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Letter from Melbourne

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Editorial

**Action stations.**

The editor reckons that the new Victorian Premier’s website is very active, with many relevant items, in the infrastructure sector(s) and elsewhere where Government has so much of a say in business and our lives, especially in education and health. Your editor will regularly peruse this site to seek items for this magazine, to round out items not picked up or given due recognition by the main media.

We also peruse a wide number of professional and industry association online and hard copy publications to look for detail which clarifies or adds to the tenor of Letter From Melbourne’s objective, as per the Front Cover.

Lots of Victorian government activities but different sectors will query whether it is fast or medium pace forward or something less than that, for example the Ports of Hastings has just been downsized (that is the planning division of the Port), whereas geelong long way a few folk are getting a little excited about Bay West. It seems that quite a few engineers and planners and infrastructure types have departed the Government departments and not just in the East West link space. Yes. We now have the Metro Link, which will be an underground train, mostly which travels from Northish to Southish under the City.

It will be interest to see how the East West Link legal and business issues continue, as it goes to the very centre of sovereign risk. Your editor had to wander around Professor Google for a while to find the following definition which satisfied him in these circumstances.

Sovereign immunity wikipedia free encyclopedia, Sovereign immunity, or crown immunity, is a legal doctrine by which the sovereign or state cannot commit a legal wrong and is immune from civil suit or criminal.

Cover-wise, our last issue missed the important fact that the wonderful Riverina Hotel, the Conargo Pub burnt down in November last year. Many folk polished up their drinking skills here, and may not have heard of this sad state of affairs on the grape vine, so to speak. Your editor is indeed fortunate to share the occasional coffee with one of its former proprietors, both on the cover and herein.

We might have forgotten that the local pub was where much community activity took place: in the City, in the Suburbs and in the Bush. Regrettably, certain drinking laws put paid to much community activity took place: in the City, in the Suburbs and in the Bush. Regrettably, certain drinking laws put paid to.

The editor is planning a Launch of the 200th Edition of Letter From Melbourne during March. So keep your ears and eyes open.

**Feature: Come on, Team**

The Victorian Government is sponsoring a new framework to trial technology on the Victorian road network that will (hopefully) improve the operation of heavy vehicles and promote Victoria as Australia’s freight and logistics capital.

Minister for Roads, Luke Donnellan, called on the heavy vehicle, freight and Intelligent Transport Systems industries to come forward with innovative approaches to using ITS and associated technology, to improve the productivity and safety of road freight transport in Victoria.

VicRoads and Transport Certification Australia will assess proposals against a set of strategic and technical principles and implement trials over the next 12 months.

A wide range of innovative ideas, including technologies that can improve traffic signals for heavy vehicles, advise drivers of rest area locations so they can manage fatigue, alert them of low clearance routes or other restricted routes or link them with the rail network to help avoid delays around rail crossings.

This initiative is part of the Victorian Freight and Logistics Plan which aims to develop freight technology demonstration projects that improve the way we manage Victoria’s roads and improve transport and logistics routes.

If a trial of a technology proves successful, VicRoads can build a business case for securing Victorian Government funding to further develop and implement that technology across the road transport sector.

The freight and logistics sector contributes between $19 billion and $23 billion, representing eight percent of Victoria’s annual Gross State Product.

Exempting one word, the above is the complete press release. vicroads.vic.gov.au/business-and-industry.

The Minister for Road Safety, Luke Donnellan, Our state is the freight and logistics capital of Australia. VicRoads Director of Road Operations, Dean Zabrieszac, ‘VicRoads and Transport Certification Australia are asking for heavy vehicle, freight and ITS industries to come forward with innovative proposals to trial ITS and technologies that can make the freight and logistics sector safer and more reliable.’

State government & politics

**New Governor**

Judge and Australian Football League Commissioner, Linda Dessau will become Victoria’s 29th Governor and first female Governor at the end of June when Alex Chernov finishes his term. Governor Dessau will stand down from the AFL job office. She has a five-year term. A passionate supporter of Essendon, she has had, _The Age_ reports, a long and distinguished career in law, serving as a judge of the Family Court from 1995 to 2013. In that capacity she chaired national projects on family violence and child abuse.

Prior to her work in the Family Court, Dessau was a magistrate in the Children’s Court, the Coroner’s Court and the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court, and a barrister at the Victorian Bar. She also worked as senior Crown Counsel in Hong Kong. Mr Chernov will be remembered for taking ‘commercialisation’ out of Government House.

**Liberals Take On Nationals**

The Liberals and the Nationals competed in the by-election for Gippsland South on Saturday 14 March, triggered by the resignation of former deputy premier Peter Ryan. Labor did not run a candidate leaving a two-way race between the Nationals’ Upper House MP Danny O’Brien and Liberal candidate Scott Rossetti, a three-time Wellington Shire mayor who now runs a local funeral business. THE NATIONALS WON.

The seat has been held by the Country-National party for much of the past 80 years, but the Liberals’ decision to field a high-profile candidate has threatened the Nationals’ plans for Mr O’Brien, who is regarded as one of the party’s rising stars, as reported in _The Age._

**No holds barred**

Tough ‘move-on’ laws introduced after violent Construction Forestry Mining & Energy Union blockades at the CBD Emporium site last year and ugly East-West Link protests are being scrapped by the State Government. According to the _Herald Sun_, the laws gave police extra powers to move on protestors who restricted access to property or if they caused a ‘reasonable fear of violence’ in others. Protesters face $720 fines and could be arrested for ignoring the move-on orders.

**Power links**

There are fears that Victorian construction projects will suffer cost blowouts and lengthy delays as a result of the disbanding of the Construction Code Compliance Unit, (…amid exposed links to bikie gangs and prostitution rackets being shut down at the desalination plant!).

Radley de Silva, Master Builders Association of Victoria executive director, said the closure was ‘disappointing.’ Industrial Relations Minister Natalie Hutchins called the CCCU and the former Victorian government’s building code a ‘waste of taxpayers’ money.’ Federal Employment Minister Eric Abetz said that Premier Andrews was bowing to pressure from the militant Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union.

**Accusations Fly East-West**

State Treasurer Tim Pallas has accused the Opposition of treachery after it gazumped the Government’s planned release of a letter guaranteeing termination clauses in the East-West Link contract. The Liberals’ Michael...

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**Coming Soon**

The Affairs of State parliamentary charts for the 2015 Federal and Victorian governments will soon be available for sale. Never be at a loss for a name or department again! Our coffee chart – your guide to the best coffee shops on and around Spring St, Melbourne – will also soon be available. Contact alistair@affairs.com.au for more information.
Plans to rebuild hotel

Pub patrons rally in support

By TYLA HARRINGTON

The Conargo Hotel was once a popular watering hole for local farmers and graziers. It was a place of camaraderie and good times. However, due to a series of unfortunate events, it has fallen into disrepair and is no longer the vibrant hub it once was.

With plans to rebuild the hotel, the community has banded together to support the project. "We want to bring the hotel back to life," said local resident Mrs. Johnson. "It's a piece of our history and it belongs to all of us."

Building not listed as state heritage

The Conargo Hotel is located in a town of national heritage importance, but it has not been recognized by the NSW government. "We've tried to get it listed, but it just doesn't meet the criteria," said local historian Mr. Smith.

The hotel has been a part of the community for generations, and it's a loss for all who care about preserving our heritage. "It's a treasure that we can't afford to lose," said Mr. Brown.

