

LETTER FROM MELBOURNE

A monthly public affairs bulletin, a simple précis, distilling and interpreting public policy and government decisions, which effect business opportunities in Victoria and Australia.
Every month for twenty-two years.

Settling into the New Year Edition

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Letter From Melbourne is a monthly public affairs bulletin, a simple précis, distilling and interpreting public policy and government decisions, which affect business opportunities in Victoria and Australia.

Written for the regular traveller, or people with meeting-filled days, it's more about business opportunities than politics.

Letter from Melbourne is independent. It's not party political or any other political. It does not have the imprimatur of government at any level. Letter from Melbourne developed a federal and national coverage. This spawned Letter from Canberra (www.letterfromcanberra.com.au) four years ago.

The only communication tool of its type, Letter from Melbourne keeps subscribers abreast of recent developments in the policy arena on a local, state and federal level.

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Letter from Melbourne

Since 1994. A monthly public affairs newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which effect business opportunities in Victoria, Australia and beyond. 2,000,000 words available to search digitally.

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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

Affairs of State

Established in 1993, is an independent Australian public affairs firm with contemporary international connections. Affairs of State provides a matrix of professional tools to multinational businesses, professional and industry associations, government agencies, pressure groups, NGOs and community causes in Australia and abroad.

The firm works with many engineering and information technology firms and other professional association and industry groups on a wide range of issues in Victoria, Canberra and overseas.

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The Editor having coffee with his niece, Georgia in Spring Street, on her recent visit from Broome.

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EDITORIAL Culturally Speaking

There was two parliamentary sitting weeks in February, that is the normal Tuesday to Thursday. Similar in March. With a fairly quiet media in the politics and public policy space. Items which really caught the front pages were the overhead railway line on the Cranbourne-Pakenham line, with the Premier in some words somehow saying that the community/Community had been advised and had added to the debate. A standard type comment by politicians when something does not quite fit in. The editor says this almost respectfully. But the no rail in my backyard movement is spreading into non-affected communities as did the East West Link community communications, though in that case the community were well consulted by Government beforehand...

Education is primary schools along the safe sex focus has attracted much attention, because of its bias towards middle-gender. This has quickly become a national issue, with the Prime Minister involved. Issues which were not considered 30 years ago and now being pushed by some sectors with such passion or emotion that it is not possible to get an objective debate.

The Editor has had many coffees in recent months with a range of public private and industry sector people and is shocked by the extent of unhappiness within the Public Service. The IBAC inquiry into Ultraset is certainly detailing some of the personal, and public cost, in very great detail. One needs to so much understand a Culture(s) as it /they might blend with other Culture(s), and how Ethics and FairPlay are conducted and measured. Sadly political correctness can be a barrier to this.

The resignation of the Police Minister is one of the more powerful events for a long time. The editor wishes him all the best. The sheer sadness and much else, of the issues for which he has had responsibility, has so effected him personally. A stand out politician resignation, so few are so affected.

Dreaming (for the Best). Infrastructure Victoria has a new plan. Some details below. The federal Infrastructure Australia plan came out about the same week.

The Cover. Peter Lalor was a businessman and digger at the Ballarat Goldfields. On 3 December 1854, he was a leader at the Eureka Stockade, and then he became a member of Parliament of the Victorian parliament for Ballarat. He was never a unionist. In due course he built the house on the Cover in Church Street, Richmond.

Even if you might not be planning to buy it, real estate agents Jellis Craig might show you through the House. Andrew McMillan 0418 142 252. Andrew is a very good auctioneer, and last year auctioned off a full set of **Letter From Melbourne**, with the proceeds to the Lort Smith Animal Hospital.

Happy or serious Reading.

FEATURE ITEM

Infrastructure Victoria is currently seeking community feedback on what the 30-year infrastructure strategy for Victoria is trying to achieve. Here is your chance.

Infrastructure Victoria as three key roles.

1. Prepare a 30 year infrastructure strategy for Victoria. The (draft of the 30 year strategy was released on 15 February.
2. Provide advice to the Victorian government on infrastructure matters.
3. Publish research on infrastructure matters.

The CEO is **Michel Masson**, who has run Yarra Trams and much else, and speaks French. Chair **Jim Miller**, formerly an executive director at Macquarie Capital, and has had much experience in the infrastructure space. Deputy Chair **Maria Wilton**, Many boards including Melbourne Water and Emergency Services.

Professor Margaret Gardner AO, President and Vice Chancellor of Monash University.

Ann Sherry AO, CEO of Carnival Australia, a leading ship cruise operator.

Chris Eccles, Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Adam Fennessy, Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

David Martine Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance

STATE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**Surge In Support**

The Coalition in Victoria has posted a huge surge in support, following the federal leadership change to **Turnbull**, drawing within striking distance of Labor and Premier **Andrews**, whose honeymoon appears to be over. The Coalition primary vote in the most recent Newspoll, in February taking exclusively for *The Australian*, jumped from the low of 35 per cent in May-June to 43 per cent in November-December.

Fractured Right Closer To Unity

Labor's fractured Right faction in Victoria is within one step of reunification, in a move expected to have ramifications for the Wills and Chisholm federal pre-selections and future debates on policy and personnel, according to *The Australian*.

Female Executive A Favourite For Senate

Victoria's all-male Liberal Senate team could be facing a shake up: Australian Super adviser **Jane Hume** has emerged as a favourite to replace outgoing Senator **Michael Ronaldson**. Freedom and Human Rights Commissioner **Tim Wilson's** decision to bow out of the race is 'building momentum' for an all female ticket at the 2016 election, say Liberal MPs, and could help Ms **Hume** take the top spot. Assistant Treasurer **Kelly O'Dwyer's** chief of staff **Julian Sheezel**, who was initially thought to be in with

a chance, also pulled out of the race in January, according to *The Australian Financial Review*.

MPs' Hiccup

A plan to introduce breath tests for state MPs has stalled, according to the *Herald Sun*. Almost 14 months since an election-eve promise was made by Premier **Daniel Andrews**, MPs are no closer to facing on-the-spot tests and penalties for exceeding 0.05. Legislative Council president **Bruce Atkinson** said that no plan was being considered by his office to carry out the tests on MPs during sitting weeks.

Mr Atkinson's comments appeared at odds with government spokesman **Chris Piper**, who said 'the implementation of this is a matter for parliament's presiding officers.' But Mr Atkinson said, 'The Government has made no formal approach about what they expect to be implemented.'

Rorts for Votes

The *Herald Sun* recently reported that Victorian Ombudsman **Deborah Glass** has gone to the Supreme Court after the Government tried to shut down her probe into Labor's rorts-for-votes scandal. Last November, the **Legislative Council** directed **Ms Glass** to investigate whether Labor misused taxpayer funds in the lead up to the 2014 poll. Labour whistle-blowers last year claimed that the ALP had used electorate office funding to pay for casual staffers who worked on the 2014 election campaign against parliamentary rules.

New Chief For Lobby Group

Martine Letts will take the reins at the **Committee for Melbourne** on March 1, succeeding **Kate Roffey**. Currently based in Sydney, Letts has included in her career several years running the **Australian Red Cross** and 17 years with the Department of Foreign Trade and Affairs. She has also been Chief Executive of the Melbourne based **Australian China Business Council** since 2013, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

Early Election Trigger

Victoria is facing the threat of an early election following a major Parliamentary impasse over the \$6 billion sale of the **Port of Melbourne**.

Talks between the Government and the Opposition to pass the deal through the upper house, where Labor is seven votes short of a majority, have all but failed.

As a result, the Labor party indicated it was preparing to use a little-known 2003 clause allowing it to refer disputed legislation to a specially-convened **Dispute Resolution Committee** as per The Age.

