Reflection on the Past Year Manure Edition

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Letter from Melbourne

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About the editor
Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB

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

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

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

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

About the publisher
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EDITORIAL

Your editor had to buy some horse manure for the Garden over Christmas, which was not a long drive in whichever direction from the seaside cottage, one or two dollars a bag. A pretty good deal. He was soon muscling about the state of Melbourne’s roads back in the 1890’s, when it was a big debate/discussion as to what would happen as Melbourne’s City area/CBD horse use continued to grow. Perhaps with manure to reach the height of a two storey building in the main streets.

Over Christmas coffee, someone mentioned that Holden’s horse and saddlery business in Adelaide was well into its stride by then. Then we got the car, all hurred up in its delivery as a result of the First World War. Rushing along the road, we come to the Victorian Hire-Purchase Act 1958, which released a tsunami of cars onto the roads and highways as so many people could now afford a car, and at the same time denying Flinders Street Station the role of being the busiest pedestrian train station in the World.

Melbourne’s competition with Sydney for the population growth and the citification/urbanisation (from The Bush) of the Australian and Victorian population all gave Melbourne a huge boost, and the citification of jobs.

Your Editor reckons that 15 April 2014 was the day that Melbourne and a large number of its suburbs hit quasi-gridlock for eighteen hours of each day. It won’t get better for some many years. Public transport is at overload. The Geelong trains over this past Christmas period would get about a 4. Bad on time. Bad on arrival. Bad on seat availability. As said in the editorial of the last Edition, most parliamentarians would not know enough serious points for a serious discussion as to public transport and road transport’s future.

Transport is one of Melbourne and Victoria’s main issues into the Future. Let the Parliament and all inside it respect the money that the taxpayer is pouring into it, and perhaps we can go back in time, not to the manure days, on the roads, but to a time when visitors to Parliament might hold the debating chambers in respect, as some of the big issues were/are discussed.

Cover. The Portarlington community have had a community swimming pool, easily privately-owned for quite a while now. Sadly, the City of Greater Geelong, local Victorian parliamentarians and even federal money (surely tax benefits for some private support) seem to have no interest in ‘local community’ (perhaps too Old School!) for if the pool closes because some bureaucrats say it needs repairs for which money is wanting, the kids will have to bus it 50 km into Geelong. An hour in a Bus to go for a swim? Community pools are needed. The people in the Cover photo are all fighting to keep the pool open, for the kids splashing in the background.

STATE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

We’re Hiring. And Hiring. And Hiring ...

The Herald Sun states that the Victorian Ministerial Offices have now become not merely Victoria’s, but the entire country’s, biggest single employer of ministerial staff. Since it took office a year ago, it has added 30 new positions.

At present there are 258 advisers, assistants, spin-doctors, and drivers working for the Premier and for his cabinet colleagues. It costs an estimated $25 million to keep all them on the payroll. This revelation comes as the administration faces questions over its finances. One in five of the 236 ministerial staff works directly for the Premier.

The Premier claims a retinue of 30 advisers, not counting a director of policy, a director of parliament and strategic relations, a legal counsel, a chief of staff, a deputy chief of staff, a media director, a media adviser, a separate suburban media adviser, and two assistants, as well as administrative support personnel.

Keeping It Real? No, Keeping It Vague

A Herald Sun article on November 26 discussed an impressive show of unanimity by the major parties in Victoria’s Parliament. They have baulked at a recent call by the State Ombudsman to clean up the procedures for political donations, and to weaken through new statutory procedures the grounds for assuming that politicians are simply being bought.

Planning Minister Richard Wynne refused to reveal whether he supported or opposed the plea, which Ombudsman Deborah Glass made, to ban developer donations and introduce new transparency laws. He said that this was the responsibility, not of himself, but of his cabinet colleague, Special Minister of State Gavin Jennings. Meanwhile, the Coalition is equally unenthusiastic about urgings to reform donation rules.

Political Donations

Donations from property developers to political candidates create a perception that politicians can be bought, according to Victoria’s Ombudsman Deborah Glass. The findings, will add pressure to the state government to begin reform of political donation laws in Victoria.

Greens MP for Melbourne, Ellen Sandell, said she would try to introduce laws banning council candidates from taking donations from property developers.

The Ombudsman’s investigation into political donations was launched after a complaint, that was ultimately found to be unsubstantiated, that Casey councillor Geoff Ablett had been involved in offering favourable planning application decisions in return for donations to his state Liberal Party election campaign, as reported in The Age.

ALP And Branch-Stacking

The Age announced on December 12 that the Victorian ALP had failed in a dramatic legal bid to close down the anti-branch-stacking campaign of its leading reform champion. The State Supreme Court outcome allows a veteran party activist, Eric Dearcott, continued access to the party’s membership records, so that he can continue to pursue his anti-branch-stacking crusade.

Those who enthusiastically greeted the win for Dearcott as a victory for party democracy and transparency included none other than John Cain, who in 1982 became Victoria’s first ALP Premier in 27 years (the last such Premier, a victim of the party’s 1954-55 split, had been his own father). ‘Whistleblowers need protection,’ Cain observed. ‘The party shouldn’t be trying to shut him up.’ Cain retired from the Premiership in 1990.

ALP Action

The Victorian ALP is moving swiftly to recover credit card and personal data it says was unlawfully obtained from its database by a party dissident and self-styled whistleblower, amid threats of criminal charges and court action, as per The Australian.

More than 200 ALP members in Victoria will lose their party membership immediately and a further 270 face similar consequences over branch-stacking breaches in the biggest membership purge in Labor history.

An investigation into fraudulent membership also lead to two “low level” Labor operatives likely facing branch-stacking charges.

The purge comes after insiders accused groups associated with federal leader Bill Shorten of using prepaid gift cards to pay for memberships. But the investigation found the so-called gift cards scandal was a myth and the Shorten loyalists mentioned in media reports had no case to answer, according to The Australian.

Premier stance

The militant Construction Forestry Mining Electrical Union has put $2.4 million in donations into the Victorian Labor Party, as Premier Andrews refuses to distance himself from the union’s controversial leaders, John Setka and Shaun Reardon.

Federal opposition Leader Bill Shorten has formally launched Labor’s new union governance policy, stating the party has “zero tolerance” for criminal and corruption, according to the Herald Sun.
The National Country Party of Australia, or the Commission had applied to the jurisdiction, "change its name to include the word 'country.' The Victorian National Party had failed in its bid to be

Whose country?

in public office. All that is about to change. Research has revealed. The figure is forecast to currently within

At present, the VEC's powers so it can investigate all corrupt conduct. It will now be able to investigate cases where it reasonably suspects corruption as well as being able to probe cases of misconduct in public office.

This offence is a ‘catch-all’ offence that can be used to start an investigation where the conduct does not otherwise constitute an offence currently within IBAC’s corrupt conduct jurisdiction,” Public Transport Minister Jacinta Allan told Parliament as she introduced the Bill, according to James Campbell is state politics editor, writes James Campbell, State Politics Editor for the Herald Sun.

Property Windfall
Stamp duty costs have spiralled out of control in Victoria, the state’s Property Council says, as new figures show home buyers have handed over more than $41 billion in the tax over the past 15 years. Revenue from stamp duty on property has more than doubled since 2000-01 in Victoria from $1.7 billion to $4.2 billion dollars in 2013-14, Property Council of Australian research has revealed. The figure is forecast to hit $5 billion for the first time this year according to The Herald Sun.

Whose country?
An Age article of December 17 stated that the Victorian National Party had failed in its bid to change its name to include the word ‘country.’ It had applied to the Victorian Electoral Commission, seeking to alter its own title to the National Country Party of Australia, or the National Country Party for short.

The VEC said NO to the group’s application, on the grounds that the proposed nomenclature too closely resembled that of an already existing political group, the Australian Country Party. ‘Having two registered Country parties with very similar names,’ the VEC found, ‘would be likely to cause confusion among voters.’

The Victorian Nationals still have 28 days left to apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a review of the application. Peter Walsh, the party’s leader, said that the party had a long and proud history of representing country Victorians and ‘that will never change.’

Your Editor would send the VEC back to primary school and then on to Ethics College. What does the VEC know about anything. Gosh. That’s almost a good aspect for a full editorial.