THE PERFECT PUBLICAN

A publican must be a democrat, an artist, an aeronaut, and a doctor. He must be able to entertain Prime Ministers, pickpockets, princes, philanthropists and the police - and he can afford to lose the political fence, a football, a dead possum, a fence, a jockey, a jester, a janitor, and a janitor.

As a result, he will settle arguments and fights, and he must be a qualified boxer, wrestler, weightlifter, sprinter and pugilist.

He must not allow his customers to become drunk and when drinking with badminton, badminton, commercial travelers and company representatives, even though he has just stepped a "beer throwing" contest in the public bar.

To be successful - he must keep the bar full, the house full, the tables and the customers full and not get himself.

Mayor: Community will feel loss of iconic pub

Conargo Shire Mayor Norm Brennan says his community will feel the loss of the Conargo Hotel.

Mr Brennan, who owns the neighbouring Conargo Store for 14 years, says the hotel was a source of pride for the village, but also for the wider region.

"Everyone loved the pub, and it had so much history in it," Mr Brennan said.

"It was a social venue for people across Australia. People had so many memories from the pub." Mr Brennan added.

Conargo Hotel: Naira and Betty Lodge

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O’Brien defended the release of what he said was a ‘letter of guarantee’ to the East-West Connect group signed in September. He accused the present Government of being ‘dishonest’ by claiming that the contract for the $6.8 billion project was not valid.

The ‘General goes for the detail’

The Age revealed that Auditor-General John Doyle’s office has been gathering information on the proposal to investigate the East-West Link, hoping to probe the former government’s approval and to give taxpayers greater understanding of the present government’s decision to abandon the plan. It was not until early February that former Victorian Treasurer Michael O’Brien unveiled the so-called ‘side letter’ which detailed how the consortium would still be entitled to compensation even if no legal contract exists.

AAA Rating at Risk

Victoria’s coveted AAA credit rating could be threatened if Labor is forced to hand over a big compensation payout following its decision to dump the East-West Link contract as reported in The Age. With the cost of breaking the deal rising by the day, the international ratings agencies which help to determine interest charges for government borrowing have warned that any payout which hurts the budget would require efforts to rein in spending elsewhere.

Abortion Zone?

Victorian Sex Party (pro-abortion) MP Fiona Patten wants protest exclusion zones around abortion centres after a rival Upper House MP was seen at a rally outside a Melbourne clinic. In the first clash between Victorian micro-parties in what is expected to be a heated Legislative Council, Ms Patten said that Democratic Labor Party (anti-abortion) MP Rachel Carling-Jenkins has been spotted outside the Fertility Control Clinic in East Melbourne. Ms Patten said the incident showed why the State Government should introduce a 100-metre buffer zone around centres to protect patients and staff, according to the Herald Sun.

Money Flow

Greens Leader Greg Barber accused Labor of being hopelessly conflicted because of developer and gaming giant donations. Barber maintained that Labor was ‘behind to these industries while their pockets overflow with their cash’ but said that a $300,000 donation from the Electrical Trades Union and $25,000 from the Construction and Forestry Mining and Energy Union to the Greens would not impact on policy. Almost 70 per cent of Labor’s donations in 2013-14 came from unions, with the rest coming from Labor head office or from its fund-raising bodies.

Opposition Leader Matthew Guy said that Victorians should be concerned about the influence of the militant CFMEU over the Labor Party. The Herald Sun investigated the register of the 2013-14 political party donations.

Private Party Favourites

Taxpayers will fork out hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay for extra staff to help minor parties grapple with legislation in the state’s Upper House. Victorians voted to elect a concoction of MPs from micro-parties including the DLP, Shooters and Fishers, the Sex Party and Vote 1 Local Jobs in the Legislative Council as reported in the Herald Sun.

Porn? What Porn?

The Herald Sun reveals that a sacked government adviser who confessed to being a parliamentary porn purveyor now denies his own claims that his office was used to store hardcore pornography. In a stunning about-face, Don Coulson, former adviser to premiers Ted Baillieu and Denis Napthine, denied any ‘direct knowledge’ of his Treasury Place office having been used as a porn drop-off point. On oath at the County Court, where he is fighting a $67,280 severance payout, Mr Coulson denied the claims. ‘My office was a drop-off and collection centre. I believe there were more USBs in circulation. I am aware that other people created them.’

Whew!

A plan to breathalyse state MPs and judges has been canned as impractical and unnecessary by Legislative Council president Bruce Atkinson. Atkinson, who oversees Victorian parliamentary rules and standards, along with Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Telmo Languiller, expressed surprise at the scheme floated by Premier Andrews, according to the Herald Sun.

Liberal Light for the Future

The Coalition must reconnect with regional areas if it wants to return to government at the next election, according to the Australian Electoral Commission creates confusion. The AEC and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal may allow Fiona Patten to change her party’s name to the “Liberal Sex Party” or, perhaps the “Liberal Libertarian Party.” When the Liberal Democrats were placed ahead of the Liberal Party of Australia in the complicated Legislative Council ballot paper in the 2014 Victorian election, the party received around twice the vote compared with when it was placed after the LPA candidate.

The evidence suggests that some LPA voters were confused by the name similarity and unintentionally gave their vote to the Liberal Democrats. Clearly, the name identity confusion created by the AEC has assisted the Liberal Democrats to the disadvantage of the LPA. Federal (Sydney) senator Leyonhjelm’s colleagues have also obtained a financial windfall since public funding is awarded to a party received around twice the vote compared with when it was placed after the LPA candidate.

More guard changes

Mr Damien Mantach has resigned as State Director of the Victorian Division of the Liberal Party of Australia. His Deputy Andrew Cox has also resigned.

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Agriculture
Stop Changing the Map
Victorian farmers are at loggerheads with the Federal Government over drought funding eligibility. Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce announced last year that $30 million of concessional loans would be made available to drought-affected farmers in Victoria’s west and northwest. But Victorian Farmers Federation president Peter Tuohey has attacked ‘fault lines’ he said he had been exposed by ‘drawing lines on maps.’

Peter Tuohey said that VFF member Julie Weir, a farmer near Birchip, checked the mapping in mid-November, only to discover that her property was in a 1-in-20 year rainfall deficiency. But when she checked again on the last day of 2014, she discovered the map had been withdrawn to exclude her farm.

Vietnam’s Political Cherry War
Hundreds of kilograms of Australian cherries are entering Vietnam each day on passenger flights from Australia and avoiding quarantine, despite a ban on Australian fruit. The Weekly Times revealed that some travellers and expats are taking up to 20 kilograms of cherries per person into the country, making a mockery of Vietnam’s decision to block Australian horticultural products because of fruit-fly concerns.

The Vietnamese ban will cost the northern Victorian communities of Swan Hill and Robinvale about $32 million annually in table grape exports. Meanwhile, more than 20 boxes of cherries carried by Australian travellers, these boxes containing five kilograms of cherries each, were seen being waved through customs in Ho Chi Minh City early in February after Vietnam’s New Year’s Day ban on the entry of Australian fruits.

Arts
Art Galleries Want Top Dog
Victorian art gallery directors are spearheading a push for the creation of a national peak body for visual arts institutions, sparked partly by the scandal over stolen antiquities at the National Gallery of Australia. Unveiling the proposal at the National Public Galleries Summit in Bendigo, Public Galleries Association of Victoria president Karen Quinlan said that former NGV director Rona Radford was ‘shot in the water’ without support from any former NGV director Rona Radford was ‘shot in the water’ without support from any.

The controversy came about because of the furore over the Dancing Shiva, an 11th-century Indian statue bought by the gallery for $5 million in 2008. The statue, purchased from disgraced antiquities dealer Subhash Kapoor, has since been returned to India.