Now Out

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Police Minister Down

Victorian Police Minister **Wade Noonan** has stunned colleagues by standing down temporarily, citing the strain of 'constant exposure' to details of unspeakable crimes and traumatic events in his job as reported in *The Australian*.

But his ministerial colleagues rallied around the 44 year old, praising him for admitting he needed respite. **Noonan** stood down for three months as minister and local member, saying the grisly nature of some of the issues he was dealing with had 'taken an unexpected toll.'

Kennett Slams Doyle

Former Victorian Premier **Jeff Kennett** has likened Melbourne Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** to an ostrich with its head in the sand for not accepting the evidence that Sydney's safe injecting centre has been a success that could be replicated in the Victorian capital, according to *The Australian*.

Council Secrecy Grows

A *Herald Sun* report found that Victorian councils are becoming more secretive, making an average of one in eight decisions behind closed doors. A State Government website shows that **Latrobe Council** is Victoria's least transparent, its councillors having made more than 47 per cent of decisions in 2014-15 in closed session. Casey was Melbourne's most secretive council, making almost 40 per cent of its decisions out of public view.

Many counsellors are interpreting confidentiality based on their own varying understanding and limited experience of good governance-driven decision-making, which is contributing to high levels of closed secret-squirrel meetings, **Ms Cheah** said. There are also increased exposures to undeclared conflict of interests and, potentially, fraud and corruption risks.

State Apology For Gay Community

Men who received criminal convictions for having gay sex before homosexuality was decriminalised in Victoria are set to receive a formal state apology. In a symbolic bid to rectify past injustices, the historic event will take place in the Victorian parliament on May 24, almost three decades after homosexuality was removed from the states statue books.

Premier **Daniel Andrews** will make the announcement as he attends the gay and lesbian **Pride March** in St Kilda for his second consecutive year. The formal state apology comes after Victoria recently moved to erase the criminal records of men who were previously prosecuted simply for having consensual sex with other men.

Before decriminalisation, countless gay men were convicted of crimes such as buggery and gross indecency with a male person, restricting them from travelling, volunteering or applying for jobs such as teaching. Attending this year's **Pride March**, the first in the history of the 21-year-old event to be centred on the theme of marriage equality, will be Ombudsman **Deborah Glass** and her team, supporting the LGBTI community.

With a federal election looming, the debate around same-sex marriage intensified recently. Several MPs in the federal government, according to *The Age*, said that they would not vote for change even if the Australian people at a plebiscite support it.

Reality Star Turns To Politics

Wannabe MP **Megan Purcell** has won Liberal Party preselection for the federal seat of Bendigo. Purcell is one of four contestants competing on *The Farmer Wants A Wife* for the affections of 36-year-old livestock farmer **Julz** from Tumby Bay in South Australia, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

Down Frankston way

Former Carrum MP **Donna Bauer** and Dandenong businessman **Peter Angelico** are the frontrunners in the Liberal preselection battle for the federal seat of Dunkley in Melbourne's south-east, according to *The Age*. This seat was held till recently by former Small Business Minister **Bruce Billson**. **Businessman Chris Crewther** was the Winner

Political Watchdog Put Down

Daniel Andrews's cabinet last year considered and shelved the proposal that a Parliamentary Integrity Commissioner be created, after revelations of the Labor Party's misuse of parliamentary funds in the lead-up to the 2014 state election. In an unprecedented leak, the *Herald Sun* revealed details of the call for a new independent body that would 'address the gaps in the existing integrity system'.

The proposal, by Special Minister of State **Gavin Jennings**, would improve the integrity and accountability system's effectiveness overseeing MPs, ministers and other public funded staff. But Government spokesman **Chris Piper** insisted that the ALP had introduced significant reforms to the offices of the IBAC, the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman, reforms which would ensure that the public sector and Parliament retained the highest standards of conduct.

Police Chief Blasted

Victoria police chief **Graham Ashton** has effectively destroyed his relationship with the state Coalition by hiring the former right-hand man to **Daniel Andrews** at his permanent chief of staff. **Brett Curran** was the most senior adviser to the Premier when the latter was still Opposition Leader, and he also ran the office of a senior minister in the previous Labor government.

Mr Ashton has ignored a backlash from Liberals and Nationals and hired Mr Curran as his Chief of Staff. He did so despite a key part of his job being to act as an intermediary between political figures and the Chief Commissioner, making it problematic for the Coalition to deal with Mr Ashton's own office.

Coalition police spokesman **Edward O'Donohue** condemned the appointment. *The Australian* reported Mr O'Donohue as declaring that the idea of the force having been unable to find a politically independent person beggared belief.

Critical Year For VIC Fiscal Health

Right now, the Victorian economy is in pretty good shape. But it's all pivoting on just two things: people still pouring here from overseas and interstate, and the strength of the Melbourne property market and all that apartment building. We are yet to really feel the impact of the end of the China driven resources boom, and maybe a slowing of all that Chinese money that's been flowing into apartment buying. And, of course, what happens when the car industry finally closes down? These are among the issues lately raised by **Terry McCrann**, in *The Herald Sun*.

Road Warrior To Quit

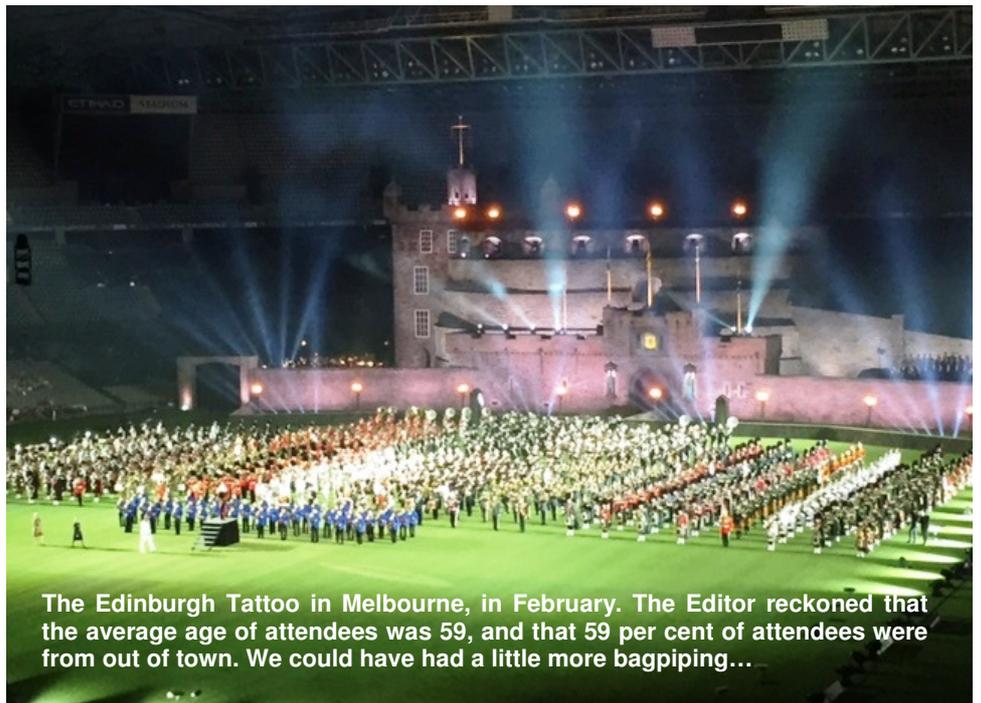
Former County Court Judge **Gordon Lewis** is quitting his role as Victoria's first independent road safety camera commissioner at age 81, finishing up as speed and red light camera watchdog. The *Herald Sun* observed that Mr Lewis's recommendations during his four years in the job resulted in a refund for millions of dollars in wrongly paid fines.