New And Improved Chook Shed
The Herald Sun notes that a $40 million redevelopment of State Parliament would bulldoze asbestos-infested external buildings and a grass tennis court, the better to build plush new offices for 110 parliamentarians. Under the plan, which has bipartisan support, the old building referred to as ‘the chook shed’ would go. In its place there would be a three-storey building with a rooftop garden.

Bruce Atkinson, President of the Legislative Council, said that the building had been designed to fit in with the pristine parliamentary gardens and to minimise pain for the taxpayer. ‘It’s certainly not a palace,’ he noted.

Union Against Andrews
The Health and Community Services Union certainly no longer regards Daniel Andrews as its friend. It upbraided the Premier over his plans to outsource government disability services work.

Martin Foley, the Minister for Disability, had announced that the cabinet would soon start to identify which organisations were best placed to provide those services which the State Government oversees. Nevertheless, representatives of the union are adamant that Andrews had promised, when he was still Opposition Leader, to keep the relevant jobs in government hands.

Racism Suit: It’s Lib Versus Lib
Inga Peulich is the Shadow Minister for Multiculturalism. She has taken legal action against Prasad Philip, a fellow Liberal, as reported by The Age on December 3. Philip has alleged that Peulich racially vilified him at a Liberal Party meeting last December. The wit which Peulich served on Philip rejects the latter’s claims that she had launched a 'racist and abusive tirade’ at him, that she ‘carries the poison of racism in her,’ and that she owed an apology not just to him but also to the wider Indian community.

She told The Age: ‘This is very hurtful to me and my family, including my 83-year-old mother who was in a children’s concentration camp on the grounds of race. There is no truth in the allegation that I am racist and that I have racism running through me.’ Philip is a businessman and Liberal activist of Indian background. He insists that Peulich abused him with racially motivated intent during a debate over the party’s troubled campaign for south-eastern Melbourne seats at the 2014 election.
FEDERAL

For new readers, we also publish Letter From Canberra, which has the same parameters and objectives and has a national focus.

AGRICULTURE

Newmarket Reunion

Saturday 19 February, from perhaps midday. Your editor might know more detail soon, 9654 1300

Another afternoon for the livestock agents, auctioneers and stockmen, farmers and truckies, who for a century and a half, until 1987, were a part of the largest livestock trading yards, facility, in the World. The Editor will attend the re-union to swap a few stories that have been passed down by his family, and to have a beer or a coffee or two.

We Lead Food Boom

Victoria has become central to the nation’s emerging dining boom, with research showing the food and grocery sector is growing amid an otherwise declining manufacturing industry. More than 92,000 Victorians are now working in the $119 billion food and grocery processing sector, representing 32 per cent of manufacturing jobs in the state.

More than 60,000 jobs are in Melbourne, including more than 120 at Carman’s at Cheltenham, which export muesli, muesli bars and oats to more than 32 countries as reported in The Herald Sun.

A Beef With GST Exemption

Experts such as PwC partner Paul Abbey and CPA Australia head of policy Paul Drum, are strongly in favour of removing the current GST exemption on fresh food according to The Age.

Apricot Seed Ban

The sale of raw apricots kernels, which can cause cyanide poisoning, is now banned in Australia and New Zealand. Some kernels are promoted as an alternative therapy for cancer treatment, but the Cancer Council of Australia warns they are not only ineffective at treating disease but can be very dangerous according to the Herald Sun.

ARTS

TripAdvisor For The Arts

Nicholas Gruen, economist and chairman of the Australian Centre for Social Innovation, wondered in The Age on November 27 why we could not have for the arts sector what we long ago became accustomed to using for the travel, hotel, and dining sectors. In other words, we need the equivalent of websites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp and Urban Spoon, to provide useful information for consumers, and more specifically to help us avoid costly disappointments.

Dr Gruen cited the report lately released by Creative Industries Minister Martin Foley, which proposed a platform to ‘capture data from arts providers, promoters, funders and patrons.’

In response to Foley’s initiative, he writes: ‘Though that platform might be specific to the arts, it’s a part of a larger innovation agenda ... Amid all the pep-talks intoning the need for tough choices, how fitting for the arts to show us a way to work smarter, not harder.’

Funds to Creativity

A new fund to deliver “landmark Victorian creative works” is being considered by the State Government after months of consultation with the state’s artistic community. It is one of 42 initiatives recommended in a government-commissioned report handed to Creative Industries Minister Martin Foley. Publisher Louise Adler led the task force, according to The Age.

Peace And Lerve With Oprah

After five years away from Australia, she was back. Yes, Oprah Winfrey, ‘dressed in a peach mermaid sequinned gown’ according to the Herald Sun on December 3, spent two hours alone on stage at the Rod Laver arena and made her one-woman show a message of empowerment.

‘From the start,’ we are told, ‘the 61-year-old confidently let loose, telling the 15,000 audience members that they should find their “calling” in life. That we should all [be] rid of the “disease to please”. That we should keep our “vibrational energies high.” The largely female audience cheered throughout, as the billionaire delivered an often emotional mix of spiritual messages.’

Literary Awards

The shortlist for the Victorian Premier’s 2016 Literary Awards has been revealed. For fiction, the authors represented include Miles Alinson and Steven Carroll; for non-fiction, they include Karen Lamb and George Megalogenis; for drama, Patricia Cornelius and Mary Anne Butler; for young adult writing, Sally Morgan and Meg McKinlay; and for poetry, Alan Loney and Colin Riddell. If you want to vote for the People’s Choice Award, you should go to the www.wheelercentre.com website. All categories’ winners will be announced on January 28.

Circus Breaker

Roll up, roll up for White Night Melbourne’s open-air circus! This year’s dusk-to-dawn arts party, to be held on February 20, will include acrobats, jugglers and aerial artists during 12 hours of Big Top action outside Melbourne Museum, as reported in the Herald Sun.

EDUCATION

Joy For VCE Stars

An impressively diverse range of backgrounds marked the top scoring students in this year’s VCE. So noted the Herald Sun on December 15, which reported that Melbourne Girls’ Grammar School and Melbourne Grammar School led the way, with three students from each of those establishments recording the highest tertiary entrance rank of 99.95.

Frankston High School has had its most impressive results ever. Four of its students managed to achieve scores of 99 or above, and 41 of them achieved 90 or above. Meanwhile, at Glen Waverley Secondary College, 20 students had ATARs of 99 or more, and 130 of them had ATARs of 90 or more. At Suzanne Cory High School in Werribee, six per cent of VCE students attained scores of 99 or higher.

New Bible, Koran For State Schools

On November 24, The Age reported that students at government schools in Victoria are permitted to sing Christmas carols in class time, but that they will not be allowed to sing hymns. Moreover, whilst honey-dipped apples are considered permissible in order to mark the Jewish New Year, programs that use the Bible or the Koran are forbidden from class time.

In response, Rob Ward, a spokesman for Victoria’s largest Special Religious Instruction provider, Access Ministries, accused the policy of being ‘ambiguous and confusing. When we sing a Christmas carol, that is based on a biblical story. Do you need permission to sing a Christmas carol?’

More Trouble For Vocational Colleges

It was only a few years ago that Australia’s vocational colleges seemed unstoppable. Now, up to 12,000 of their students, some of them in Victoria, and the rest being elsewhere around the country, are in a frustrating limbo, according to an Age report of November 26. The collapse of Vocation Limited is a particular embarrassment for the State Department of Education and Training, because the now defunct college operator owes that department $8 million.

How uneducated

The Vocational Education company Acquire Learning has been accused of unconscionable

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crackdown on quality issues, as identified in Authority Three out of four equine training providers troubled training sector. In another damning assessment of Australia’s courses, as reported by The Age, a federal issue with wide state ramifications, so we have also covered the topic in this Victorian-focused publication.

Inaction On Phoenix Could Have Cost $106m Authorities failed to act on a serious complaint against the parent of embattled Phoenix Institute, action that may have prevented the potential loss of more than $100 million dollars in government funding. Concerns about fraud at businesses owned by the Australian Careers Network, which has created an uncertain future for more than 12,000 students, were foreshadowed in a complaint lodged in Victoria in February according to The Australian.

No Horse Needed Students who have never ridden a horse have been fast tracked to work as jockeys, stable hands and jackaroos through online training courses. Year long training courses for the equine sector have been delivered online in less than a week, the industry watchdog has warned, according to The Age.

Three out of four equine training providers flunked audits by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, which identified ‘critical safety and quality issues’, as identified in The Australian.