The Italian Job
Rachel Griffiths, who is preparing to play Julia Gillard, will be in Venice come May. So will Cate Blanchett, Janet Holmes a Court, Rupert Myer, Naomi Milgrom, Simon Mordant and Neil Balnaves. They are among more than 60 people who have donated $7.5 million to build a gallery to show Australian contemporary art and architecture at the Venice Biennale.

Historian Wins Award
The Europeans in Australia: Volume III, Nation, by Alan Atkinson, has won the $100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature. Dr Atkinson has been a live-in tutor at St Paul’s College in the University of Sydney.

Holloway All the Way
Jonathan Holloway will take over the directorship of the Melbourne Festival from 2016 as reported in The Age. He will start work in Melbourne in April and take over from current director Josephine Ridge after her three-year term finishes at the end of this years festival. Originally from Sheffield in England’s north, Holloway, 44, was artistic director of the Norwich and Norfolk Festival for six years before moving to Western Australia where he directed the Perth Festival.

Events
Many people have done this
Aviation shows, car racing, garden shows, art show, musical shows, comedy shows, community activities. That’s this week in Melbourne. And Moomba.

Oh. 600 companies attended the Avalon Air Show 38 symposiums, 2000 delegates and 100 plus official military, industry and scientific delegations. All included Defence contract opportunities.

The Man With a Van
Footy legend and local, Ron Barassi, is regularly cruising the esplanade in his Kombi Campervan promoting tourism in St Kilda. The 1976 VW Kombi Campervan will provide visitors with a new-generation, mobile information centre reminding them of all the fun and quirky activities which the suburb has to offer. At weekends, visitors to the mobile van will have access to iPads that will link them with the tourism website as reported in the Herald Sun.

Sixty-Minute Safety Bonus
The Melbourne Formula One Grand Prix started an hour earlier from this year after organisers were ordered to switch the start time due to safety concerns. The Australian Grand Prix, from 12 to 15 March is one of five F1 races that will start earlier amid fears they could be marred by accidents. Formula One Management has ruled this year’s race must start at 4pm instead of the scheduled 5pm twilight as reported in the Herald Sun. Several drivers have complained about fading light since the Albert Park race was moved to a 5pm start in 2009.

NGV Forced Fashion Show
The Jean Paul Gaultier exhibition has broken box office records for a summer show at the National Gallery of Victoria with more than 15,000 people through its doors in the three months since it opened. The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk was so popular the NGV kept it screening until 7 February, as reported in the Herald Sun.

White Night
Crowds poured in from every direction to converge on the all-night arts festival showcasing the best of outdoor entertainment. About 80 free events ran from 7pm to 7am on 21 February, from the Melbourne Museum in the north to the National Gallery of Victoria in the south.

Giant light projections along Flanders Street and a glowing lotus pond on the Yarra River transformed Melbourne’s heartland into a wonderland according to the Herald Sun. The third annual festival was on February 21 on track to attract an anticipated 500,000 people and new crowd control measures were proving successful.

More than 700,000 people were expected in Melbourne’s CBD for the event. Authorities warned those not attending White Night, major sporting events, music festivals, concerts or Chinese New Year to stay out of Melbourne. In a bid to keep crowds moving, public transport ran all night for White night’s dawn-to-dusk spectacular and extra trams will be on the rails for the ICC Cricket World Cup.

Last year’s White Night festival resulted in pedestrian crushes at many sites, with the worst near Flinders and Swanston Streets, after larger than expected numbers attended the lit-up extravaganza. Melbourne was tested in how it deals with crowds, with the city grounding to a halt on New Year’s Eve when there were about 500,000 people. In a bumper weekend, almost
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900,000 people flocked to an unprecedented number of events being staged across the CBD, Rod Laver Arena, MCG, AAMI Park, Flemington Racecourse and the Showgrounds.

According to the Herald Sun, White Night drew a sell-out crowd of 600,000 people and Soundspace sonic festival attracted 30,000 revellers. Nearby, Black Caviar Lightning Stakes Day and Cirque du Soleil attracted 15,000 while Guy Sebastian sang to more than 10,000 in Rod Laver. On the next day, 90,000 attended the MCG to watch India and South Africa and 30,000 flooded Little Bourke Street. New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, thousand soccer fans attracted Melbourne City and Perth Glory, 12,000 Eagles fans packed Rod Laver Arena for the band's concert, and next door, at Hisense Arena, 4,000 fans were expected to watch Melbourne United face the Sydney Kings.

White Night organisers have extended the event, which now runs from the Melbourne Museum in the north to the National Gallery of Victoria in the south, after overcrowding chaos and long lines last year.

60 years on

Moomba (also known as the Moomba Festival), held annually in Melbourne, is Australia's largest free community festival, and one of Australia’s longest running community festivals. It is celebrated during the Labour Day long weekend (over four days, from Friday to the second Monday in March). Moomba is culturally important to Melbourne, having been celebrated since 1955 and regularly attracts up to a million people with a record attendance of 1.7 million set in 1996. It is run by the City of Melbourne.

Traditional events include the Moomba parade, crowning of Moomba monarchs, fireworks displays, carnivals in the gardens along the river, river activities including watersports, water floaters, the birdman rally, as well as live music and bands.

Above detail; thanks to Professor Google.

Education

Untrained Teachers Graduating

Australian Catholic University Vice-Chancellor Geoffrey萌强, who headed the recent review into teacher education, said he was alarmed to discover that some teaching degrees do not guarantee any practical training before graduates enter the workforce. The review is controversial, as it rejects proposals to introduce minimum university entrance scores for teaching degrees or compulsory post-graduate qualifications for teachers. In its submission, the peak body the Australian College of Educators called for an ATAR cut-off of 70 for teaching degrees according to The Age.

Dropouts Wasting Public Money

Victorian students who drop out of costly training courses are wasting more than $40 million in fees and government funding every year. Serious doubts have now been raised about the integrity of a government-subsidised vocational program. These doubts follow revelations that job applicants are being targeted and pressured to sign up for courses by private colleges.

Yet while enrolments and course fees have increased, state government figures show that only four in 10 students who started these short courses in 2013 have completed them. Average fees for diploma and advanced diploma students in the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme rose by 84 per cent between 2011 and 2014. Fees charged to these students increased from $2.4 million in 2009 to $79.6 million last year according to The Age.

Gosh

Vacant Victorian schools are being sold to meet a $225 million sales target, which has been dramatically increased in recent years. As part of an aggressive push to fund the Naphine government’s infrastructure program, the target was increased sevenfold from $32 million in 2009-10 to the current amount. Around 720 schools are currently deemed surplus, and many of the vacant sites are the result of school mergers.

Current schools on the market include Norlane Primary School and the former Western Heights Secondary College, while the former Kealba Secondary College, former Calder Rise Primary School and former Keilor Park Primary School are among a handful of schools being prepared for sale.

All this was revealed by The Age, on the basis of documents which were obtained through the Freedom of Information process by Our Children Our Schools, this group being an alliance of public education community campaigns. The alliance has described the sale of schools as ‘short-sighted.’ Dr Peter Goss, of the Grattan Institute, said that governments should be ‘very careful’ about selling school assets or land that may be needed in the future.

Give Your Certificate Back

Almost 10,000 government-funded vocational students in Victoria have had their qualifications recalled in the past year, because of concerns about poor training and standards breaches. This action has inspired calls for a regulatory crackdown. The extent of recalls is equivalent to almost 5 per cent of the 200,000 qualifications issued in 2013, according to The Australian.