FEDERAL

Shame on You

Daniel Andrews has disgracefully played on people's emotions by offering to take in the 267 asylum seekers who face being sent to Nauru following the High Court ruling.

The Victorian premier is guilty of the most blatant grandstanding, going so far as to take two of the children among the asylum seekers to the **Melbourne Zoo** and posting a picture of them together.



The Edinburgh Tattoo in Melbourne, in February. The Editor reckoned that the average age of attendees was 59, and that 59 per cent of attendees were from out of town. We could have had a little more baggiping...

Andrews boasts that he is prepared to offer sanctuary to the asylum seekers 'because it is the right thing to do.' No, Mr Premier, it is the wrong thing to do. According to a *Herald Sun* editorial, **Andrews** is offering false hope in a heart-wrenching situation where people smugglers are watching for the slightest weakness in the Federal Government's turn-back-the boats policy that has saved so many lives.

Andrews risks more drownings at sea if the people smugglers take his words as opening the way for them to resume a human trade that cost 1200 lives as Labor lost control of Australia's borders during the Rudd and Gillard years in government.

Where Are The Towers?

Just four of 109 new mobile phone towers promised to fix Victoria's telephonic black spots have been built, with the rollout bogged down in red tape. The resultant delay, noted in the *Weekly Times*, leaves Victorians in some of the state's most fire-prone regions at risk of missing out on vital emergency information, and demanding to know when the problem will be fixed.

Residents caught in the North East Victorian blaze, which ravaged 9,000 hectares around Barnawartha and the Indigo Valley, have complained that they were unable to access updates about the fires because of poor mobile reception. And while the federal and Victorian governments insist that the rollout is in the providers' hands, a **Telstra** spokesman said that scheduling also hinged on when promised cash from both governments was delivered.

'We expect to be able to provide more detail about the schedule in the near future once agreements are finalised with all contributing governments' the spokesman said. Other factors such as local council planning permission, the geography of some sites and existing infrastructure also affected timelines.

Grab For TAFE Resisted

State governments have condemned the bid by **Malcolm Turnbull's** cabinet to take over

responsibility for funding TAFE. They reckon that the federal government instead needs to focus on repairing its scandal-plagued vocational loans scheme.

Under the controversial proposal, revealed by Fairfax Media and discussed in some detail by *The Age*, TAFE fees would be deregulated. Also, TAFEs would receive the same levels of funding as private colleges in a bid to increase competition in the sector.

Time for Bold Tax Reform

Remember several facts: Corporate taxation provides 22 per cent of federal revenue; personal taxation provides 50 per cent. Of this 50 per cent, the top 2.3 per cent of income earners pay 26.1 per cent of all personal income paid. The top 16.8 per cent of taxpayers paid 63.5 per cent of tax paid by individuals. Meanwhile the bottom and 27.3 per cent of income earners pay 3.7 per cent of all personal income taxes paid. The GST collects 15 per cent of federal revenues, but this is paid out in full to the states.

Indirect taxes excluding GST provide the Commonwealth with 13 per cent of its revenue. Further, any increase in taxation removes from federal or state governments the pressure to adjust their own levels of spending. For Australia to avoid the abyss we're quickly approaching, we need a combination of reviewing and reducing government expenditure and also instigating a taxation system that, while providing incentives, is fair and provides the revenues to governments to meet the country's or states' most basic needs.

Such are the findings of **Jeff Kennett** in a recent column. The former Premier told the *Herald Sun*: 'Because of my past political life I have some understanding about the need for urgent reform. This is why I strongly believe a broader taxation base that reflects the personal choices we as individuals make on the things we buy is one of the necessary and fair ingredients of reform. Maybe on many items the greater the value of the product the greater the percentage of GST applied, if that is not too difficult to administer.'

AGRICULTURE

Food Boom Rules

Food and grocery processing in Victoria is well poised to fill the employment gap left by other manufacturing sectors such as cars, new research shows. According to the *Weekly Times*, an **Australian Food and Grocery Council** analysis has shown that food manufacturing is responsible for almost half of all current manufacturing jobs in regional Victoria – and with a 28 per cent growth in food and beverage exports last year, there's every reason to expect more.

State Output Slashed

According to the latest quarterly production update from the **Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences**, the national wheat harvest is expected to clock in at 24.2 million tonnes this financial year. That is up 5 per cent on a year earlier, but Victoria is a clear laggard among the individual state forecasts.

Victoria's wheat belt, which is heavily concentrated in the Mallee and Wimmera regions, bore the effects of lower rainfall through the past winter season. The *Herald Sun* reported that many areas received less than 60 per cent of average seasonal falls.

Murray Fears Still Flow

A member of the billionaire Kahbetzer family has accused the federal government of using water bought from irrigators to prop up South Australia's Lower Lakes instead of acting to the benefit of natural wetlands and forests. In May 2009, **Twynam Agricultural Group** sold 249,000 megalitres of Murray Darling entitlements to the government for \$300 million, the largest single sale of environmental water in Australia's history.

Owner and Director **Johnny Kahlbetzer**, whose company was once the largest private holder of irrigation rights in the basin, said – according to *The Weekend Australian* – that this vital water was now being directed to the artificial environment of the Lower Lakes, which was losing unacceptable volumes to evaporation. He called for management of the barrages to

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enable the Southern Ocean to roll into the lakes each autumn and during drought. 'So much environmental water was sent down to the Lower Lakes last year that water levels were almost one meter above sea level at the beginning of summer, because the barrages act like a dam wall.'

ARTS

Bendigo Scratches Its Marilyn Itch

An eight-metre-high sculpture of Marilyn Monroe, titled *Forever Marilyn*, was installed in Bendigo's Rosalind Park. The statue's monumental take on Ms Monroe's flirty subway scene, made famous in the 1955 movie *The Seven-Year Itch* is crafted from stainless steel and aluminium and weighs 15 tonnes. The artwork has not been seen outside America before.

Forever Marilyn precedes an exhibition devoted to the same iconic actress at the Bendigo Art Gallery. The *Herald Sun* revealed that this exhibition would provide a huge array of costumes and other memorabilia.

EDUCATION

Transgender Brainwash

A mother has withdrawn her children from Frankston High School over a new transgender awareness program. **Cella White** says her son, 14, was told he could wear a dress and that boys who identified as female could use the girls' change rooms and toilets according to the *Herald Sun*.

Principal **John Albiston** denied pupils were being brainwashed. He said all state schools must join the **Safe Schools Coalition** by 2018, and his was showing 'we openly celebrate differences and support students who identify with the LGBTI community.'

Education Minister **James Merlino's** spokesman expressed pride in the **Safe Schools Coalition**: 'Discrimination, harassment and bullying have no place. It is up to all of us to establish safe and inclusive learning environments for every one of our students.'

Chaos for Students

Three private training colleges that collapsed, leaving thousands of students in limbo, received at least \$66 million in government funded student loans. They had been recently audited by the national regulator and were found to be compliant, with the largest still under investigation.

As news of the closures trickled to concerned students, former employees revealed the colleges recruited students from foster homes, homeless shelters, womens' refuges, aged-care homes and drug rehabilitation centres.

Aspire College of Education, The Design Works College of Design, the Australian Indigenous College and the affiliated **RTO Services Group** and **National Training and Development** were placed in voluntary administration, with at least 500 staff affected according to *The Age*.

We Don't Need No Education ... Review

Premier **Daniel Andrews** has attacked **Malcolm Turnbull's** decision to review a school education program that aims to promote acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students according to *The Age*.