Crackdown Victoria training colleges will be barred from enrolling more than 200 students, and prevented from offering ‘high risk’ courses such as heavy vehicle training, childcare and crane operations, under a sector wide crackdown on dodgy training providers, writes Timma Jacks in The Age.

Education Ordered To Repay $37m To Teachers The State’s Education Department was ordered to repay $37 million to employees it unlawfully charged for school laptops. The Federal Court ruled that the department unlawfully deducted money from teachers’ salaries to pay for laptops according to The Age.

What is a PhD? Earning a PhD is not about job placement, according to Michael Biercuk. And PhD-level research is not about helping businesses make profit. There, I said it. New policies designed to improve job readiness in higher-degree graduates risk transferring weaknesses of Australian industry back to academic research.

The PhD is not, and should never be, a vocational training certificate. Rather than a narrow quest for job placements, pursuing a PhD is about making a deep contribution to knowledge. So it’s confounding why so many discussions on improving Australian innovation are focused primarily on how to change academia, and specifically PhD programs, to meet industry demands on job candidates, as reported in The Australian Financial Review.

Michael Biercuk is an associate professor at the University of Sydney, chief investigator in the ARC Center of Excellence for Engineered Quantum Systems, and the winner of the 2015 Australian Museum Eureka Prize for Outstanding Early Career Researcher.

ENERGY

Next door The national energy market regulator has warned that South Australia is likely to face continued price volatility and ‘significantly lower’ electricity availability with the retirement of two gas and coal power stations and an increased reliance on wind.

A report by the Australian energy regulator warned that despite the upgrade of the inter connector with Victoria, ‘current forecasts indicate total capacity (including imports) available to the South Australian region will be significantly lower than in 2018 done in 2015’ as reported in The Australian.

Gas Price Victorians are facing a New Year gas price sting as retailers prepare to lift charges. Energy Australia, which has 460,000 gas customers, says average households and small businesses combined will pay an extra $61 to $60 annually, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Ocean Energy: Watch This Space The Age on December 17 announced that Victoria is set to harness the energy of the ocean. An enormous underwater machine will capture the power of the waves and is expected to supply enough clean energy for approximately 250 houses.

Beneath the surface of the water, the steel structure will sway, with a generator producing electricity. It has been installed west of Portland, about 800 metres off-shore. Energy technology company BioPower Systems will shortly start running tests on the equipment.

ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION

Tales Of Dumb Bureacracy A Herald Sun article on December 15 discussed the battle being waged by a teenager to stop state authorities from killing a rescued baby deer. Andrew Foots, 19, took in the fawn, dubbed Rudolph, after he twice spotted it alone and ‘skinny’ in bushland at Goughs Bay, which is near Mansfield, north-east of Melbourne.

Officials from the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources had other ideas. They seized Rudolph, and carted him away in a police-patrol wagon, about a week later, on November 19. On December 10 they won a court order to kill Rudolph, who, they believed, posed a threat to public safety.

Unconvinced, Foots appealed against the verdict. Since then, the Jirrahlinga Koala and Wildlife Sanctuary, near Barwon Heads, has volunteered to take and look after Rudolph.

Daniel Beecher, Foots’ lawyer, accused the Department of wanting its ‘pound of flesh.’ The reasons for killing a deer, or any animal, under these circumstances are difficult to understand when there is a non-lethal alternative that would provide so much good to so many, is how Beecher put it.

Foots, a farm-hand who over the years has reared about 1,000 goats, could face criminal charges for adopting the deer. But he insisted that both he and his mother had visited a local veterinarian for advice on how to care for the sambar fawn, and the veterinarian told them that they needed no wildlife permit.

Barrie Tapp, chief investigator for Animal Cruelty Hotline Australia, said that people should be encouraged to help look after wild animals, not to leave them struggling. In the meantime, a spokesman for the Department’s Game Management Authority subdivision refused to comment on the case for as long as the courts had not yet finalised it. The appeal will be held in February.

New Board Members The Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, has four new board members, appointed by Lisa Neville, the State Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water: Virginia Wallace, Susan Anderson, Moragh Mackay and Allan Bawden PSM.
**Water Bombers Land**

The *Herald Sun* announced on December 3 that two of the world’s biggest bushfire-fighting aircraft have now landed on Victorian soil, in readiness for what has already become a scorching summer. These aircraft include the C-130 Hercules among 47 water bombers that have been brought in from overseas for the bushfire season.

But the 47 water bombers are by no means the only components of Victoria’s current bushfire-fighting fleet. There are also 25 helicopters, 20 fixed-wing planes, two large air tankers, two air-cranes (water-bombing helicopters), and two Sikorski helicopters.

**Net Void Leaves CFA High And Dry**

Weather information and access to detailed maps are critical tools for fire fighters, but for many small Country Fire Authority brigades, Internet access and top notch mobile phone coverage can be difficult to get. Even in places not far from Melbourne, coverage can be poor and Internet access limited.

The Macclesfield CFA brigade, just East of the Dandenong Ranges, is one such group struggling with intermittent mobile coverage and no Internet. A CFA spokeswoman said it supported the work of Emergency Management Victoria, governments and telecommunications companies to tackle mobile phone black spots as reported in *The Age*.

**Fiskville documents**

The CFA has been slammed by a Parliamentary committee investigating the Fiskville training college, with the chairperson of the committee accusing it of refusing “to provide vital information” needed by the inquiry.

Labor MP and committee chairperson Brownyn Halfpenny blasted the CFA, saying there had been extensive withholding of information that was critical to the committee’s investigation of what happened at Fiskville, according to *The Age*.

**Under Fire**

Ten houses near Ballarat were destroyed by fire in mid December, 10,000 hectares burnt and 60 people near Wodonga fled their homes as an uncontrolled grass fire advanced rapidly on Sunday evening, according to *The Age*.

**EVENTS**

**Shot Ban For NYE?**

A *Herald Sun* report suggested the possibility that shots of booze would be banned at pubs and clubs on this coming New Year’s Eve. This possibility comprises part of a scheme proposed by the state’s liquor regulator, the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation.

If the call were to be put into practice, venue staffers would also be empowered to limit the number of drinks of any sort that revellers could legally consume, and liquor inspectors would be out in force to crack down on rogue operators who serve minors and drinks. The Commission has recommended that shots and double shots be forbidden, as an element in a concerted plan to tackle alcohol-related harm on the year’s biggest party night.

**Festival Cancelled**

Australia’s biggest rock festival, Soundwave, has been cancelled, leaving suppliers and ticket holders in limbo. The move, which came after headline act L7 pulled out, was announced by promoter A. J. Maddah on Twitter with “poor ticket sales” cited. Town Hall has since emerged that venues had not been booked for the touring show’s three scheduled events, in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, in January 2016, per *The Age*.

Perhaps more importantly, the big Lorne Music Festival was moved to Mt Duneed near Geelong, and away from fire danger, as the Coast had many fires and near miss areas.

**Security Fence For MCG Test**

The *Melbourne Cricket Ground* is set to have increased security measures as authorities warn that a terrorist attack in Australia remains likely. It is understood a fence will be constructed around the perimeter of Australia’s biggest sporting stadium as it prepares to host the biggest test match of the cricketing calendar as reported in *The Australian*.

**2016 Business Summit**

Join Australia’s business influencers at the SUMMIT from the 15 to 16 March in Melbourne. This event will focus on Australia’s economic position in the global landscape, with discussions covering construction technology, leadership, Asia and other new opportunities.

**Global Food Forum**

Keynote speakers and analysts will provide extra insight into the state of our export markets, the impact of technology on productivity, and how Australia can maximise its potential as a leading global food supplier. Event at Palladium Crown Melbourne on Wednesday, 20 April, theaustralian.com.au/gf

**Australian Domestic Gas Outlook**

According to the official journal of the Australian Institute of Energy, *Energy News*, Australia’s Premier event for all domestic gas market stakeholders from 7 to 10 March at the Four Seasons Hotel in Sydney, www.aie.org.au

**Our Eyes and Ears**

The $169 million redevelopment of the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital may have to be scaled back after its buildings were found to be riddled with asbestos. The government has launched an urgent review into the project amid “substantial costs and time blow outs” less than halfway through its construction.

