicated seating classes will go, and ticket prices will be frozen as the AFL tries to reconnect with its heartland. Children under 15 will be able to go to every Sunday match at the MCG and Etihad Stadium next season for free.

General admission prices will remain at this season’s $25 and ‘walk-up’ seats will be available for all games except the ANZAC Day blockbuster between Essendon and Collingwood. General Manager of clubs and operations, Travis Auld, said that the changes were for families and diehard supporters as reported in the Herald Sun.

**BYO Burger**

Sports fans will be able to bring their own hamburgers, chips and coffee into Etihad Stadium in a hip pocket win for spectators fed up with high food prices at the ground. The Stadium chief Paul Sergeant said the trial move would be extended indefinitely according to the Herald Sun. Melbourne stadiums have regularly charged as much as $6.50 for a bucket of chips at Etihad or $5.60 at the MCG although Mr Sergeant said times were changing.

**Transport – air**

**More Flights Please**

Foreign airlines would be free to increase flights to Australia’s big four cities, especially from Asia, under a push from the airport giants. The Australian can reveal a campaign for greater liberalisation of the air service agreements negotiated by the government with foreign countries, a move that could allow the biggest airports to get more flights. The Australian Airports Association warns some agreements threaten to constrain airline capacity on routes on key growth markets such as China.

**Yes**

Air travellers who sign up as low-risk flyers could breeze through screening from ‘kerb to aircraft door’. Under a hi-tech security trial with Qantas, to start at Melbourne Airport during 2015, those passengers would not be subjected to normal screening. Melbourne will become the fourth airport, after London’s Heathrow, Amsterdam’s Schiphol, and Doha Hamad, to test the Smart Security program, which has been devised by airlines and airports.

To use the fast-track system people would register as ‘known travellers’, and security agencies would check their backgrounds. As reported in the Herald Sun, advanced facial biometric technology could link them to their travel documents and communicate the risk assessment to the boarding gate. About 31 million passengers a year go through Melbourne Airport, and some industry figures would like over half of them to use Smart Security.

**Fair enough**

Essendon Airport has cracked down on Tullamarine passengers using its car spots for free parking, according to the Herald Sun. The airport has started enforcing parking restrictions on its land and introducing fees for longer-term parking. Airport CEO Chris Cowan said some drivers had been unfairly taking advantage of lax parking rules in the retail and aviation precinct.

**Transport – rail**

**Secret Plans**

The Herald Sun has confirmed Public Transport Victoria plans to put the brakes on 12 morning and 14 afternoon peak services, which will be prevented from entering Melbourne’s underground rail network. The switch has been discussed in internal briefings between Metro and PTV. The proposal will be a major test for the new Labor government, which campaigned against the previous Coalition government’s plan to take the line out of the loop under its Metro Link Rail plan.

There are fears that platforms at Richmond, South Yarra, Parliament and Flinders Street will become overcrowded as commuters change trains to go through the loop.

**Metro Sells Hot Ticket**

As reported in the Herald Sun, the first app ever developed for Metro Trains has recorded 70 million downloads, with more than 1.3 billion sessions of it having been played. It counts supermodel Kate Moss among its fans. Metro Trains is riding the wave of popularity, and plans to release a new version about now.

The game app came off the back of the successful public service announcement – Dumb Ways To Die – featuring cute shapes dancing, singing a catchy tune and dying in idiotic ways, so as to educate young people about rail safety.

**Route Upgrades Off the Track**

Plans by the former State Government to reduce journey times on Melbourne’s three busiest tram routes, and on express bus lanes between Doncaster and the city, could be scrapped by the new State Government, according to The Age. This announcement comes despite a study showing that if the plans were kept, they would generate millions of dollars in economic benefits. The tram and bus upgrades were planned as part of the cancelled East-West Link toll road, and their benefits were used to pump up the business case for the $6.8 billion project.

**Transport – road**

**West Gate Cracks**

Traffic chaos gripping the West Gate Bridge for days after Boxing Day. Delays of up to an hour are expected, and VicRoads has warned that future traffic disruptions could be worse than they were earlier, according to the Herald Sun. This is the third year running that Melbourne’s long-suffering commuters will cop the brunt of a major road shutdown over the Christmas-New Year period.

From 26 to 29 December, three inbound lanes of the bridge were closed, in order to repair an 85-metre crack in the road that opened and spread across two lanes in January 2014.