Bad Grades Are Out

Aspiring teachers who receive poor VCE results could be barred from Victorian classrooms under a proposal being considered by the state government. A spokesman for Education Minister **James Merlino** confirmed that the cabinet was considering a similar model to New South Wales, where future teachers are sourced from the top 30 per cent of school leavers. In an effort to attract more high achieving students to the profession, NSW has set minimum academic standards for entry into undergraduate teaching degrees, as reported in *The Age*.

Dookie At Double

Student numbers could double the year at the **University of Melbourne's** diploma in general studies at Dookie, between Shepparton and Benalla. The general studies diploma started in 2013, according to the *Herald Sun*, and includes comments, environment, science and agriculture subjects, preparing students for further tertiary studies.

Social Engineering?

Victorian schools will soon have to follow strict new participation guidelines aimed at tackling discrimination against transgender students in sport, as reported in *The Age*.

The Wag State

As people's return to class this term, a third of the states primary teachers and almost half of secondary teachers now brand truancy as a big problem. But not one parent has been fined for repeatedly failing to send their child to school, two years after tough new laws were introduced. Principals and the **Australian Education Union** say these facts supply the evidence that schools need better support to address truancy, according to the *Herald Sun*.

External Exams To Fight Cheats

Training college students would be forced to sit external exams in a crackdown on cheating flagged by the federal Education Department. A recent report from *The Weekend Australian* quoted the federal Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, **Luke Hartsuyker**, as having backed his department's proposal for independent marking.

Audits by the **Australian Skills Quality Authority** have warned of the potential for cheating and identity fraud in some training courses. Some training colleges let students, rather than needing to do formal tests, self-assess their knowledge to gain a diploma in child care, aged care or security work.

Unprepared For Student Explosion

Up to 220 new schools need to be built in Victoria in the next decade to cope with an explosion in student numbers, research has warned. But despite the alarming statistics, for the first time in 15 years, not a single new state school will open its doors to students when classes resume this term.

Victorian schools must absorb 190,000 extra students between 2016 and 2026. This was the finding of an analysis prepared for **Fairfax Media** by the **Grattan Institute**, as reported in *The Age*.

Can VET Mess Be Fixed?

As Victoria's inaugural skills commissioner, the new watchdog for the travel and vocational education and training sector, **Neil Coulson** now has the responsibility of aiming to help the state government fix the mess. 'We need to ensure that courses are matching the skill requirements of industry,' he said to *The Sunday Age*, 'but that they are also adding value to students and putting them in good stead for employment.'

Mr Coulson, the former head of the **Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**, said that an initial task would be creating fresh strategy to identify skills shortfalls and analyse the training needs of existing and emerging industries. It's fair to say expectations are high.

School Spending Reckless

A billion dollars in extra funding would flow to Victorian schools over two years under Labor's plan to fund the full six years of the **Gonski** school funding deals. **Malcolm Turnbull** took aim at **Bill Shorten's** plan to spend an extra \$37 billion on schools during the next decade. *The Age* reported the Prime Minister as decrying the plan, likening it to reckless spending reminiscent of the Rudd-Gillard years.



The NewMarket Sale Yards reunion in February was a wonderful time to catch up with drovers, auctioneers, truckies, stockmen and farmers. And to have Coffee with Joan Caldwell who helps put this annual event together, since the markets closed in 1987. Any photos of the Editor playing *Waltzing Matilda* under the Peppercorns are in the *Stock and Land* magazine.

First Week Bomb Threats

A series of hoax bomb threats led to the evacuation of several schools and learning centres across Victoria and interstate. Victoria police said the phone calls were not related to terrorism and there was no imminent threat to schools, according to *The Age*. But certain hoax bomb calls in early February, causing chaos in Victorian schools, have been traced to an elite high school, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

ENERGY

Duplicate the System

State governments may have to spend billions of dollars to duplicate the electricity network to cope with the unreliability of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar, according to the national energy forecaster, as reported in *The Australian*.

As the **Australian Energy Market Operator** released a report that found there could be reliability issues for the South Australian market, which has embraced renewable technology, its chief executive, **Matt Zema**, said that the rise of wind and solar could also create problems throughout the country.

ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION

Sustainability Fund Sitting Idle

The State Government has a community chest of more than \$300 million earmarked for a specific role, but now sitting idle in the Treasury according to **Tim Piper** in the *Herald Sun*.

Its called the **Sustainability Fund**, and its money that industry, the community, and you and I have paid as a levy on waste. Right now, it's \$75 per tonne of waste to landfill.

When the fund was established 11 years ago, it was intended to help reduce waste and to encourage action where there was no viable market; for example, to fund the development of composting to help create a product that the market would eventually pay for. metres.

Set New Emissions Targets

Victoria's climate change laws face a major overhaul, with an independent review recommending the state establish new targets to cut emissions, put in place a legally binding charter on government decisions and give the environmental watchdog powers to limit greenhouse gases, among other sweeping reforms as per *The Age*.

But the government, which commissioned the review, has immediately ruled out setting up a state-based emissions trading scheme or

adopting a 'shadow carbon price' on government decisions, which were both floated in the review's recommendations.

The latest scrutiny of the laws, headed by lawyer **Martijn Wilder**, a partner at **Baker & McKenzie**, put forward 33 recommendations that would significantly bolster climate law powers. The review did not spell out exactly what Victoria's climate targets should be, but said that it should focus on limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

New Crown For Queen Vic?

Queen Victoria Market has two trump cards: a bid for listing with the **UN** as a protected World Heritage site, and a \$250 million dollar master plan to reinvigorate the market. The case has been laid out in a study that portrays the 'Queen Vic' as more than just a market, but as a key element in the city's foundation story.

As Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** notes, in the early days Melbourne was ringed by markets that were the forerunners of the Queen Vic. Among the key claims to heritage status is the site's history as the city's first cemetery. An estimated 7,500 people were buried there, including local Aborigines and **John Batman** himself in 1839, though his were among remains later transferred.

Despite its origins, built on the remains of the dead, the market was always a living, breathing part of the city. At the moment, only one Melbourne landmark currently has protected World Heritage site status: the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens.

Or **Doyle** says that the federal Environment Minister **Greg Hunt** has suggested a possible fast track to UNESCO recognition. This procedure would involve linking it to the existing world heritage listing for the Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, as reported in *The Age*.

Flamin' Help

Victoria's super anti-bushfire fleet includes 47 water bombers and surveillance aircraft, 25 helicopters, 22 fixed-wing planes, two large air tankers, two air-cranes (water-bombing helicopters) and two Sikorsky helicopters. Many of the 47 water bombers have been brought in from overseas for the bushfire season, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Backburn Gone Wrong

A controversial back-burning operation, carried out despite warnings of potential catastrophe, may have led to the Christmas Day devastation

of the Wye River township, confidential state government files revealed, according to *The Age*.

Frightening Picture For Future

Analysis prepared for the Victorian government paints a frightening picture of Melbourne's future climate, with transport infrastructure vulnerable to flooding and heat stress, longer and more severe bushfires and pressure on hospitals from heatwaves. *The Age* described the relevant modelling, from the **CSIRO** and **Bureau of Meteorology**, as predicting that climate change could have a major impact on the state's health system, economy and environment, including shorter snow seasons, food production challenges and problems with transport infrastructure.

Those forecasts were prepared as the government seeks to elevate climate change in terms of a political issue, ahead of possible new laws to tackle emissions. The predictions, based on international climate models, show that under a high-emission scenario similar to the current trend, the number of days over 35 degrees in Melbourne would more than double from an average of eight per year to 17 by 2070. Average rainfall could drop by up to 23 per cent in the most extreme case.