A confidential document obtained by the *Herald Sun* revealed that delays could jeopardise $50 million in federal funding. Redevelopment of the hospital was announced by the State Government in 2012, with completion set for 2017. But work has been frequently held up by the “unravelling” of hazardous materials throughout the state’s third-oldest hospital, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

**BUSINESS & INVESTMENT**

*Here Comes LaunchVic* Philip Dalidakis, the State Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, formally opened on November 27 the new body that will accelerate start-up enterprises, drive new ideas, and create jobs in Victoria as a whole.

LaunchVic will provide the right environment for entrepreneurs to develop, incubate, and grow early-stage innovative businesses, backed by the State Government’s $60 million start-up fund. Working with Victoria’s start-up community, as well as with the successfully established incubators, business angels, on the branding, identity, and form of LaunchVic, to ensure that it can be support fledging businesses to grow.

The Chief Executive Officer will be Dr Pradeep Philip, who used to be the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. An advisory board of industry experts, who will work to strengthen and build the current operating environment of Victoria’s start-up ecosystem, will support Philip.

**Support Centre, Cyber Jobs To Victoria**

The Victorian Government says that its plans concerning the National Broadband Network involve creating 700 new high-school jobs in Melbourne during the next five years. This scheme would entice 400 jobs over the first two years, and with 300 more to be generated later on by the project less directly, in terms of construction, maintenance, and technical support.

One especially notable aspect of the project is the establishment in Melbourne of the NBN’s Cyber Security Operations Centre. The idea is that this centre will be the first line of governmental defence against cyber-threats to the NBN’s operation. It will provide a collection of services to deliver detection, identification, triage, and management of cyber-events and incident response.

**Tourists in Parks**

The 28 kilometres of the Shipwreck Coast from Princetown to the Bay of Islands, west of Peterborough, attracts few overnight visitors, who may have contributed to very low levels of spending from tourists in the area, a new report commissioned by Parks Victoria says.

The new 100-page master plan for the Shipwreck Coast is aimed at turning that around, with 72 upgrade projects over the next 20 years that could boost visitor numbers by half a million a year. The report said the target market for nature-based tourism such as the Great Ocean Roads is “experience seekers”, adventurous and self-motivated people who are ecologically minded and love the outdoors, as reported in *The Age*.

**Shop Around The Clock**

The *Herald Sun* noted that almost 1,000 stores across three city blocks were then preparing for an onslaught, as they started trading later into the night in the lead-up to Christmas. Retailers concerned included Melbourne Central, Emporium, QV, The Strand, GPO, Myer, and David Jones, all of whom were planning to open at least until seven o’clock each evening, starting on December 1. Note this for next year!

**The Power Of Tim Tams**

The Tim Tam biscuit dispute was triggered when Arnott’s demanded price rises of up to 10 per cent for some of its biscuits, including Scotch Finger, Teddy Bear, Monte Carlo and TeeVee Snacks, and a similar hike on some popular Campbell’s cooking stock products.

It has now blown into a full scale blockade, with Arnott’s refusing to supply Coles with up to six Tim Tam varieties to be the Secretary of the second biggest supermarket chain refused to accept the price rises, arguing they were unjustified.

The ‘biscuit war’ has developed into a major battle of wits between a supermarket giant and
suppliers, with other food manufacturers in the nations $19 billion grocery market paying close attention as neither side looks to budge on the vexed issue of pricing, according to The Australian.

Behind The Great Tim Tam Crisis

Coles has blinked in a tense stand off with Campbell Arnott’s, accepting price rises on dozens of products after the biscuit and soup maker held its Tim Tams hostage. Campbell Arnott’s told Coles in July it planned to lift prices in October by up to 10 per cent on a range of items, including Tim Tams, Scotch Fingers, and Monte Carlo biscuits, and some vegetable and meat stocks.

Coles said the price increases were unjustified and refused to pay, prompting Arnott’s to stop shipping Tim Tams and other products to Australia’s second largest supermarket chain’s warehouses from early October. The stand off lasted 2 weeks before Coles caved in and agreed to pay an increased price on 44 ‘must have’ Arnott’s biscuit products and 7 lines of Campbell’s stock. Campbell Arnott’s would not comment on its negotiations with Coles other than it reviewed wholesale prices as necessary according to The Age.

Really Takes The Cake

There was a time when international food companies, whose brands were among the best known in the world and constant features of any supermarket trolley or basket, would jokingly refer to Australia as ‘treasure island.’ It referred to the fact that some food producers, mostly based in North America or Europe, could charge a much higher wholesale price for their packaged goods in Australia than any other market in the world. When Wesfarmers bought the then struggling Coles supermarket chain in 2007, its new boss, the canny Scot Ian McLeod, set about putting an end to these shenanigans, pushing back international suppliers to force the price down. It’s in this context that the corporate brawl between Coles and Australia’s biggest biscuit maker and soup stock purveyor, revealed by The Australian over the price of the Tim Tams and its portfolio of chocolate biscuits and soup stocks can also be viewed, as reported by Eli Greenblat.

Self-Interest Driving

The leader of the federal government’s sweeping review of competition policy has accused car dealers and manufacturers of acting out of naked self interest, instead of their claimed regard for road safety, by fighting against foreign used cars. ‘If you have a rule which says you can only have one vehicle at a time brought in here, what’s that got to do with preventing clunkers on the road?’ said Ian Harper, who told the government to deregulate used car imports last month.

A lobbyist for car dealers and makers, Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce executive director Geoff Gwilym, said there was no need to discuss the policy which is backed by Liberal Minister Paul Fletcher. ‘We are in the industry and we know what we’re doing’, Gwilym said. ‘The government has made the decision on this issue so why are we still having this debate?’ as reported in the Australian Financial Review.

Melbourne Metro Rail

Melbourne CBD will keep moving while the city’s newest rail tunnels are constructed, with trams, pedestrians and cyclists to remain on Swanston Street while the new Melbourne Metro tunnels and stations are built underneath. Evan Tattersall as Chief Executive Officer is overseeing the project. Tunnel boring machines (TBMs) are likely to be used to build most of Melbourne Metro’s rail tunnels, including under the Yarra River.

Information sessions have been held with over 1000 people attending, 3000 people undertaking social research and more than 5000 people visiting the feedback portal on the Melbourne Metro website. mmrailproject.vic.gov.au

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Culture Of Conflict

There is a sustained and systemic ‘culture of conflict’ which afflicts the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, according to an outgoing board member who has resigned. The board member concerned, Lieutenant-General Des Mueller, sent a letter that The Age discussed on December 15.

Lieutenant-General Mueller described the MFB, which now employs 2,200 persons, as having been gripped by bitter internal conflicts that appeared unlikely to ease. At the same time, his letter includes the following conciliatory reflection: ‘In spite of the difficulties which the MFB experiences, and they are the worst I have ever seen in any organisation, I have nothing but admiration for the work that fire-fighters do … I like them very much.’

He made the comments after a run of major clashes between the MFB and the powerful United Firefighters Union. Several of these clashes have been so severe as to warrant referral to the Fair Work Commission, for settlement. In 2014, tensions flared particularly over the MFB’s bid to reduce union influence in the workplace by applying to terminate an enterprise bargaining agreement.

Expansion of Pharmacist’s Roles

Pharmacists will take on some doctors’ tasks under a controversial plan to let Victorian patients see pharmacists for vaccines and chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma. Under a trial that has enraged doctors, Victorian Health Minister Jill Hennessy said three pharmacies would test a partnership with GPs next year. It also wants more pharmacies” with its plan to create five 24/7 “super pharmacies” next year. It also wants more pharmacists to give flu vaccines from next year and whooping cough vaccines from 2017 under its state-based immunization scheme. The expansion of pharmacist’s roles has infuriated president of the Victorian branch of the Australian Medical Association, Tony Barton, who said the plan was risky and aimed to substitute the skills of doctors, as reported in The Age.

New Allowances to Firefighters

The militant United Firefighters Union bagged the Government’s latest offer of a 14.7 per cent pay rise over three years, saying it was a bid to buy off workers. The pay offer will come on top of the Government conceding a number of extra allowances, which will also cost millions. Union members labeled the offer as “dirty tricks” and a “divide-and-conquer tactic by the Government to try and break the solidarity of the UFF” in a bulletin emailed to members.

The offer, made in the Fair Work Commission, would see a qualified firefighter earning $69,703 to $79,973 by August, 2018, before any allowances are added. The wages bill is expected to cost the state and added $47 million in pay over the duration of the deal.