**Road Toll Increase**

Victoria’s road toll has risen for the first time in six years. Police data show that 248 people died on the state’s roads in 2014 – up from 243 at the same time last year as per the Herald Sun.

**Beach Safety for Cyclists**

Serious bicycle crashes have been reduced on Beach Road, Melbourne’s most eminent street for sporty cyclists, bucking the city-wide trend of worsening injury rates as cycling has gained popularity. Cyclist injury rates almost halved between 2001 and 2011 in central Melbourne, where the boom in rider numbers has been strongest, but according to new data, the rate has dropped on Beach Road, which teems with several thousand riders each weekend.

The decline in crash rates has been put down to the recent banning of on-street parking on Saturday mornings, and better rider behaviour, following the death of a pedestrian who was run over by cyclists on the so-called ‘hell ride’ in 2006, as reported in The Age.

**Taxi!**

Taxi passengers struck a cab bonanza, with an extra 560 cars hitting the road to ferry Christmas party and New Year’s Eve revellers. According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne’s taxi fleet was boosted by 10 per cent during 2013, and it now includes 5,600 cabs with 16,000 drivers. A new social media campaign will also be launched using #TaxiTrippin to tell the Victorian Taxi Association of passengers’ experiences and hear what they have to say.

The taxi industry is working closely with Melbourne City Council to plan taxi services on the biggest nights of the year. Passengers will also put the new Bourke Street mega-taxi rank, between Russell Street and Royal Place, to the test. The rank, which has security guards, CCTV cameras, public toilets and food and coffee from the Salvation Army, has been averaging about 1,000 people each weekend since opening in November.

**Can Drive Faster**

Traffic camera commissioner Gordon Lewis backs higher speed limits on some Victorian highways. He also used a live blog with Herald Sun readers to call on police to be more transparent about speed camera positioning, saying that he believed some cameras were placed unfairly.

**Secret Toll, Napthine**

The Naphthine Government sensationally considered increasing tolls on CityLink and East Link, and introducing tolls on the Eastern Freeway and Tullamarine Freeway, in order to make the $6.8 billion East-West Link financially viable. The 200-plus-page East-West Link Business Case obtained by the Herald Sun, before its official release, has revealed that tolls on the first stage of the abandoned tunnel were not enough to cover its ongoing costs.

**350 People Sent Home**

According to the Financial Review, as many as 350 people had already lost work as a result of the halting of the $6.8 billion East-West Link, after the main East-West Link consortium and a separate engineering consultancy suspended staff on the road project mainly from the St Kilda office.

**Utilities**

**Surprise Surplus**

Revised figures contained in the Economic and Financial Update released in October show that dividends from public and non-public financial corporations, including the Victorian WorkCover Authority and water utilities, will top $920 million during 2014, compared
with an earlier estimate of $414 million. The government will now take $49 million from the South East Water Corporation, up from $160 million announced in the May budget. Morwell’s Yarra Valley Water dividends has increased from $5 million to $20 million, according to the Financial Review.

Desal Plants Redundant
Figures obtained by The Australian show that the Victorian desalination plant, south-east of Melbourne, will have cost water users $1.2 billion by December, rising to $2 billion by the end of the next financial year. The Victorian experience has been replicated across Australia’s east and south. Plants in Victoria, NSW, Adelaide and on the Gold Coast cost more than $10 billion to build but their operations have been effectively mothballed.

Desal on Stand-by
Victoria’s new Water Minister is open to using the controversial desalination plant if water supplies hit critical levels in Victorian towns. Environment and Water Minister Lisa Neville said she wanted to make sure that all Victorian communities had a secure water supply, and the desalination plant was a good insurance policy.

Ms Neville has asked for a briefing on the situation in the Gippsland community of Korumburra, where South Gippsland Water wants to connect the town to the Lance Creek Reservoir supply, which is connected to the multi-billion-dollar desalination plant and Melbourne’s water supply back-up, according to The Age.

Society
Every year an Anglican church in East St Kilda opens its doors to Melbourne’s animals and their devoted human companions. During Christmas 2014, a dozen dogs sat in their owners’ laps or in the aisle of St James the Great Church, according to The Age. Jennifer Craven attends the service annually with her poodle shih-tzu-cross, Xena, and said that the dogs were normally very well behaved.

Father Roger Kelly said Christmas was an ideal day to have animals in Church as it was a manger surrounded by animals. It was also an example to learn from.

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