Inner-city Parking Tax

The Education Department has been forced to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in congestion taxes imposed on inner-city state schools. In February, the department told 14 government schools that each of them would be slapped with a $950 charge for every car park in their school grounds. According to The Age, religious schools were exempt from the tax, which is designed to reduce inner-city traffic.

The tax was extended to new parts of Melbourne by the Naphine government. After an outcry from principals, the government ordered the department to pay the same rates levies, which are expected to reach almost $200,000. Brunswick Secondary College principal Vivienne Telfeson said that her school budget would have taken a $45,000 hit every year because of the levy.

Radicalisation Simmering Quietly

A growing number of Victorian schools are grappling with the radicalisation of students and parents, the Australian Principals Federation has warned in The Age, according to new Victorian branch president Peter Kearney. It comes as the Education Department appoints a senior adviser to work with government and non-government schools to promote racial and religious tolerance and social cohesion.

Home-Schooled Kids Alone

The Victorian government has refused to commit to monitoring home-schooled children. The Weekly Times reported that parents who register their children for home-schooling in Victoria are not monitored by the Education Department. Parents are not visited at home and are not required to participate in curriculum and assessment checks. Victorian Principals Association president Gabrielle Leigh said that ‘the lack of any monitoring was necessary.’ ‘Schools are regularly monitored and there needs to be consistency across the state,’ Ms Leigh said. Parents who home-school their children are monitored in all other states and territories.

Three Surprise Deaths

Three trainee psychiatrists and an intern working in Victorian hospitals died suddenly in recent weeks, sparking concern about the intensity of their training programs and the overburdened mental health system in which they are working, as reported in The Age. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists recently advised members that three of its trainees had died unexpectedly. A general medical intern working at Geelong Hospital also died last month. He was just one week into his internship.

Dr Mukesh Haikerwal, a Victorian GP and chairman of the World Medical Association Council, said that after talking to psychiatric trainees in Victoria, he was concerned about the low pass rate in their training program and the workload they faced in the already overburdened public hospital system which is in a state of crisis.

Vocation Education Bankrupted

Private education provider Vocation Limited has put itself and its assets on the auction block after it announced an expected $27 million loss for the first six months of the financial year. In The Australian, Vocation’s chief executive, Mark Hutchinson, in whose name they are working, and the company’s bankers continued longer than expected.

Schools Cutting Education

Experienced principals are struggling to balance their books, with some school budgets plunging into debt for the first time despite promised Gonski funding. As schools returned in the new year, some principals have had to cut literacy and numeracy programs and spending on maintenance and student welfare to make ends meet. It comes as the Education department investigates the Gonski deal and the Andrews government prepares to release details of how much extra state and federal money Victorian schools have received under the funding deal.

Believe it or not

Panels of students are being used to interview school students in Victoria. The move has been praised by the Victorian Student Representative Council, but the Australian Education Union said that students did not have the depth of knowledge to decide who should be employed. Melton West Primary School, Eltham Secondary College and St Helena Secondary College are amongst a handful of Victorian schools that also use selective panels as reported by The Age.

Sad

The former principal of Yeshivah College from the period that sex offenders David Cyprys
of disconnections in Australia, and, as reported in The Age, the State Government has launched an inquiry into the adequacy of the hardship policies of the state’s energy retailers.

**Power Cut for Homes**

A power giant has proposed cutting poles and wires charges by $55 from next year, in a sign that an era of punishing electricity price rises is coming to an end. United Energy’s draft plan would reduce annual network costs for an average household to $375 and freeze prices for a further four years. The proposed relief for its 650,000 Victorian customers would be the first in six years. United Energy spokeswoman said that the planned reduction was due to lower borrowing costs, reduced smart meter fees from next year and declining electricity demand according to the Herald Sun.

**Environment & conservation**

Persons who suffered loss or damages as a result of the Murrindindi Bushfire on Black Saturday, 7 February 2005, should take notice of a proposed settlement of the Murrindindi Bushfire Class Action in the Supreme Court of Victoria. If you are, or think you might be, a person who has suffered loss or damage as a result of the Murrindindi Bushfire, you should inquire as to the terms of the offer, which was published on page 5 in the 26 February edition of The Age.

**Dust and Despair**

Regional Victoria is falling into drought. Rainfall in the west is at its lowest since the devastating drought that peaked in 2006. Regional Victoria should alternately drench in heavy rain and would green paddocks and replenish parched dams, but the weather bureau warned that a year’s average rainfall would be needed. A Herald Sun investigation found that almost a dozen regional centres in the state’s west had experienced their lowest rainfall in eight years.

**Let the Brumbies Roam Free**

Wild horses will continue roaming free through a northern Victorian forest after an unlikely Upper House intervention by the Shooters and Fishers party. Originally, Parks Victoria had planned to remove about 120 brumbies from the Barmah National Park as part of a feral pest eradication program to protect the environment. The Barmah Brumby Preservation Group’s president, Murray Willaton, said that the horses were vital to Victoria’s history. According to The Age, the number of horses in the forest was under control and once eradicated the breed could never be recovered.

**Star of Geelong**

A fresh plan to bring a massive factory freezer fishing boat to Australian waters has been strongly opposed by marine campaigners. The 95-metre, Dutch-managed Dirk Dirk, which has been renamed the Geelong Star, is coming to the country and will make the Victorian city its home port. The plan echoes the controversial attempt in 2012 to bring a ‘super trawler’ to Australia, which prompted a backlash from environmentalists and smaller fishing operations. The Age reports that the original super trawler proponents are now bringing the Geelong Star to Australia again, to catch a quota of jack mackerel and red bait in Commonwealth waters.

**How sad**

The head of the Royal Botanical Gardens says that he is sad about, but determined to take positives from, the death of the 400-year-old Separation Tree, one of Melbourne’s landmarks. For safety reasons, arborists will begin lopping branches and the trunk of the towering, heritage-listed river red gum, which vandals killed by ring-barking the trunk. According to The Age, this was one of the few trees left in the gardens that had not been felled as part of Melbourne’s modernisation. It is believed to date from the 17th century when indigenous tribes met beside the Yarra River. And at the same place, on 15 November 1850, Superintendent Charles Latrobe announced that what is now Victoria would separate from NSW.

**To Kill or Conception**

With possum culling a crime in Victoria, Surrey Hills’s Deborah Best said she saw no better option than putting the marsupials on birth control. Wildlife Victoria gave the tick of approval to possum contraception, which involves catching and implanting possums with hormone devices.

But Boroodara City Council isn’t considering contraception, despite acknowledging possums as a problem. Another council in Melbourne’s suburbs, the City of Yarraville, harboured the notion in 2012, but plans were scrapped because of cost, impracticality and public concern.

**Kill Trees, Kill Bees**

Urban honey producers are urging the state government to reconsider a plan to inject poison into some trees that could affect bee populations in suburban Melbourne. The government intends to inject suburban trees with poison, so as to eradicate Marchalina helenium or the giant pine scale, and to help protect the state’s $1 billion softwood timber industry from the pest. According to The Age, the giant pine scale is a parasitic insect, native to the Mediterranean and Russia, which has been responsible for the destruction of pine forests in its native countries.

Nearer to home, infestations have lately been found in Mount Waverley and Harkaway near Narre Warren. Urban beekeepers, a growing and vocal movement in Melbourne’s food community, are ‘seriously concerned’ for their future after the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources announced that it would inject pine trees across a large swathe of eastern and southern suburbs and the Dandenong Ranges with the chemical Imidacloprid. This is a potent neonicotinoid (...) pesticide, which has been associated with the rapid decline in bee colonies in the northern hemisphere, and which has been banned by the European Union.