The Government has also agreed to include a number of new allowances expected to cost $1.6 million. The new allowances include ambulance subscription, fitness benefits, sporting vouchers, driver education, added bonuses for member posted in hard-to-fill positions and extra time off if they are involved in an accident, according to the Herald Sun.

Disabled Jobs Threat

Up to 20,000 disabled workers earning an average of $4.97 and hour could lose their jobs if a proposal forcing bosses to pay them more goes ahead. A KPMG report, released last month, says hundreds of businesses that employ the disabled could be bankrupted if the Fair Work Commission changes the rules.

Ken Baker, CEO of industry lobby group National Disability Services, said 85 per cent of disability enterprises could shut down if wages increased by 40 per cent. ‘The
(proposed) changes could destroy thousands of jobs for people who can’t find another job and would then be dependent on government for support.

After the Federal Court in 2012 ruled current disability wages were invalid, the United Voice Union and Health Services Union applied to the Fair Work Commission to change the award, as per The Australian.

Firefighters in Impasse Over Terms

The deal reached after negotiations with the state’s Community and Public Sector Union, also includes additional pay rises linked to productivity improvements and 20 days’ paid domestic violence leave. It comes after police this month agreed to a deal including yearly salary rises of 2.5 per cent and new penalty rates for overnight, weekend and public holiday shifts, according to The Age.

Metro Stands Down

Debora Gough writes to The Age that Metro has shoot down a worker for allegedly leaking sensitive documents to the public transport union, worsening tensions between the train operator and the union following Metro’s decision to sack five union members for breaching safety protocols.

Union Law-Breaking Cost Jobs

According to Dan Tehan, a Modest member in The Australian Financial Review, by repeatedly defying the law, the Maritime Union of Australia is playing havoc with the burgeoning cruise industry in Victoria. He says that the Maritime Union of Australia is holding the town of Portland in Victoria to ransom by breaking the law. Through its illegal actions, and through its insurers, workers could be prevented from disembarking from three cruise ships over the coming weeks, costing the local economy millions. It is time we had an industrial relations system where breaking the law had real and immediate consequences.

Terrorism And Counter-Terrorism

John Silvester, crime-writer and regular Age columnist, devoted his November 28 article partly to Ross Guenther, who has been appointed Victoria Police’s first Assistant Commissioner (Counter-Terrorism). Shortly before Silvester’s article appeared, Daniel Andrews ‘pledged nearly $50 million to boost the police’s counter-terrorism resources.’
10 December 2015 to 14 January 2016
Letter From Melbourne

numbers of lead feet. In 2015, 234 people have died on our roads compared to 235 at the same time in 2014, according to the Herald Sun.

Booze buses to change
As reported by Wes Hosking in the Herald Sun, smaller booze and drug buses will be unleashed to catch out rouge drivers as part of a new, more "agile" police testing fleet. Victoria Police will have for large buses and six smaller units to give the force greater flexibility.

New cop shop for riverside
A new $2.8 million police station will open in Melbourne's expanding Southbank precinct early next year, at 60 Moray St, to replace the existing station at the St Kilda Rd complex. This move will allow easy access to the Southbank precinct for foot patrols and will also service several new developments and apartment complexes into the future”.

Southbank Residents Association president Tony Penna said there was an increasing need for a police station in the fast-growing area, with about 18,000 people now calling it home, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Red Light Challenged
The validity of Melbourne’s most prolific red light camera has been questioned by the RACV, which fears some motorists are being improperly penalized.

The camera monitors and intersection where the traffic signals disappear from the line of sight of approaching motorists as they close in on the intersection, potentially increasing the risk that drivers will run the red.

The camera, at the corner of Cemetery Road West and Royal Parade in Parkville, has caught more motorists since it was turned on in October 2011 than any other red light camera in Melbourne.

In the four years to October, 28,436 motorists ran the red light while turning right into Royal Parade, being penalized a total $10.04 million in fines, figures from the Department of Justice show, according to The Age.

MP Pushes To Keep Terrorists Locked Up
Convicted terrorists would be treated like paedophiles and kept behind bars even after their sentences have expired under a bold plan to be put before federal and state governments.

The proposal, which is set for discussion at Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s first COAG meeting of state and territory leaders, is being pushed by federal liberal MP Dan Tehan, who heads the Parliamentary joint committee on intelligence and security matters according to The Age.

Injection for Vic Police
The continuing terror threat level in Victoria has stretched the state’s police, Victoria’s Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton has revealed.

Ashton welcomed a $49.4 million boost to police counter terrorism from the state government saying it came at a very important time according to The Age.

Second-Class Cops
Protective Service Officers are being removed from fighting crime at railway stations and forced to undertake menial jobs at Victoria Police headquarters. The Herald Sun revealed dozens of PSOs have been removed from the front line to perform administrative duties. IBAC is probing complaints by the PSOs.

External Force Required
In order to fix police culture an external power is required, according to Greg Denham in The Age. Greg Denham is a former senior sergeant with Victoria Police and is now executive officer of the Yarra Drug and Health Forum.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Geelong Council Inquiry
The State Government will launch an investigation into the Geelong Council amid claims of bullying and dysfunction involving councillors and staff. Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins announced an inquiry and the appointment of three commissioners, including former senior Victorian and federal civil servant Terry Moran with a brief to report back in March. The last CEO resigned over only three months in the job and went back to a senior Victorian civil service job. Kelvin Spiller is the present CEO.

This includes the clarity of roles across the council, the efficacy of the 126 different services we deliver to our 225,000 residents, and the Halliday workplace culture review” according to Councillor Lyons in the Herald Sun.

Uber Legalisation
Lord Mayor Robert Doyle has urged the State Government to move swiftly in legislating controversial ride-sharing service Uber, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Man in Red
Pedestrians have been urged not to cross the ‘red man’ this Christmas, it is a $70 fine. With pedestrian activity up more than 40 per cent in lead-up to Christmas, avoid jaywalking.

Over the past five years there have been 846 collisions involving pedestrians in the City of Melbourne. He said most pedestrian fatalities in the city occurred between midnight and 6am on Sundays, and between 9am and noon on Mondays, according to the Herald Sun.

Doyle Wants Etihad Bulldozed
Melbourne’s Lord Mayor, Robert Doyle, told the Herald Sun on November 11 that the Etihad Stadium should be bulldozed, in order to make a better connection between Docklands and the CBD. He also called for a new linear suburb to be built above the real line to Flemington Racecourse.

A day after an exclusive report in the same newspaper revealed Councillor Doyle’s intention to seek another term in office, he has been mayor since 2008, insisted it was inevitable that eventually the Etihad Stadium would be destroyed, to open up Docklands. Recently the first cinema in the Docklands precinct was announced, with Hoyts planning an eight-screen complex at a revamped Harbour Town.

Councillor Doyle welcomed the move. He asserts that Docklands had turned the corner in the last few years, and that over the next decade it would hit its stride.

MELBOURNE

Parking Money Grab
Parking inspectors at an inner-city council have been increased and asked failings to raise enough money in fines. Tenix Solutions, which manages parking for Stonnington Council, says it has not met its target of parking infringement notices for the first three months of the financial year.

With the council estimated to be about $100,000 down on projected parking revenue for the first quarter, Tenix says it will install new officers and work overtime to rectify the shortfall, according to the Herald Sun.

City’s Spray Street
ONE of the city’s famous street art precincts has lost its way and top graffiti artists are moving to other locations. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said globally recognized Hosier Lane was suffering from poor-quality art.

“The artwork is substandard, they’ve painted over some of the most iconic artwork and what they’ve put in its place is nowhere near as good
Firm Beats Lockout
Research house Roy Morgan has won a court fight to access its Collins St offices after being dramatically locked out over the weekend.

The polling company has refused to pay rent since September, a total now standing at $730,083.07, in an ongoing dispute about the cost and placement of new lifts. Roy Morgan wants the new lifts to cover the basements and roof. The case between Impact and Roy Morgan will be heard in February, as per the Herald Sun.

PLANNING
Our Windsor
The historic Hotel Windsor may be closed for good during the next state election campaign. Hotel owner Adi Halim made the threat after talks to extend a redevelopment permit broke down.

The long running saga returned to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, but a planning permit application did not go ahead and the State Government has resolved not to extend the permit. Halim insists that work could not begin when the permit was issued in 2010 due to heritage requirements. The Halim Group plans a $300 million-plus redevelopment of the 19th century hotel, including a modern 27 storey tower at the back.