Fire-fighters Demand Inquiry

The firefighters' union has demanded a coronial inquiry into the devastating Wye River fire after revelations of a back-burning operation in the Otway Ranges before Christmas Day. **Fairfax Media** earlier revealed leaked files which showed that a controversial back-burning operation, carried out despite warnings of potential catastrophe, may have led to the destruction of more than 100 houses in Wye River and Separation Creek, according to *The Age*.

Environment Minister **Lisa Neville** has rejected claims that she intervened to cancel a planned burn last March because a local koala cull had gained widespread media coverage. She called these claims 'false accusations.'

Dissent On Ducks

Daniel Andrews faces internal dissent over his government's decision to allow another duck-hunting season. It's a decision that comes despite Labor's own environmental policy committee calling for a permanent ban.

Rank-and-file members are furious at the move, which they claim could blunt Labor's message against animal cruelty and leave the party at even greater risk to attack by the Greens. The

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government has announced the start of a full length 12-week season, but has imposed fresh restrictions on the daily bag limit, amid concerns about low bird numbers and dry conditions.

As part of the new conditions, hunters will be given a bag limit of eight birds on the first day of the season which begins in March, followed by a bag limit of four bags per day until the season ends in June.

However, Agriculture Minister **Jaala Pulford** said 'hunting is an important contributor to many small rural communities. Victoria's 48,000 licensed game hunters, including about 26,000 duck-hunters, contribute more than \$430 million to local economies each year and help support over 3,000 jobs.'

Hunters have expressed disappointment at the restrictions announced this year. Shooters and Fishers MP **Daniel Young** said he was not aware of any scientific evidence to prove that that the Victorian duck season had any significant impact on duck populations or their recovery in later years, as reported in *The Sunday Age*.

Twister Hits Melbourne

A mini-tornado created havoc as a wild summer storm struck Melbourne's north in late January. The State Emergency Services received more than 250 calls reporting damaged roofs, smashed windows and flash flooding, and the clean up was continuing late in the night.

Reservoir was hardest hit. Locals said a twister touched down in North Road just after midnight. Residents reported the swirling wind carried away doors and fences, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

EVENTS

All-Night Party

White Night was on Saturday, February 20. More than 500,000 people poured into the city for an all-night cultural party best known for its large-scale light projections, live music and performance, and giant artworks. The event happened between 7PM and 7AM the next day.

Run for the Kids is on Sunday, March 20. **Cirque Du Soleil** opens on January 20 of next year. Tickets now available

Marching to a Different Beat

Over 1200 musicians and performers marched into Etihad Stadium as part of the world-renowned **Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo** in mid-February.

First staged in 1950, it is the fourth time the event has left its Scotland home and the first time it has come to Melbourne, reports the *Herald Sun*.

Drug Amnesty Bins Demanded

Drug disposal bins should be introduced at music festivals, so that revellers can discard illicit substances without fear of being caught by sniffer dogs, health promotion groups say. The so-called amnesty bins could prevent dangerous situations where partygoers panic and take multiple pills at once when faced with being searched by authorities, according to proponents, as reported in *The Age*.

Truck Flip Causes Chaos

A truck full of **Red Bull** drink flipped over on a busy city intersection on a recent Monday morning, causing huge traffic snarls across the transport network during peak hour. *The Age* noted that the truck crashed onto its side when it hit a rail bridge after trying to turn from Spencer Street into Flinders Street at about 7AM.

Wild Geelong

A wild thunderstorm that drenched Geelong with more than a month's rain in less than an hour on January 27 led to widespread flooding and more than 250 calls to emergency services. In total, 72 millimetres of rain were recorded at Avalon Airport, while Geelong Racecourse saw falls of 42 millimetres, as reported in *The Age*.

Australia's Place At The Table

The Global Food Forum takes place at the Palladium, Crown Melbourne on Wednesday April 20, 2016. Business leaders, farmers, politicians and international speakers will discuss the growing debate about foreign investment in Australian agribusiness and how Australia can manage the often competing demands of the mining and agriculture sectors.

An advertisement for the occasion recently appeared in *The Australian*. Keynote speakers and panellists will provide expert 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.

Horse Festival Comes To Town

The ninth **National Clydesdale and Heavy Horse Festival** took place at Werribee Park Equestrian Centre in January, and allowed the public to get up close to these gentle giants.

About 100 horses were on display at the festival, the biggest of its kind in Australia, and one judge travelled from Scotland, the home of the

Clydesdales.

Breeds on display include Clydesdales, fjords, Friesians, Highland ponies, part bred heavies, Percherons, shires and gypsy cobs, which were bred in Europe to pull gypsy wagons, as reported in the *Herald Sun*. Plan for next Year

HEALTH

Can't Afford A Doctor

Struggling to get to a GP when you need one? According to recent data discussed in *The Age*, you're not alone. Last year, one in five Australians waited longer than they thought was acceptable to get to see a GP, and one in 20 said they delayed or did not go to a GP in the previous year because of cost.

While the data published by the Productivity Commission revealed that 85 per cent of GP visits were bulk billed last year (meaning patients faced no cost), the **College of GPs** has warned that more Australians will face private GP fees this year because of the federal freeze on **Medicare** payments for GP services.

Waste Of Space

Victoria's new \$1 billion cancer centre will open with a completely vacant floor this year. Five months before the Parkville centre is due to open, the state government is shopping around for a replacement for the 42-bed **Peter Mac Private**, which it abandoned nine months ago.

Donations to the **Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre**, worth \$20 million, also remain uncertain. These donations were contingent on the private wing being built.

The Government said that under the Coalition's plan, there would have been no viable hospital with access to transport patients to imaging, pathology, operating theatres and the intensive care unit. Bed-based patients would have been required to be transported in lifts shared with animals, animal waste and medical waste, according to the *Herald Sun*.

War Over Ice

Doctors and police are at loggerheads over who should babysit dangerous and volatile patients, high on ice, in hospital emergency departments according to the *Herald Sun*.

BUSINESS & INVESTMENT

Welcome to Boomtown

Melbourne is booming, clocking up a 33 per cent jump in the number of jobs in the last decade to take its growing economy to a worth of \$90 billion, new figures show.

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City council census data shows 111,200 jobs were created since 2005, taking total employment to 450,300 jobs across 16,300 businesses.

Docklands had the largest employment increase of 38,000 jobs, and a 183 per cent rise in the number of cafes and restaurants. Almost 30,000 residential buildings sprang up, providing 58,000 units and 9700 houses and townhouses.

According to the *Herald Sun*, an extra 700 cafes, restaurants and bistros arrived on top of the 1400 from 2005.

The Place To Be

Tradies, bus drivers and real estate agents trained in other Australian states will be welcomed into Victoria under new laws. The State Government will propose a plan to recognise interstate qualifications in the bid to cut red tape for workers living in border towns as per the *Herald Sun*.

The move will affect plumbers, gas installers, bus drivers, real estate agents and pest and weed controllers. The move will help Victoria's growing population, according to Treasurer **Tim Pallas**.

Shipyard Dumps Workers

Defence, security and aerospace company **BAE Systems** will cut 50 jobs from its Williamstown shipyards. The job cuts reduce the total shipyard workforce to just 150. The company has been bleeding jobs over the last 18 months, with more than 800 jobs lost.

The company is winding down as its contract to build the **Air Warfare Destroyer** comes to an end. The **BAE Systems** blow comes as up to 80 jobs will be lost at Treasury Wines packaging and warehousing centre in Mildura according to the *Herald Sun*.

Victoria Hails Full-Time Jobs

An increase in full time jobs in December has been welcomed by the Victorian government. The government has spruiked **Australian Bureau of Statistics** figures showing that full-time jobs in Victoria increased by 12,700 in December. Yet, as reported in *The Age*, the coming loss of car manufacturing is set to put pressure on employment growth this year.