**Protect the Bandycock**

Environment groups are preparing a court bid to protect the remnant southern brown bandicoot population in Melbourne’s southeast, as reported in The Age. The Green Wedges Coalition and Environmental Justice Australia will argue urban expansion in Melbourne’s south-east will threaten the future of the remaining bandicoots and are calling for a ‘functional’ wildlife corridor.

**Regional Bombers Let Loose**

As reported in the Weekly Times, aerial bombers can now attack fires without waiting for orders from the ground. A recent rule change means that helicopters and planes are now being
A pick up in export activity, sales and employment saw out the last quarter of 2014 for Victorian business but has not translated into improved confidence for 2015, according to the VECCI - Bank of Melbourne survey of business trends and prospects released this week.

Encouragingly, exports, particularly among Victoria’s diverse manufacturing sector, rose for the quarter and were one of the few business indicators expected to continue to rise into the new year as a result of the lower Australian dollar and healthy underlying demand among our key trading partners.

Among other highlights of the quarterly survey of over 400 businesses across seven major industry sectors was the comparatively strong sales and employment performance of the wholesale and retail sector.

Unfortunately, the strong finish to 2014 has not led to positive sentiment towards prospects for the state and federal economies in the year ahead.

Although 17 per cent of respondents anticipate stronger economic growth for the Australian economy over the next 12 months, this is well below the 28 per cent who held this view in the previous quarter.

These findings reflect the lowest level of optimism about the national economy in two years.

For Victoria, 18 per cent of respondents anticipate that state economic conditions will improve over the year ahead, a fall from 25 per cent in the previous quarter.

Regional respondents were more optimistic about the Victorian economy than their metropolitan counterparts, with 22 per cent expecting stronger conditions over the year ahead, compared to only 16 per cent of metropolitan respondents.

The results show enormous opportunity for the new Victorian Government and the Federal Government to deliver policy reforms that raise business sentiment and competitiveness.

Action to reduce business costs and provide long-term certainty is needed to ensure this is a one-off dip and not the start of a downward trend in business confidence.

Bank of Melbourne Chief Executive Scott Tanner added: “The latest VECCI-Bank of Melbourne survey of business trends and prospects is a mixed report card for the Victorian economy, revealing a disappointing decline in business confidence.”

“However, the combination of relatively low interest rates and a weaker Australian dollar should ease pressure on Victoria’s key sectors and provide growth opportunities.”

Opportunity for government to influence business as survey reveals declining confidence in prospects for the year ahead

By Mark Stone
automatically dispatched to fight fires before ground crews arrive. Previously, aircraft could be called in only after ground crews arrived at the fire, and after a safety check was carried out by the officer in charge of fighting the fire.

Now, pilots make their own safety assessment, which usually involves doing a ‘dummy run’ to check for people, before bombing the fire. CFA chief Evan Ferguson said landholders, who may be fighting fires with their own equipment, must be aware that, under the new system, aircraft could arrive before fire trucks. The change was made in response to a recommendation in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that the CFA and government departments allow dispatch of aircraft without a request from an incident controller or state duty officer.

**Health Check**
The power of Victoria’s environmental watchdog to properly oversee massive rehabilitation projects such as the looming clean-up of Alcoa’s defunct Point Henry aluminium smelter will be tested under a new review. In an interview with *The Age*, Victorian Environment Minister Lisa Neville said that the laws within which the Environment Protection Authority still works may have fallen behind present-day requirements. ‘It has been a long time since the EPA has been through a process of review and really looking at the legislation and its powers, and I think probably it hasn’t kept pace with more modern challenges,’ she said.

**Potential Union Target**
Country Fire Authority chief executive Mick Bourke has quit, prompting fears from the state opposition about a union takeover of the fire services. Mr Bourke has been chief executive for the CFA for six years, during which he had to deal with controversy over the Fiskville centre, which has been linked to unusually high rates of cancer.

In *The Age*, The United Firefighters’ Union secretary Peter Marshall said that firefighters would not miss Mr Bourke. Opposition Emergency Services spokesman Brad Battin said ‘The Coalition are concerned that this is the start of the unionisation take-over of CFA.’

A Herald-Sun headline has the UFU demanding from the CFA (the Government) which includes pay increases of 9.7 per cent plus lots of other items. The CFA has several hundred full time staff, just increased by some 300 since the election, plus at times of fires, they are joined by thousands of farmers and other folk who live out there where the fires can be.

Nearby, the CFA seeks an Executive Manager, Technical Assets Strategy & Services, Horton international

**Antarctic Ship Frozen**
The 63-metre Antarctic Chieftain became trapped in ice some 1650 kilometres northeast of McMurdo Sound in mid-February, damaging its propeller, according to the Rescue Co-ordination Centre New Zealand. Rescue co-ordinator Greg Johnston said the US Coast Guard icebreaker Polar Star was about 100 nautical miles away, as reported by the *Herald Sun*.

**Next**
Notice of intention to publish Notice controlling Game Hunting under the WildLife Act, setting bag limits...etc...

**Gaming**
**Government Avoids Payout**
Daniel Andrews has been saved from having to pay back $85 million to Tatts Group and Tabcorp, after the High Court of Australia knocked back the gambling giants’ appeal applications linked to an old poker machine levy. The Court announced on 13 February, as reported in *The Age*, that the companies’ special leave to appeal applications had been dismissed. Previously, the two companies had operated Victoria’s 27,000 poker machines, which excludes those in Crown Resorts’ Melbourne casino.

Their joint venture licence was not extended when the management of pokies were transferred to pubs and clubs in August 2012. Despite running the pokies for just 46 days in 2012-13, the former Naphine Coalition government sent Tabcorp and Tatts Group bills that represented the entire year’s amount for the now scrapped health benefit levy. The levy was used to fund healthcare and charitable initiatives.

**Health**
**Hospitals Will Demand More**
The state government is facing its first battle to control public sector pay as hospital workers prepare to demand a pay increase of 20 per cent over the net four years. If successful, the claim by the Health Workers Union, which represents 55,000 public sector staff, would cost millions of dollars and deal a blow to the Andrews government’s claim that it is sticking with the previous Coalition government’s wages policy.

Although the Andrews government remains coy, Victoria’s public sector unions are preparing to use a generous pay deal given to paramedics following Labor’s election win as a template to demand big pay rises, according to *The Age*.

**Head of Health to Retire**
Victoria’s Chief Health Officer Rosemary Lester retired at the end of February after three years in the role, according to *The Age*. Dr Lester has served in various roles at the Victorian Health Department for more than 25 years, and is well known for leading the state’s response to the swine flu epidemic in 2009.

**Psychiatrists Present Youth Diagnosis**
Psychiatrists want governments to reopen children’s homes to care for troubled teens, in a return to the system of institutional care dismantled decades ago according to *The Australian*. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists also championed adoption as a preferred alternative to long-term foster care. It has told a Senate inquiry into out-of-home care that institutions are needed to care for children and teenagers with ‘challenging and complex behaviours’, who run away from foster homes to live on the streets. The psychiatrists have proposed that children and teenagers exhibiting violence or self-harm be housed in ‘secure homes’ such as those used in Britain, if they cannot live with their parents or foster families.

**Cancer Risk Full, Fiskville**
Exposure to chemicals and contaminated water at the Country Fire Authority training centre in Fiskville fire fighting training centre in Fiskville contributed to higher rates of cancer and 16 deaths according to a study in *The Age*. The controversial Fiskville fire-fighting training centre, near Ballan, had been linked to high rates of cancer among staff.