Planning Minister Richard Wing has said that the owner has (had) plenty of time as the permit was until January 2017 according to the Herald Sun. Melbourne’s Mayor, who since 2008 has been Robert Doyle, has renewed his call for the Windsor to be saved.

The issue is now set for a full VCAT hearing on February 15. It is understood that Halim is going to decide over the next few weeks whether he should pursue the legal action. He could, as an alternative, consider an option to shut the hotel down if the permit is not extended.

Big National Trust Tiff
An Age article on November 25 says that the National Trust of Victoria was reeling, after six of its 12 board members had resigned, or were voted out, in a showdown over the Trust’s direction. Lobbyists who declared themselves alarmed at the Trust’s increasing business focus campaigned to vote out three finance-oriented board members, in favour of those whom they considered more inclined towards conservation and advocacy.

After that, three board members resigned: the chairman, former pharmaceutical executive Graeme Blackman; the Trust’s finance committee chairman and Deloitte consultant Michael Batchelor; and former education sector executive Des Thornton. Evidently, there had been an ‘orchestrated campaign’ from influential factions, and that altogether only five per cent of Trust members voted. The insider called the outcome ‘more than an unhappy time. It’s catastrophic.’

The board members who were voted out had been all members of the Trust finance committee. Martin Purslow, chief executive of the Trust, announced that delivering the board’s strategy had led to its most successful two years, with profits accruing from record attendances at Trust properties. Such properties included Rippon Lea House, Como House, and Barwon Park.

East Werribee And Scientology Link
Victoria’s Finance Minister Robin Scott gave ‘preferred bidder’ status, The Age announced, to a little-known consortium with Scientology links, which came to have huge tract of East Werribee public land. Since the time when the consortium concerned, Australian Education City, was chosen, three Chinese investment firms have bought into the planned project, lifting the consortium’s value from almost nothing to more than a quarter of a billion dollars.

During November, Australian Education City beat off three of Australia’s largest property development companies, to begin negotiations with the State Government over 400 hectares of public land in East Werribee. The consortium has promised a 1.5-million-square-metre city on the site, with soaring residential towers, as well as with connections to Australian and overseas universities. These campuses, it predicts, will eventually provide 58,000 jobs.

Leader of the company is Bill Zheng, a Chinese-born businessman with strong links to the Church of Scientology. Zheng once worked for Price Waterhouse Coopers, and has made a fortune in property investments via his firm, Investors Direct Financial Group.

Our Clock
A $1 billion redevelopment of the Nylex clock site on the Yarra would see it transformed into a mini-suburb with its own brewery and arts and leisure precinct. 500 jobs will be created during construction of the new named Malt District at Cremorne, including 1,000 apartments, bars, restaurants, cafes and commercial offices. Developer Caydon is also working with Parks Victoria for a ferry stop at the waterfront development. The Nylex clock will be restored and repositioned at the same orientation on a new building, as per the Herald Sun.

Combustible High Rise
Melbourne’s Metropolitan Fire Brigade has called for a national audit of modern high-rise buildings, warnings that the use of cheap, flammable and non-compliant cladding over the past decade has created cities filled with ‘ticking time-bombs’.

MFB fire safety director Adam Darlymple told a (federal) Senate inquiry into non-conforming building products that the service was frustrated with the lack of national action over the widespread use of cheap, highly combustible aluminium cladding imported from Asia, according to The Australian.

Our Yarra
The Victorian Government will introduce planning controls to limit overdevelopment on the river, including enforced setbacks and heights for buildings. Water management expert Chris Chesterfield will chair a committee to overhaul the governance of the iconic river along its 240km length.

Chesterfield, a former Melbourne Water senior executive and Office of Living Victoria chief executive, was once in charge of the river when it was run and we need to recognise the community’s aspirations for the river into the future. Planning Minister Wynne said the Yarra flowed through eleven council areas and consistency was needed to protect it, as per the Herald Sun.

Five-Minute Walk City
The City of Melbourne’s third People for Places report divides Melbourne into 15 mini-cities within one metropolis, with each area developed as a resident-and-visitor friendly neighbourhood in which the pedestrian is king.

The micro-analysis of the CBD, which was first conducted in 1993 provides a snapshot of a city shining upwards and sprawling outwards.

It is turning from what Lord Mayor Robert Doyle calls ‘a 10-hour-a-day city into an 18-hour-a-day city’.

The 2015 Places for People report brakkes the city down into “15 catchment” areas, starting with the traditional central city around Flinders Street but now spreading out to encompass areas to the north, south, east and west. The council’s director of urban design, Professor Rob Adams, said the report highlighted flaws in the development of newer areas such as Southbank and Docklands, which finds notably lacking in the pedestrian-friendly aspects at the core of the city’s strategy, as per The Age.

Already a number of suburban councils have adopted interim controls, or are preparing to do so, as developers edge closer to Melbourne’s main watercourse. “It is iconic and it is one of the most important assets that our city has got,” said Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne.

State planning rules will be changed to allow for consistent decision-making along the river, with control over building heights, setbacks, overshadowing, vegetation and public access, as per the Australian Financial Review.

Waterways May Be Dammed
The Maribyrnong River and Moonee Ponds Creek could be partially dammed while two bridges are built across them as part of a new toll road through Melbourne’s west, planning documents show.

High-voltage transmission towers beside the West Gate Freeway will also be move or rebuilt so the freeway can be widened to 12 lanes between the Western Ring Road and Williamstown Road as part of the $5.5 billion Western Distributor project.

The high-voltage power lines could either be shifted closer to homes in Brooklyn and Yarraville or buried.

Best Cycling State
Victoria has been named, in a Herald Sun article of December 15, Australia’s best state for cycling holidays. Nevertheless, it needs to do more in order to promote itself as the nation’s premier cycling destination.

A national online survey, in which more than 3,000 people took part, revealed that Melbourne was the single most popular destination for cycling experiences. Deemed the best of the state’s cycling destinations was the Great Ocean Road.

Top Cup Becomes Top Bomber
Brievue, Victoria Police chief Ken Lay has joined the Essendon Football Club’s board, according to a Herald Sun report, and is its Number One ticket-holder. Chairman of this board, incidentally, is the former ALP federal cabinet minister Lindsay Tanner.

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Match Fixing Dangers

The Age announced on December 15 that local sports leagues' integrity is being increasingly compromised by the rise of match-fixing and corruption. It attributed this trend to the increasing popularity of unregulated overseas online bookmakers, a popularity noted and regretted by the Victorian Government.

As part of their submission to a federal review of these off-shore bookmakers' impact, the state authorities say there is a lack of awareness of integrity risks amongst sub-elite and community-based sport in Victoria. The submission also maintained that such ignorance left many sports fans exiting the stands.

Pedestrians will be given priority over vehicles as a result of the new system. Pedestrian traffic is cleared under the new part clocked up and estimated 1,279,745km. The 110,000 kids from 620 schools who took part clocked up and estimated 1,279,745km.

The Victorian government has failed to put up legislation to declare Port of Melbourne, delaying the $6 billion sale. After threatening to proceed with the sale using special administrative powers if legislation was not passed, on the last parliamentary sitting day for the year, Treasurer Tim Pallas refused to comment on what his next move would be.

It is understood the government has only begun constructive negotiations with the opposition, which it relies on for support to get the legislation through the Upper House.

The Coalition has been, since August, willing to negotiate with the government, Guy said. "We have given our suggestions to the government and we wait for point for the negotiations comes from the government, the time frame in which the government is liable to pay compensation should it proceed with building a second container port in the state."

Potential bidders for the asset include infrastructure giants Hastings Funds Management, IFM Investors QIC Ltd and partners. QIC is expected to bid with Borealis Infrastructure and the Future Fund. Hastings has teamed up with Wren House Infrastructure Management and Global Infrastructure Partners. IFM Investors is also working with Barclays, as reported in the Australian Financial Review.

Flogging the Port of Melbourne

Kenneth Davidson, a senior columnist at The Age, writes that this city's future as an international hub in jeopardy. There are so many questions about this whole thing, and capacity sits right at the core of it.