\$20 Million a Year

Uber drivers, working illegally and hailing from some of Melbourne's areas of highest unemployment, shared in more than \$20 million in 2015, according to a study conducted by the ride-sharing company and published in *The Age*.

Boost For Victorian Business

Four Victorian automotive component manufacturers will share in more than \$2 million of federal funding. More than \$15 million will be invested in 10 innovative companies to help them move into new industry sectors before local car manufacturing ends in 2017.

Clayton-based **Bosch Australia** will gain \$1 million. According to the *Herald Sun*, this amount will accompany \$6.2 million of Bosch's own investment to develop and install a state-of-the-art assembly line for new exports.

Ban Fuel Discounts

Petrol stations will be banned from advertising discounted fuel prices on their display boards, under new regulations to be introduced by the Victorian Government later this year.

This will force petrol stations to show the full undiscounted price of fuels on the large boards advertising the current fuel price.

Until now fuel boards have enticed motorists by displaying a price that was 4 cents below the pump price, mostly at **Shell** petrol stations linked to **Coles Supermarkets** and **Caltex** petrol stations linked to **Woolworths** for customers who had a voucher according to *The Age*.

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CFA Firefighters Big Bucks

CFA firefighters have taken less than half a day to reject a 19 per cent pay rise over six years, according to an offer by the State Government. **CFA** chief executive officer **Lucinda Nolan** emailed firefighters with the offer that would end the three-year pay dispute as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

The offer included an immediate pay rise of 5 per cent with another 9 per cent increase over three years. This is in addition to the 5 per cent which the State government gave **CFA** firefighters last November because they had not had a pay rise in two years.

Docks Shut Down

The **Port of Melbourne** is in the grip of three days of strikes, as workers shut down Australia's largest stevedoring business for the first time since the 1998 waterfront dispute. Strikes at **Patrick Stevedores** terminals in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Freemantle follow separate strikes on Sunday by tugboat engineers.

The tugboat strikes have been blocking the access of carriers and have caused alarm at potentially severe flow-on effects. Concerns are rising that the latest strikes at **Patrick Stevedores** will cause further disruption to the national supply chain. **Patrick Stevedores'** four port terminals handle almost 45 per cent of all container cargo in Australia.

'Unfortunately a very small contingent of the **Maritime Union of Australia's** most militant

officials appear intent on winding back the clock to a time when their power to intimidate and interfere in proper commercial agreements ...was as indisputable as it was unacceptable'. Said at the time.

Central to the dispute in the issue of job security for existing employees, many of whom have unpredictable work hours, according to the union. The issue has always been job security, **MUA** deputy national security **Will Tracey** was quoted by *The Age* as saying.

Cuts would help youth and jobless

Kent Comley, owner of the Mount Gambler restaurant **The Barn**, was reported in the *Financial Review* as deploring the high cost of labour on public holidays and Sundays. This cost meant that many businesses in the town were forced to close.

Alcoa, AGL standoff

A brawl over power pricing could close the Portland smelter, devastating a small south-west Victorian community, and ultimately forcing a power station in Gippsland to shut. Doubts over the future of the **Alcoa** smelter, which employs 700 people in a town of about 8,000, have emerged with a subsidised power contract coming to an end in November.

JUSTICE & POLICE

Peace, Not Fines

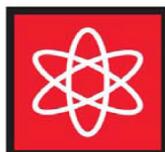
A good travel record should qualify public transport users to a warning instead of a fine for not having a valid myki ticket, just like warnings issued for low level speeding infringements, according to the **Public Transport Users Association**.

The good record call is among a host of recommendations to emerge from a survey of almost 500 public transport users on the current public transport fare enforcement system according to *The Age*.

More Prisoners Please

Victoria's top prosecutor has called for urgent legal reforms as figures show thousands of criminals are escaping jail time. More than 30,000 Community Corrections Orders were given to offenders last year, more than double the 13,300 just a year earlier as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Thugs, paedophiles, armed robbers and domestic abusers have all walked free with no prison time or minimal sentences after being placed on the orders. It follows a guideline judgement handed down by the Court of Appeal in 2014. Chief Crown Prosecutor **Gavin Silbert**, QC, said the orders were not working and immediate reform was needed.



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Cops in Danger

Simon Brown-Greaves, a former Victorian Police psychologist, said the threats of ice, terrorism and other perils meant members were more likely than ever to face a critical incident in their career.

Brown-Greaves, who now holds senior positions in the private sector, spoke at a Melbourne forum to support police and their family members who had gone through critical incidents. He said it was vital new recruits were prepared early in their careers for what might lie ahead.

The police culture needed to ensure officers were willing to ask for help and educate them about the extreme pressure and stress they might feel and how those factors could affect them, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Split on Merits

The **Law Institute of Victoria** wants lawyers to be allowed to charge US-style success fees, but defendant firms say this could lead to more lawsuits and create conflicts of interest between lawyers and their clients. It is the most controversial question facing the legal profession.

Plaintiff law firms say contingency fees could enhance the class actions regime. Nevertheless, the move is staunchly opposed by defendant firms, which say it could enrich lawyers and create conflicts of interest with clients while increasing speculative litigation and class actions against corporations.

Victorian Attorney-General **Martin Pakula** has previously spoken in favour of lifting the ban on lawyers charging contingency fees, but NSW Attorney-General **Gabrielle Upton** has been more hesitant. The matter was discussed recently in the *Financial Review*.

Fraud to Shield

A computer executive linked to Victoria's failed **Ultranet** project claims that he admitted fraud to 'protect' top Education Department staff. **Greg Tolefe** told **IBAC** (the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission) that he pleaded guilty in a Western Australian court to submitting false travel expenses to his employer **ASG** in 2007-08. But he said he did it for good reasons.

ASG and global computer giant Oracle were then preparing a tender for **Ultrahnet**, which in 2013 was dumped, having cost the state's taxpayers \$240 million. **IBAC** is now

investigating tenders and the shareholdings and conduct of those linked to the project, according to the *Herald Sun*.

Explosion Gripping Streets

Federal and state governments have reacted responsibly and effectively to the curse of the ice. But we are clearly losing battle. There is no question. Our state has a major crisis on its hands.

This is not the time for judgement about what governments have or haven't done. It's time now for us as a community to say that hard action must be taken. We need more funding for detox centres, more ports surveillance, more community engagement and education programs in schools. **Major Brendan Nottle** is Commanding Officer for the **Salvation Army** in Melbourne City, as published in the *Herald Sun*.

Armed Police in Raids

An alleged drug kingpin and several dealers operating the major Melbourne crime syndicate were arrested in a series of dramatic police raids. **Operation Mergers**, which Victoria Police say has put a massive dent in the supply of heroin and ice in the city saw offices issues 15 warrants, according to the *Herald Sun*.

Signwriters Fined Over Deadly Collapse

A signage company has been fined \$250,000 for its role in the Swanston Street wall collapse that killed three pedestrians in Melbourne.

Aussie Signs, contracted by builders **Grocon** to attach an advertising boarding to the wall, had pleaded guilty in the County Court to a charge of failing to ensure that people were not exposed to risk. Two teenage siblings were killed in the 2013 collapse, as reported in *The Age*.

Water Cops Boost

A new generation of almost a dozen police water boats has been purchased for Victorian waterways. This will be a particular boon to search and rescue operations, with more than 700 call-outs per year. The fleet will be used for routine patrols, search and rescue operations and other incidents, according to the *Herald Sun*.