**Agriculture**
**Hard Life on a Brown Land**
Outside of Melbourne, the grass has long since turned from green to brown, according to an opinion piece in the *Herald Sun*. Parts of Victoria are facing drought after the most sustained period of below-average rainfall ever to have afflicted the state since the late 19th century. Victoria’s farmers and graziers are resilient. They accept that droughts are part of farming, but last year had the hottest temperatures on record, and those who rely on the land for their living need help.

The Federal Government has allocated $30 million this financial year to help farmers in
financial hardship because of drought. This is on top of $33 million that has already been approved. The Victorian Government is also making grants available to farmers affected by drought conditions as well as bushfires.

**Soil, Food and Cities**

In Melbourne University’s Voice publication, it mentions the fact that agricultural researchers are exploring technologies to support large-scale food waste as a soil conditioner, in the hope of being able to improve soil management as an integral part of the food chain.

**Greens Burned Bridges**

Victoria’s new Agriculture Minister, Jaala Pulford, is seeking to mend connections with the state’s $11 billion agriculture industry, amid concerns about the power of the Greens over the Andrews Government. The Labor government is yet to reveal its position on several key rural issues. But it managed to antagonise some farmers swiftly when, within two weeks of being elected, it announced that it would scrap the $100 wild dog bounty. Victorian Farmers Federation president Peter Tuohy said that he was optimistic the government would heed the peak body’s warnings to consult farmers before finalising its policies, after an initial meeting with Ms Pulford in February.

**Business & investment**

**Nuclear Push Backing**

Melbourne businessman Ron Walker and business partner Hugh Morgan, who wanted to be at the forefront of a nuclear industry in Australia several years ago, now say that lowering the costs of projects will be crucial to getting the industry going. Mr Walker announced that he was buoyed by the decision of Jay Weatherill, South Australia’s Premier, to hold a royal commission to investigate options to expand his state’s involvement in nuclear energy to include enrichment, energy and storage.

The current status of South Australia in this regard is merely that of being a location for the mining of uranium. Mr Walker and Mr Morgan set up a company called Australian Nuclear Energy in 2007 that examined the viability of building a nuclear energy plant near Portland in Victoria. According to the Financial Review, former Labor senator Nick Bolkus, once a New Grocon CEO, unchanged. Mr Broad stated that the process of building a nuclear energy plant near Portland in Victoria. According to the Financial Review, former Labor senator Nick Bolkus, once a New Grocon CEO, announced that he was buoyed by the decision of Jay Weatherill, South Australia’s Premier, to hold a royal commission to investigate options to expand his state’s involvement in nuclear energy to include enrichment, energy and storage.

The long-running legal battle to save Izzy the Staffordshire terrier from being put down will go before the High Court most likely in April. Tania Isbester, a mother of five and Izzy’s owner, took her case to Victoria’s highest court after a Knox City Council panel decided Izzy would be destroyed for biting a woman after the dog escaped from its owner’s backyard. Ms Isbester pursued the matter all the way to the High Court after the Court of Appeal ruled against her, as reported in The Age.

**Live Animal Bait Condemned**

Ten greyhound trainers accused of using live animals to train their dogs have been publicly named, while another five have been suspended as the scandal grows. According to the Herald Sun, the 10 suspected trainers had their names released by Greyhound Racing Victoria board. Among the alleged offenders is Tony Mills, a legendary trainer who in 2013 won the Ken Carr Medal, greyhound racing’s top honour in this country.

Greyhound trainers who used live animals to train their dogs face jail and life bans from the sport as two major inquiries are launched into the barbaric practice. The Herald Sun has obtained horrific images of dogs mauling to death live pigeons, possums and rabbits tied to lures. Those images have sparked outrage and disgust from governments, racing officials and punters. The scandal has cast doubt over the future of Australia’s $3 billion-a-year greyhound racing industry, with 70 people implicated across three states. The Racing Integrity Commissioner and Victoria’s Chief Vet announced that they would each probe incidents of live baiting.

**Series of Unresolved Disturbances**

The suspicious fire that destroyed a $2 million Essendon home in February appears to be the latest in a series of unsolved arson attacks, shootings and bashings plaguing Melbourne’s restaurant scene. The Age understands that there have been at least 10 violent incidents in the past 18 months involving the homes, businesses, staff and families of several restaurateurs across the city.

**Take A Stand**

Daniel Andrews, who made a pre-election commitment to establish Australia’s first royal commission into family violence, has since said that the inquiry would look at how boys were educated about their responsibilities to women and children. He told the Herald Sun that men had a ‘special’ role to play in ending the scourge of violence against women and children, which in 2013 saw 29 Victorian women killed by their partners or ex-partners, and police called out to help terrified and injured victims more than 63,000 times. The Premier agrees with former Victorian Police Commissioner Ken Lay, who said that family violence was a men’s issue, and had to be addressed by men.

**Super Stations Shelved**

BOLD plans to replace small, outdated police stations with regional ‘super-sites’ have been shelved by the Andrews government, as the search for a new Chief Commissioner continues. In his first public comment about police resources, new Police Minister Wade Noonan has said that whoever replaced Ken Lay in the force’s top job would not have unfettered control over the future of stations.

**Body Parts Floating in Yarra**

Member of Victoria Police are scouring missing persons and criminal databases as well as Melbourne tattoo parlours, following the dragging of ‘reasonably fresh’ body parts and a bag of flesh from a river in the city’s inner west. The man from whom the remains came has been identified, but police are conducting DNA tests before releasing his identity.

**Informers Crisis Probed Further**

The probe by Victoria’s peak anti-corruption watchdog into the police informers crisis has reviewed 5,500 documents and interviewed several witnesses under oath. Those witnesses are believed to include former Chief Commissioner Simon Overland. The police handling of informers and witnesses has been blamed for tainting cases, including the collapsed investigation into the murders of Terence and Christine Hodson. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission is finalising its probe into informer scandals first exposed by the Herald Sun in March 2014.

**Commander Concedes Hidden Failures**

Victoria Police recently conceded significant failures in the way it dealt with gangland witnesses and informers, but it is confident reforms will prevent a repeat of the disasters that have dogged the case of murdered informer Terence Hodson. Force Command’s concession that there is ‘clear room for improvement’ in how it had worked with them [informers] in the past’ comes as a joint Fairfax Media and ABC Four Corners investigation reveals that ongoing police chief Ken Lay is urging Victoria’s Coroner to find ex-cop Paul Dale and dead gangland boss Carl Williams responsible for the 2004 murder of career criminal Hodson.

**Construction Starts on Prison**

Work has begun on the new Ravenhall Prison Project, the state’s newest prison for 1,000 offenders. The prison will create 700 jobs at its construction peak and 600 ongoing jobs once it is completed in late 2017. Altogether the Ravenhall prison will cost $2.5 billion over 25 years, including $668.6 million in capital costs and $1.6 billion in total operating costs.
Mokbel Seeking Freedom

Gangland figures including Tony Mokbel are considering legal bids for freedom after the corruption watchdog found ‘negligence of a high order’ in Victoria Police’s handling of informers. The Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission’s damning report was prompted by a Herald Sun investigation, which dealt with the force’s controversial use of informers to get information on gangland crimes, drug lords and corrupt police.

Judicial Baseline Warning

County Court judges have warned that baseline sentences will lengthen criminal trials and increase the number of criminal appeals. Both these developments would put more pressure on the court’s stretched funds. Chief Judge Michael Raveses said that the law on baseline sentences could undo many of the improvements to the way the court performs ‘that we have worked so hard to achieve in recent years.