Are we going to have a port that has rail to the dock? Are we going to be able to take the trucks out of Maribyrnong? Are we going to be able to have the leadership team and go all the way into the dock? We do not know what the capacity is going to be. When will the second port happen? All of these variables are just sort of sitting out there, and we are going to let the bidders tell us the future and how they see it all happening, Treasurer Tim Pallas is showing contempt for Parliament and proper process.

Deals are being done that will damage the bay and neighbouring communities, stealing from the future generations according to Kenneth Davidson in The Age. The deal involves giving the private buyer and implied right to triple the size of the port.

Among airports for the world's 50 busiest cities, Melbourne's is the only one outside America that is still to rail to the main metropolis, and even within America there are only five cities on the list that are thus handicapped. Film-maker Elle Marsh, a masters student at the Victorian College of the Arts, reports that with Vacant she has explored the 'beauty and emptiness of Australia's largest car park' and what the car park says about Melbourne's cultural identity.

Lobbying: One could muse as to which organisations are against the building of a rail link to the Airport.

TRANSPORT - RAIL

Open For All Week

For decades Flagstaff has been, as it were, the Cinderella of Melbourne's CBD railway stations. But no longer will it be so. An Age report of December 7 stated that as of New Year's Day, trains would begin to stop at Flagstaff on weekdays as well as on weekends.

Ever since Flagstaff opened 31 years ago, numerous trains have skipped the station. Back in 1985, few people lived in the western end of the city centre, which was very much a dead zone compared with what it has become since. The 1990s' trend towards downtown apartment residence remained unimaginable.

Myki Technology...

The enforcement of Victoria's problem-plagued Myki technology is under an immediate government review amid concerns that the ticketing system cannot withstand legal scrutiny and thousands of commuters have been bullied into paying fines.

The state government will announce a sweeping review of the fare enforcement regime, and admits it doubts the current system is equitable, effective and fair, as per The Age.

Trainless station

Thousands of new residents in department towers planned on land at Flemington Racecourse should not get a train service, the State Government says despite having a useable railway station and line at their doorstep. Public Transport Victoria and the state transport department have rejected the possible use of the station for commuter services. Advocates for public transport branded the approach "defeatist and disappointing".

And local residents said the massive apartment project was being inappropriately fast, tracked by the Victoria Racing Club and its development partner, the Shanghai-based Greenland Group, one of China's largest residential builders. Four towers and a low-rise apartment precinct are proposed at Flemington, on racing club land that it says is ripe for development. One hectare of land is on Epsom Road, and another three hectares are in Ascot Vale next to Flemington Racecourse railway station.

The railway station and spur line are used for just a handful of race days, and for special events like the Royal Melbourne Show, as reported in The Age.

Railway Safety Slammed

According to Adam Carey in The Australian, the safety of Melbourne's passenger rail system has been questioned after Metro sacked five staff for walking on tracks without protection and the union retaliated by releasing an internal document exposing hundreds of serious track faults around the system.
Hot Times At Metro
Melbourne’s Metro train system, The Age reported on December 15, has a new strategy for the extremely high temperatures expected during summer. It hopes that the strategy will guarantee fewer train delays and fewer frustrated passengers when the thermometer climbs.

During recent years, the worst of the summer heat has routinely wrought havoc upon the running of Metro transport. Railway tracks have buckled, train motors have overheated, air-conditioning systems have broken down, and several hundred services have simply needed to be cancelled.

The presence of precautionary speed restrictions exacerbates the unreliability of the Metro’s system in summertime. Those restrictions have come into play across the network whenever the temperature hits the high 30s, as it has often done and will often continue to do.

Train Lines And Black Spots
We have all experienced the frustrating feeling that comes when one is conversing on a mobile phone and suddenly the connection ceases. We feel that comes when one cannot embark upon a mobile phone call in the first place. Welcome to that most vexatious of telecommunication phenomena, the ‘black spot’.

Victoria wants to use federal money intended for a mobile black spot program targeting high fire risk areas to upgrade phone coverage on trains. The government last month confirmed that it had dumped the $40 million Northline government plan to put Wi-Fi on V/Line services, suggesting that it was not needed because most phone plans now include a data allowance.

Innovation Minister Philip Dalidakis instead promised to improve phone coverage along regional railway lines, which can be patchy, even in areas with a relatively good signal, because of interference created by the moving train, as per The Age.

A State Government plan, discussed by The Age on November 30, to fix mobile phone black spots along five of the busiest regional rail lines; Melbourne-Geelong, Melbourne-Ballarat, Melbourne-Bendigo, Melbourne-Seymour, and Melbourne-Traralgon, should make life easier for those whose livelihoods depend on being able to conduct phone conversations in transit. One such commuter is furniture production during his journeys. He is able to conduct phone conversations in transit.

‘On the way in it doesn’t mean too much because I am still waking up but on the way home we have wholesalers in Western Australia and I often get emails from them,’ Bell complained. ‘We could possibly jeopardise the [sale], especially if it is a Friday … they have to wait for the whole weekend before they get the quote.’

TRANSPORT - TAXIS, ETC
Uber’s proposal
The Herald Sun has obtained Uber’s submission to the State Government outlining its case to operate legally in Victoria, in which it also agrees to a tightened screening process and Taxi Service Commission regulation.

Uber proposes drivers pay an annual licence fee of up to $150, despite taxi licences leased from the Government costing $22,700 a year. The company itself does not want to pay a cent. In a bid to win approval, it has promised to create 5,000 jobs in the state on top of the 6,500 drivers it already has, according to the Herald Sun.

It Ain’t Over Till It’s Uber?
A Herald Sun article on December 5 revealed that the preceding day, Uber had been effectively outlawed in Victoria, when a driver was found guilty of driving a hire car without a licence or accreditation. Meanwhile the State Cabinet is considering a plan to force Uber to adhere to existing hire-car regulations on the statute books.

While the relevant ministers had already been discussing Uber a good deal anyhow, the decision by a Melbourne magistrate is likely to spur the government’s review of the whole taxi and ride-share industry. It has the ‘unstopable’ Uber been, in fact, stopped?

Fixed Taxi Fares Proposed
On December 16, the Herald Sun announced that the Taxi and Limousine Commission was considering a radical plan to improve the taxi sector. Were the plan to go ahead, taxi fares would rise to ensure that cabs arrived on time, and passengers would pay fixed fees to Melbourne Airport. Part of the motivation behind the plan is of course the need to keep the taxi industry competitive against Uber-derived threats.

Unhappy With Uber?
UberX customers who are unhappy with its services claim they were incorrectly charged are left in legal limbo, as no government bodies will investigate customer complaints because the popular ride-sharing app is illegal.

In the midst of the party season, Uber customers can only make a complaint to the company itself. Because Uber operates illegally in Victoria, no department will respond, per The Age

Citywide shakeup
A major Melbourne City Council owned firm has undergone a management and operations shakeup after posting a big profit dip over the past year. Two senior executives including the former acting chief, are leaving Citywide. Citywide issued an after tax profit of $3.37 million in 2014-15, down from $7.5 million the previous year and $8.2 million in 2013, according to The Herald Sun.

City Car Tax
An inner-city congestion charge for cars that vary according to traffic conditions has been proposed to solve Melbourne’s road problems. The RACV supports the idea in principle, provided that petrol prices and some other charges fall under a major review of motorising taxes. US planning expert Professor Robert Cervero said that political will was needed to put a price on the true costs of using cars, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Cycling Rules Clarified
An article in The Age on December 7 spoke of a new handbook, which sets the record straight concerning Victoria’s often misunderstood cycling road rules. It aims to take the confusion, and maybe some of the heat, out of driver-cyclist interactions. Produced by the Victoria Law Foundation, the pocket-sized Bike Law Handbook has the backing of the cyclist group Bicycle Network, which hopes that it will reduce the number of crashes on the state’s roads.

Craig Richard, Bicycle Network’s chief executive, observed that confusion about the road rules created potential, all too often realised, for conflict and unsafe behaviour. Of some inner-city stretches of the city’s busiest road. The West Gate Freeway is, the pocket-sized handbook’s author, produced an article in The Age.

The warning of looming gridlock near the port appears repeatedly in reports and confidential briefings about the $1.6 billion Webb Dock project, which also reveal the project’s costs are spiralling as VicRoads rectifies the botched road plans.