Energy Giant Charged

Hazelwood mine operator **GDF Suez** will face millions of dollars of fines, after it was charged over a fire at its coal mine that burned for 45 days. A *Financial Review* article noted that **Worksafe Victoria** has charged the **Hazelwood Power Corporation** with 10 workplace safety breaches.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councils Cut Services

Councils are threatening to stop funding vital services provided by the **State Emergency Service**, childcare centres and school-crossing supervisors if their rates are capped. But at the same time, they continue to splurge millions of dollars on curious projects according to the *Herald Sun*.

Most of Melbourne's 31 councils, and many regional councils, say State Government caps to limit rate hikes to inflation are unsustainable, and they are contemplating scrapping funding for what they consider 'state services.' But ratepayers, calling the threats unethical, are demanding councils control spending.

Rate rises will be capped at 2.5 per cent from July 1.

Tower Value Topples

Planning controls have halved the value of proposed CBD towers, a builder says. New height and ratio rules were set last September after concerns were raised that new buildings were too high and overwhelming streetscapes.

Nathan Theos, new business director for construction heavyweight **Prebuilt**, said the controls had slammed a brake on development of inner-city apartments according to the *Herald Sun*.

City Ban on Circus Animals

Melbourne is set to join 45 other councils around Australia in banning exotic circus animals within its borders, including elephants, monkeys, lions and tigers. This is thought to have little effect as Melbourne rarely hosts such circuses anyway according to the *Herald Sun*.

Out To Dodge Rate Caps

More than a quarter of Victorian councils, according to *The Age*, want to see the rates they charge residents rise by more than the 2.5 per cent limit set in new, state government rate-capping laws. The **Essential Services Commission** has released a list of 21 councils that intend to apply for a rate increase in the coming financial year, this requested rate increase being higher than the 2.5 per cent limit set by local government minister **Natalie Hutchins**. Councils involved include most of Melbourne's inner city municipalities: Melbourne, Yarra, Maribyrnong, Glen Eira and Darebin.

Bid To End Doyle Reign

Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** could become

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ineligible to stand for re-election in October if a push by residents for US style caps on terms succeeds. In April he is on track to become Melbourne's longest serving mayor ever, and if he is elected to a third term, he will have been in the office for 12 years at the end of that term.

But a number of residents' groups have made submissions to a review of the Local Government Act calling for a two-term cap, like that applying to United States Presidents. Often state governors' posts in America also have term limits, as well as restrictions on the number of consecutive terms that an occupant can serve.

Carlton Residents Association president **George Jenko** is a key figure in the groups concerned. He said, and the *Herald Sun* reported, that Melbourne needed new ideas and to attract people of talent. 'This can only flow with periodic change.'

Trees Saved

Scores of mature palm trees on a major boulevard in Melbourne's north will be temporarily removed and then replanted, following major water pipeline replacement works along St Georges Road in Northcote. After an outcry from locals, the 70 mature palm trees will be stored while works are completed, according to *The Age*.

Back-burning Saviour Not Cause

The devastating fire that destroyed more than 100 homes in and around Wye River could have been much worse if authorities had not embarked on a controversial back-burning operation before Christmas Day, an investigation has found, according to an interim report by Inspector General for emergency management **Tony Pierce**, according to *The Age*.

Green Light For Sustainability

The **City of Melbourne** has partnered with **Australia's Clean Energy Finance Corporation** to fast-track planned sustainability products, as reported in *Melbourne* magazine.

How Will Council Pay Wage Demands?

Local Government Minister **Natalie Hutchins** announced that council rates increases for 2016-17 will be capped at 2.5 per cent, more than twice the rate of the CPI (1.1 per cent to 30 June 2015). Uncontrolled wage rises will feed into council costs through rising construction costs including roads and bridges, risking council cost structures. 'How are councils to manage the huge rise in construction costs that will inevitably result from the CFMEU's demands?', asks Liberal MP **David Davis** in his regular email update.

Smoke-Free Message Gets Out

British rock band **Queen's** 1984 classic 'I want to break free' was reworked as 'This place is smoke-free', while US rapper **MC Hammer's** Hit 'U can't touch this' became 'You can't smoke here', as reported in *Melbourne* magazine.

Push For Female Firefighters Feared

Melbourne's fire brigade is overhauling its selection process in a bid to invest more female recruits, but the union fears that changes will lower standards and jeopardise safety, according to *The Age*.

Toll on Trees

An average of three trees are removed each day in central Melbourne, as the dry spell, building development, age and vandalism take

their toll on the city's greenery. The *Herald Sun* cited city municipal figures which show that 773 trees, including 34 large specimens, have been lost in the past nine months. Those losses include the removal of 17 so-called heritage trees, which required notification to **Heritage Victoria**.

Elms Pulls Up Stumps

Last drinks were called at the 165-year-old **Elms Hotel** in Melbourne's CBD in January.

Whilst the **Elms** is not the eldest pub in Melbourne's CBD, it has had the longest continuous licence, says **Genevieve Tierney**, who runs the pub. It is closing to make way for an office redevelopment, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Toxic Waste Dump Horrifies

Warrandyte residents said that they were stunned and horrified at revelations that **Parks Victoria** staff washed toxic chemical waste into the Yarra River near a popular swimming spot. They said it was irresponsible that neither the **Environment Protection Authority** nor the Environment Minister had been informed for almost nine months about either the resulting dead trees or the health risk to swimmers, as reported in *The Age*.

MELBOURNE

Cyclists Rage On

Cyclists are starting to turn on each other as they fight for space in the city's increasingly congested bike lanes. Victoria's peak cycling lobby group says the solution is to upgrade key routes.

But the **City of Melbourne** denies it is a congestion issue, saying that lanes have already been widened to cater for growth as per the *Herald Sun*.

Slower bicycle commuters claim they are coping the brunt from speedsters who see the ride to work as a race, while motorists continue to fume at riders hogging road space.

Pay For Picnics

As Melburnians take to parks and gardens for Australia Day and other celebrations, councils are charging for social gatherings that attract between 20 and 500 guests. Councils covering some of Melbourne's most popular spots require groups to register and pay for a permit, which is then checked by patrolling council officers.

In Port Phillip, which includes bay-side suburbs such as St Kilda, Elwood and Albert Park, parties of 20 or more people need an \$82 permit, which buys two hours during which people can enjoy a beer and throw the frisbee around. Each extra hour costs \$41. *The Age* mentioned the shock expressed by Port Phillip locals who frequent these parks at the news that they would be expected to pay.

Doyle Warns On Donation Bans

Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** has warned that it is likely only very rich people would be elected to the city council's top job if campaign donations were banned. Cr **Doyle**, who raised almost \$400,000 at the 2012 poll, has put up his hand to run again at elections due later this year.

Thus reported the *Herald Sun*, which also noted a submission made to the State Government's review of local government laws. In that submission, the Mayor hit back at proposals urging that council campaign donations be banned or constrained.

PLANNING

Stables Close After 104 Years

After 40 years working in the police Mounted Branch in Southbank with Leading Senior Constable **Kevin Knowles**, the red brick stables, used as an army hospital during World War 1, will become a **Victorian College of the Arts** visual arts wing according to *The Age*.

Land Grab Race

The **City of Melbourne's** boundaries could be set to expand to take in a major development near **Flemington Racecourse**. Three residential towers to house 1400 people have been proposed for the **Flemington Green** site, on the north-east edge of the racecourse.

Under the proposal from the **Victorian Racing Club** and **Greenland Developers**, the development would include 700 dwellings and retail space, and almost 400 more dwellings on the opposite side of the course as per the *Herald Sun*.

The site straddles the border of Melbourne and Moonee Valley municipalities. In a report to be voted on, **Melbourne City Council** officers recommend it take control of the area. 'A realignment of the boundary will deliver a high quality and consistent level of service to all residents within the proposed development precinct.'