‘According to The Age, baseline sentences were introduced last year, prescribing median and maximum punishments for a range of crimes including murder and commercial drug-trafficking. They were designed to lengthen average prison terms for offenders, with former Attorney-General Robert Clark saying courts had previously imposed ‘appallingly inadequate’ average sentences.

Train-Surfing Jump

Police and Metro have warned of a growing ‘sub-culture’ of criminal and dangerous behaviour on Melbourne’s rail network. More than 100 incidents of such behaviour took place in each of the last few years. According to Metro chief executive Andrew Lezala in The Age, train-surfing and coupler-riding were problems all over the world, but in his view Melbourne had a bigger problem than other cities.

Local government

Free Parking Is Cheaper

The St Kilda Sea Baths Centre may scrap its current program of paid parking, and may offer spaces for free in the high-demand area, to avoid having to pay a costly congestion levy. According to The Age, the baths’ management had been開放可議 that a paid-parking policy would result in more congestion and driving if businesses decide to make their paid parking spaces free.

Management representative Travis Atkins said that the centre could face a bill of up to $380,000 if it was compelled to pay the levy. The baths would become exempt from the levy if it was compelled to pay the levy.

To Dump Services...

A plan, reported in The Age, to stop councils raising rates beyond the level of inflation could lead to local government dumping services, letting roads or pools go to ruin or slashing staff numbers in a bid to reduce costs, municipal associations have warned. The warning comes after the Baw Baw Shire Council, which covers 4,000 square kilometres in eastern Victoria, blamed a local government dump in the policy, which the Australian Labor Party had promised when it was still in opposition. Representatives of the Baw Baw council said that a restructure which would include job losses had taken into account the Andrews government’s pledge to force councils to cap rate rises at the level of inflation.

Victoria’s budget might have used to shabbier parks, local roads and rubbish collection under a state government plan to cap council rate increases, leading international ratings agency has warned.

In a newsletter to clients, Standard and Poor’s claims Labor’s pledge to limit council rate increases to inflation would hurt the financial position of councils and their ability to maintain infrastructure such as roads and parks.

“Proposed rate caps in the Australian State of Victoria could weaken local councils’ credit quality and their ability to maintain infrastructure,” the briefing says.

The briefing argues similar policies in NSW and previously in Victoria had led to “significant infrastructure backlogs, deteriorating asset quality and lower levels of service”.

Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins said the changes would provide a fair system and transparency to ratepayers, so they would know where their money was being spent.

Labor’s policy has already been slammed by councils, who fear it will restrict the services they can provide — one Mayor has already warned the policy would be “catastrophic”. Municipal Association of Victoria chief executive Rob Spence said councils, who were currently rated by Moody’s at AA2, needed flexibility in their revenue to manage their business or services would be affected.

Rural councils, already struggling with revenue, were most at risk and could be forced to cut services and jobs if there was a rigid policy on rates.

Nearby, the ‘General has been critical of the Municipal Association of Victoria in a recent VAGO (Victorian Auditor-General’s Report). More next month. Says the Association and its Council spend too much on staff.

Varra River Restrictions

The Yarra River will be subject to tougher planning controls and overseen by a new trust in the latest attempt to protect it from inappropriate development. Henceforward, the waterway will be governed by the Yarra River Protection Act, which the Victorian government hopes will curtail the encroachment of large-scale apartments and will preserve vegetation and parkland. According to The Age, planning is overseen by different councils and agencies, with guidelines that can easily be ignored or appealed by developers.

Swimming Against the Tide

Outdoor pools have become a financial burden and administrative headache for many councils. Their ageing, decades-old pipes and concrete have become increasingly expensive to repair. Seasonal opening hours are another argument for their closure. But it was not always so.

Outdoor pools once symbolised both local progress and a cultural disposition for the outdoors, according to RMIT academic Ian McShane.

In his paper, The Past and Future of Local Swimming Pools, McShane reveals that Victorian municipalities built around 200 swimming pools between 1950 and 1980. That period was a grand phase for these monuments, attesting to municipal achievement. Australia’s success at the Melbourne Olympic Games helped spur this pool-building frenzy, as did concerns about drownings. Outdoor pools hosted festivals and pop concerts as their popularity flourished.

And councils were good at building them, McShane says in The Age. ‘They knew about concrete. They knew about hydroponics.’ Pools became part of the ‘urban fabric’ and remain much loved. These days, though, councils are under increasing financial pressure to maintain them. Campaigners hoping to save pools are now looking to impressive victories in battles throughout Melbourne and country Victoria to inspire them in their fight, such as the Fitzroy and Chewton pool victories. The latter where Letter From Melbourne joined the locals’ fight.


I Want My Pony/Tales of Bureaucracy

Rosie lives in Cape Schank on a 1,000-square-metre property with her miniature horse, where the Mornington Peninsula Shire municipal/local laws require a minimum of 2,500 square metres for livestock. Miniature horses need daily exercise and feeding multiple times per day. Shire Environment Protection and Community Safety manager Claire Smith said the owners had been advised of the law, that her friend/ horse is not allowed to stay!. Rosie is expected to grow to no more than 86 centimetres, which is about the same size as an adult great Dane, according to the Herald Sun.

A Myna Umm

Indian Myna birds are no longer welcome in Stonnington, after councillors voted to introduce a program to deter the introduced pests. But councillors have opted against culling the birds. Instead, they intend to place the focus on habitat restoration and biodiversity as a way of deterring the mynas themselves, according to the Herald Sun.

Council Trips Over Bill

Melbourne City Councillors and their staff have spent almost $650,000 on travel in the past two years. New York, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Singapore and Osaka: all these cities were the venues for meetings that included conferences, summits, trade missions and arts festivals. Lord mayor Robert Doyle clocked up the biggest travel and accommodation bill at $43,207 between 2 November 2012 and 31 December 2014. According to the Herald Sun, several of the trips were substantially subsidised by organisations that invited the participants.

New Creature in Docklands

On 20 February, as reported by the Herald Sun, a 100-metre dragon helped usher in the Chinese Year of the Goat amid a range of activities planned for the waterfront precinct. It took around seven tons of steel, 1.5 kilometres of silk and over 800 LED lights to make the Docklands Dragon a spectacular attraction.

Docklands to Welcome Millions

A spectacular free ‘flame and fountain’ show with the potential to attract millions of visitors has been proposed for Docklands. It would feature a giant water display choreographed...
with music during the day while flames, pyrotechnics, video projections and lasers could be added at night. Rydéns Chamber of Commerce supports the idea and Melbourne City Council has dubbed it an exciting concept, while talks are also planned with the State Government, as revealed in the Herald Sun.

Families Feel Under Threat

Queen Victoria Market traders are anxious about a move to introduce seven-day trading at the precinct. They fear that such a move, if introduced, will kill off many family-owned small businesses. While most agree that the market should open longer, the stallholders say that they have been left with little or no detail on how the changes will be implemented. According to The Age, many of the stalls are run by families who already work long hours, and who say that opening every day and into the evening would "just be impossible." Melbourne Mayor Robert Doyle announced the new opening hours in February as part of a $250 million revamp of the market.

Planning

Row to Save Lonsdale Street Building

The Uniting Church wants to demolish the dilapidated Princess Mary Club at 130 Lonsdale Street and lease the land to Leighton. The plan comes on the jocks which/former predecessor: whether to allow Heritage Victoria to issue a demolition permit for the building to make way for an office tower. The Uniting Church's general secretary, the Reverend Mark Law, said that the goal was to ensure the architectural and social significance of the neo-Gothic Wesley Church and its supporting buildings, as reported in The Age.