Among the serious planning mistakes was a failure by the port authority to design the roads for super-sized container trucks, which have had approval to travel on certain Victorian roads since 2013, as reported in The Age.
Advice Ignored
As per reported by Lucille Keen, in the Australian Financial Review, former prime minister Tony Abbott has been criticized by the federal government’s financial watchdog for handing over $3 billion to Victoria for its East West Link toll road and tunnel without proper analysis. Commonwealth Auditor-General Grant Hehir (formerly New South Wales Auditor-General and before that a well-known Victorian departmental Treasury secretary) said Abbott was given “clear advice” from the public sector that the toll road project had not been fully analysed.

He criticized Abbott for approving the transfer of $1.5 billion on the final day of the 2013-14 financial year, which maximized the budget deficit in the Rudd government’s final year. The reporter claimed Abbott ignored advice from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development that the money was being transferred to the state well in “advance of project needs, and proposed and alternative payment approach that aligned payments with project progress.”

WELFARE
Church Confessions Sought
In a rare public statement, Sano taskforce detectives investigating historic allegations of abuse have made an appeal for information about sexual assaults at St Patrick’s Cathedral between 1951 and 2001. The development came after Cardinal Pell cancelled his flights to Melbourne from Rome, citing ill health for being unable to give evidence in person at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, as reported in The Age.

Heat on parents
The number of children having to be treated after being trapped in hot cars has soared by more than 40 per cent in the past year.

As the mercury rises again today, the Herald Sun can reveal paramedics were called to a record 1531 instances of children being locked in hot cars up more than 30 per cent from the 1165 in 2014, according to the Herald Sun.

SOCIETY
Campsites
Fees at dozens of campsites around the state have been cut by $11 a night ahead of the Christmas holidays, with refunds to be given to families who have already booked.

The fee reductions affect 55 “mid-level” camping or boating sites, including in the Gippsland Lakes, Kinglake, Great Otway National Park, and Grampians areas. It comes after the Government scrapped a new fee system, introduced by the former government, for all basic campgrounds, as per the Herald Sun.

A new era
There has been much evidence before the child abuse royal commission, when 1996 marked the start of an era when the church took its responsibilities for clergy sex crimes and cover-up much more seriously. The church has said this new era meant transparency, accountability, justice for victims and a new leadership showing integrity, courage and a commitment to change.

This new wave of church leadership prompted Pell, in 1996, to establish the Melbourne Response, an internal process which investigated complaints of clergy sexual abuse. It was characterised as being a genuine attempt to both give justice to victims and act against clergy offenders. (This has not turned out to be the case. Asmy research has found, not only has the Melbourne Response not provided justice to some victims, it has caused a new round of trauma and harm to many), as per The Age.

Ice has cold results
According to The Age, a government panel has made more than 50 recommendations to help tackle Victoria’s methamphetamine epidemic, including expansion of the drug court, and a police operation to stem supply of the drug from south-east Asia.

The law reform, drugs and crime prevention committee’s 900-page report, the result of the bipartisan inquiry’s year-long consultation. Headed by Western Victoria MP Simon Ramsay, the committee’s recommendations included: a “harmonization” of unexplained health laws across Australia to large organized crime groups and laws to allow for the declaration of “drug transit zones” to assist with cross-border detection and seizure of illicit drugs on interstate roads.

There are better ways
A quarter of all drownings in 2014 in Victoria involved people who were born overseas. 39 people died in water in Victoria in 2014, and involved people who were born overseas. A quarter of all drownings in 2014 in Victoria involved people who were born overseas. 39 people died in water in Victoria in 2014, and 90 per cent of the victims were men. On concern, the report also found that appropriate safety checks had not been carried out at almost half of the state’s swimming pools in the past five years. It comes as Consumer Affairs inspectors start conducting hundreds of unannounced inspections of shops and wholesalers to seize potentially dangerous inflatable pools and swimming toys, as reported in the Herald Sun. Too much paperwork. Bring back the Herald Learn-To-Swim certificate, (was that its name) from the Baby boom era generation.

VALE
Bannon, John, aged 72. Labor Premier of South Australia. Bardenhagen, Dr Fiona Jane, aged 48. Boffa, Maria Aurelia OAM, aged 94.

Brzozek, Anna. Bufradeci, Maria Aurelia OAM, aged 94.


Hurley, Thomas Victor. Victorian Bar. A Great friend of many and will be greatly missed.

James, Dr. Patrick Keely, The Hon John QC, aged 90. Victorian Bar. Kendall, Barry Anthony. Kennelly, Ron. Respected member of the Portside community. Krum, Henry, aged 67. Professor at the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Researcher at The Alfred Hospital. La Fontaine, Don Cyrell.

Leydon, John, aged 72. Soldier, chief instructor of a national Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU), and known for his strict discipline as ‘Mad Dog,’ a name which amused him when, long afterwards, he learned of it. MacDonald, Rod, aged 92. Architect.

Marginson, Betty May AM. University College, Municipal Councillor and Mayor of Hawthorn.


Lieberman, Evelyn May (née Simonowitz). Aged 71. Former deputy chief of staff during Bill Clinton’s presidency, and best known for having attempted to thwart the Monica Lewinsky scandal by banning Clinton’s best-known intern to a job outside the White House. Maxwell, Godfrey John.

Nachman, Merton Roland, aged 92. Alabama lawyer who made history when it came to American defamation laws. His client, segregationist Montgomery politician L.B. Sullivan, sued The New York Times for having published in 1960 an advertisement that Sullivan considered to be defamatory. Under Alabama law and national law, as matters stood then, it was. Sullivan won from the newspaper $500,000 in damages, equivalent to almost $3,914,000 in today’s money.

Unfortunately for him, the Supreme Court’s judges in 1964 (New York Times v. Sullivan) unanimously overturned the original state court’s 1962 ruling, and decreed that the ruling’s criteria for determining defamation had been far too strict. The long-term result was that libel laws in America, at both state and federal level, were spectacularly weakened; ‘that actual malice’ needed to be proven in libel cases; and that in practice the First Amendment would triumph over other considerations.
Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mark Stone
Chief Executive
20 January 2016

PC report on Australia’s workplace relations framework makes valuable recommendations, but falls short in key areas for business

As you may have seen the Productivity Commission’s (PC) report on Australia’s workplace relations framework was released prior to Christmas and contains important recommendations for Victorian business.

Our submission argued that the key outcomes of the PC review must be the creation of a simpler, fairer and more efficient framework that spurs economic growth, increased productivity and improved business competitiveness.

We welcome a number of the final report’s recommendations including:

- Providing penalty rate relief for hospitality, entertainment, retail, restaurant and café businesses by aligning Sunday rates with Saturday rates.
  
  The report states that Sunday penalty rates are inappropriately high given changing consumer preferences and work against the interest of people seeking employment and employers who want to trade on a Sunday.

- Reform of state and territory public holidays. The PC has recommended that new state public holidays are not subject to public holiday penalty rates or a paid day of leave.
  
  This recommendation is particularly relevant in Victoria as the recent introduction of two new public holidays takes Victoria to a nationwide high of 13 days, compared to states like New South Wales with 11. The Victorian Chamber calls for a nationally consistent maximum number of public holidays to reduce the cost and confusion for business.

- Addressing ‘strike first, talk later’ tactics by unions.
  
  These tactics significantly disrupt business and there is no requirement for bargaining to have commenced before striking occurs. The PC has made recommendations that would limit this avenue.

- Expanding the existing portable long service leave schemes would not be justified given the cost to business for no benefit.
  
  The Victorian Chamber’s separate submission to the State Government’s inquiry into this issue stated that an expansion would impose significant costs on business and discourage employment, particularly among older Victorians.

However, we were disappointed that the report falls short in a number of areas.

The report missed the opportunity to address the problem of costly and lengthy general protections claims, despite our strong advocacy on the significant impact they have on business. It does, however, propose reforms to limit the ability of frivolous and vexatious claims to proceed, and for greater powers to award costs against applicants, so we urge the government to act on these recommendations.

Unfair dismissal claims continue to be an issue for business. Despite the Victorian Chamber urging the PC to remove the burden of unfair dismissal for businesses with under 20 employees, this recommendation was not part of the final report. Therefore small businesses will continue to spend time and money defending claims rather than running their businesses.

We are also disappointed that the PC has recommended the removal of the small business dismissal code, rather than working with industry to improve the effectiveness of the code.

We await the Federal Government’s response to the report and urge it to consider the recommendations and take on the heavy lifting required to implement much needed reforms for business.

Mark Stone is the Chief Executive of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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