Skyscraper Density Too Intense

High-rise apartment towers in central Melbourne are being built at four times the density of other cities, according to a report in The Age. Deemed 'tiny apartments,' Melbourne is in the middle of a big change, driven mostly by controls and apartment design standards. Melbourne must establish much tighter density standards, but he has slammed Matthew Guy, said, 'the AFL is ...'

Sports

A Top Spot

The Melbourne Cricket Club has a new President, its twenty seventh, lawyer with HWL Epsworth and former Melbourne footballer Steven Smith succeeding Paul Sheehan in April. The Melbourne Cricket Club has a new President, its twenty seventh, lawyer with HWL Epsworth and former Melbourne footballer Steven Smith succeeding Paul Sheehan in April.

AFL Revenue Under Threat

The AFL’s ability to control gambling on football is under investigation after the controversial betting on its rising star award. At stake are millions of dollars in gambling revenue which, at present, the AFL is able to demand from bookmakers. A spokesman for the AFL, reported in The Age, said the AFL is ... completing a review of its integrity processes and policies.'

Safety First Thing in the Morning

Two Goulburn Valley primary schools will try out a before-school water safety program that, according to The Age, may become a model of how schools could teach students to swim and be safe around water. The program comes after Life Saving Victoria issued research late last year. This researched showed the parlous state of children’s swimming skills and water safety knowledge.

Fewer schools now offer swimming lessons than used to be the case. Drownings are the leading cause of death for children aged up to 14 years. More than 50 per cent of children leave primary school unable to swim 50 metres or float for two minutes. The Goulburn Valley program was devised by LSV with a $30,000 grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

Transport - ports

Hastings

The underlying sentiment of the Labor Government as an Opposition (it was that the Geelong area was the better place to build our next container port rather than Hastings. The Port of Hastings Development Authority CEO Mike Lean says the focus now is investigating the logistics associated with using Hastings as a bulk port. The port already does bulk work for oil and gas. Nearby municipalities are concerned for Jobs, etc. More next month, unless you do your own research.

Rent increase

Stavedore at the nation’s busiest container terminal face massive rent increases of up to 800 per cent as the Victorian government readies the Port of Melbourne for sale.

Fairfax Media has confirmed that the Victorian government has notified DP World Australia, one of two stavedores at the port, that it wants to massively increase rent at the terminal, prompting warnings of job losses and economic damage to the state.

The port takes in about $40 million a year in rent from DP World and Asciano, which owns Patrick ports. Asciano’s rent is due to be reviewed next year, if the government were to achieve the increases, then the port could be in for a windfall boost to its revenue worth about $320 million a year. The port’s total revenue last financial year was $368 million.

The revenue on offer will be a key driver of the price the government achieves in the privatisation process under way. Consortiums are formng to bid for the Port of Melbourne, with interest expected to range as much as $5 billion when it is sold this year.

Pearl Drops Anchor

The streets of Mornington were flushed with 1,800 visitors as the first P&O super-liner berthed off the Harbour recently. Hundreds of residents greeted passengers of the Pacific Pearl, on a one-day stopover in Mornington before heading to Portland. Over the next 12 months, the cruise line will make five calls to Mornington, injecting almost $2 million into the local economy, according to the Herald Sun.
public transport project since the City Loop was built, has been hit by a two-month delay and will not open until late June. According to *The Age*, trains were scheduled to begin operating along the new 45-kilometre link between Southern Cross Station and West Werribee in April, but now they will not do so until 21 June, after the government made a decision to delay the link’s opening. (The press release said there was a shortage of trains...all the fault of the previous Government, after the former Labor Government had planned the Regional Rail Link in the first place."

**Transport - road**

**East-West Problems Continue**

*The Age* revealed on 10 March that legislation to avoid a taxpayer-funded East-West Link compensation bill remains an option being considered by the Victorian government. This is despite fears that such a move would damage Victoria’s reputation as a safe place to invest, and perhaps would result in the state’s current credit rating being lowered.

**West Gate Nightmare Looms**

A major expansion of Melbourne’s port due for completion late next year is tipped to funnel more than 6,000 extra trucks a day onto the West Gate Freeway, prompting a truck industry warning that congestion on the West Gate Bridge will become dramatically worse. Webb Dock is being expanded at a cost of $1.2 billion to create capacity for an extra one million shipping containers in the Port of Melbourne.

The West Gate and Monash Freeways will, together, constitute virtually the only link to and from Webb Dock, which is forecast to generate more than 10,000 daily trips within 10 years. So great an increase is going to impose further strain on a freeway that already struggles to move more than 170,000 vehicles a day, according to *The Age*. Peter Anderson, chief executive of the Victorian Transport Association, warned that the lack of rail access to Webb Dock will force thousands of heavy vehicles a day onto the West Gate Bridge, many will of them laden with heavy loads that will limit them to speeds of just 25 km/h as they ascend the bridge.

A new access road is being built that will directly connect Webb Dock to the freeway and keep trucks off residential streets in Port Melbourne, a key criterion of the port expansion project, which began under the former Victorian Government.

**Society**

**Beer Taps Tightened**

A beer war is brewing that could see craft beers on tap phased out in Australian pubs according to the *Herald Sun*. Foreign-owned alcohol giant SAB Miller, which controls Carlton & United Breweries, is attempting to get a stranglehold on the booming craft beer industry by locking out home-grown makers.

**We Want Fewer Holidays**

Business groups have demanded that the new Australian Football League public holiday – announced by Daniel Andrews recently – be scrapped, declaring the State Government’s decision to gazette two new holidays as ‘absolutely insane.’ *The Herald Sun* reports that Victoria is now the public holiday capital of Australia after the state government announced holidays for Grand Final eve and Easter Sunday.

Grand Final Friday, alone, is predicted to cost at least $800 million in wages, lost productivity and penalty rates. Half of Melbourne’s restaurants are expected to close on Grand Final Friday, with the imposition of penalty rates at double time and a half. As a consequence, visitors to the city on the day will have few options concerning places to eat. ‘It’s going to be anarchy,’ Restaurants and Catering Australia chief John Hart said.

**Multicultural Business Ministerial Council**

Appointments thereto, david.mciver@ecodev.vic.gov.au or Small Business Victoria,

**Vale**

Carew, William F.J. (Bill), Davidson, Richard. Freeman, Shirley (21/10/24 - 28/12/14) – Pharmacologist. Guest, James (11/07/16 - 20/01/15) - Died aged 99 and was a respected surgeon. Guinness, Michael Lee (20/06/38 - 20/02/15). Dr Alf Bamblett, Aboriginal leader

Hamilton, Kelvin Charles (03/06/21 - 10/02/15) - Teacher, Mentor and avid golfer. Horton, Dr Valda Doreen - aged 88 years old. Lewis, Dianne (21/04/44 - 31/12/14) - Social Secretary. Ran a newsagent in Wattle Park and was a secretary at Qantas. Lipton, Ross (18/07/57 - 09/12/14) McDonald, Dr Dennis Parton, Willis Moss Robertson, Mavis Ruston, Ted (01/08/15 - 30/12/14) - Soldier, toy-maker, people’s advocate. His funeral was attended by members of the Australian Commando Association and many friends.

Slattery, Bernie - Respected journalist died at age 65, a veteran who wrote and sub-edited for more than four decades, including 26 years on two News Corp publications, the Geelong Advertiser and the *Herald Sun*. 

27 January to 10 March, 2015

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