Tunnel Vision

A subway under Spencer St could reopen to safely ferry commuters from Southern Cross station as the crush on city streets is set to worsen.

Melbourne city council has pledged \$750,000 to investigate whether it could open the gates to the underground walkway from the station to Little Collins St.

Streets around train stations are becoming increasingly overcrowded, particularly during peak, with concerns pedestrians are being pushed on to roads according to the *Herald Sun*.

Palace Needs Life Support

Melbourne's Palace Theatre should be saved from demolition because of its cultural significance as a popular entertainment venue, a high-profile historian has told the planning tribunal set to decide the building's fate as reported in *The Age*.

Professor Graeme Davison also questioned a 2014 Heritage Council decision not to include the theatre on Victoria's heritage register. He said the former Metro Nightclub had been incorrectly identified as an original cinema, when it was most likely the last surviving 'expressly built' vaudeville theatre in Melbourne.

Rise To Student Challenge

Skyscrapers dedicated to student accommodation, with hundreds of studio apartments as small as 12.1 square meters, are being planned and built in Melbourne. In a rarity for a city teeming with units designed for investors, there are advanced plans for at least five new high-rise towers in the CBD catering to university students.

The Age reported that a UK-based firm called **Scape Student Living** is in the forefront of such schemes, with a proposal for Melbourne's largest and tallest student housing project. This firm's three proposed skyscrapers opposite

RMIT University on Swanston Street could house almost 1,600 students.

Markets In The Shadows

Queen Victoria Market's historic sheds would be overshadowed under a **Melbourne City Council** plan to allow skyscrapers near the iconic site, says the key heritage body, as reported in the *Sunday Herald Sun*.

Report Urges New Stations

Once the area was utterly rural, consisting mostly of paddocks for grazing cows, and orchards dotting the rolling hills. Today it is Melbourne's fastest-growing activity centre outside the CBD, with thousands of new apartments under construction and population growth of 26 per cent.

But Box Hill has a big problem, the local Whitehorse Council says. The problem consists of its dysfunctional and jam-packed railway station, and the clapped-out bus interchange above it.

As early as 1954, the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works decided that Box Hill was the key place outside the city centre where growth and government investment would be concentrated. The 1985 opening of Box Hill railway station was a glittering moment in the suburb's history. More than six million train and bus passengers came through Box Hill last year, according to *The Age*.

Punt Some Reform

The Age described the State Government as having set up an advisory committee to determine whether the 62-year VicRoads hold on the properties will remain or be removed. Residents are pushing for the overlay to be removed as it will prevent their homes being bulldozed to make way for a 'six-lane super-highway.' Town planner **Rob Milner** told the hearing that the overlay should remain and the Government needed at least to investigate having a tunnel under Punt Road to ease congestion.

Waves Over Junction

St Kilda has been subject to controversy again as an application for a 28-storey apartment and office building at the corner of Punt Road and Wellington Street was recently submitted to **Port Phillip Council** by developer **Drekoncile**, as reported in *The Age*.

Its proponents have hailed the 95.55 metre building inspired by a shell as 'innovative' and

'contemporary.' But the sculpture tower designed by Plus Architecture is facing community opposition and is almost two times taller than the discretionary height limits which the council is set to introduce.

On Task, On Time

The suburbs of Croydon, Heathmont and Ringwood received the quickest planning approval in Melbourne. On average, it takes just 27 days between receipt of a planning application and a decision being made by the city of Maroondah, the quickest in Melbourne.

Using data from the Know Your Council website, the *Herald Sun* has established the discrepancies in planning approval times across Victoria. In the suburbs of Dandenong, Keysborough, Noble Park and Springvale, it takes more than five times longer than in Maroondah to determine a planning application. With those places, there is a median turnaround time of 146 days or almost 5 months. **Master Builders Association of Victoria** chief executive **Radley De Silva** said that unnecessary planning delays cost the state time and money.

SPORT

Eye in the Sky

A SKY-High walk above the roof of the **MCG's** stands will offer locals and visitors alike breathtaking views of Melbourne and its sporting heart. In a world first for a stadium, sports fans will be able to climb up to 70 metres above the **MCG**, reports the *Herald Sun*.

G Tightens Security

The **AFL** commission has approved new security measures as a decision looms whether to search all patrons at the **MCG** this season.

The league is in talks with the **Melbourne Cricket Club** about security after the implementation of new measures for the cricket season.

All cricket patrons had to wait outside cyclone fencing before being checked by handheld detectors and having their bags searched. They then proceeded to the entrance gates to have their tickets checked as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Bets Open

Bookmakers who took bets during matches at this year's **Australian Open** are under fresh scrutiny, with the Australian Federal Police re-examining the legality of live gambling systems

promoted by global operators, according to *The Age*.

Festering Corruption In Tennis

Victorian police detectives questioned local tennis figures about which matches could be fixed in the first round of the **Australian Open**. This announcement appeared in *The Age* only days before an explosive report was released that threatened to expose festering corruption in the sport.

Ex-Cop To Clean Up Greyhounds

Greyhound Racing Victoria is appointing former homicide squad detective **Charlie Bezzina** as its senior integrity advisor, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

MCG Security Tightened

Sports fans will face stringent new security measures at the MCG amid fears that the stadium is vulnerable to a car bomb attack.

The latest plan will see two lanes of Brunton Avenue closed for the duration of any major events. This is to ensure that vehicles entering the MCG's underground carpark can be searched before approaching the gate. A *Sunday Age* report stated that the entry point has been identified as a major weak spot in the ground's security, making it a potential target for a terror attack.

Mate vs Mate in Footy Show Sex Drama

The one-time hit show is under an injury cloud. Originally conceived as a panel show where footballers could shed their club tracksuits, put on a bag of fruit and let their personalities shine, has become all about the hosts.

The occasionally bawdy, but mostly banal in-house banter is increasingly disconnected from the game and those who play it, reports *The Australian*.

'We do get carried away with ourselves' **Billy Brownless**.

TRANSPORT - PORTS

The Clock Strikes Twelve

Parliament is on the brink of a deal to sell the **Port of Melbourne** after an eleventh-hour backdown by the State Government as reported in *The Age*.

In a significant development, Labor has agreed to dramatically water down a controversial clause exposing the state to a compensation payment to the future owner if a rival port is built

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that undercuts its business.

Treasurer **Tim Pallas** has until now insisted the compensation regime should apply for 15 years from the point at which a new rival port is built. Tat means the new Port of Melbourne owner would be insulated from competition until at least 2046.

The government appeared to capitulate to a key Coalition demand that the compensation regime only apply for 15 years from the day the port is sold, ensuring it will expire in about 2031.

Port Sale Sinking?

The Port of Melbourne privatisation is facing a national security hurdle, with the federal government set to gain new powers potentially allowing it to bar foreign bidders. Foreign governments wanting to buy our own state governments' infrastructure are automatically scrutinised by Australia's Foreign Investment Review Board, but currently, private foreign companies are exempt from that requirement.

Federal Treasurer **Scott Morrison** has confirmed that the government plans to dump the exemption for the foreign companies wanting a stake in state-owned 'critical infrastructure' in the near future, according to *The Age*.

Discussions In Writing Please

Negotiations to sell the Port of Melbourne have stopped after the State Opposition, as reported in *The Age*, claimed that proposed changes to anti-corruption provisions would stymie political discussions.

Qube Makes \$9 Billion Bid

Chris Corrigan's dream of regaining control of some of Australia's best port assets has moved a step closer to fruition, with the logistics group which he chairs, **Qube**, making a formal \$9 billion takeover offer for **Asciano**, as reported in the *Australian Financial Review*.

Legislation Delays Port Sales

Victoria's sale of the **Port of Melbourne** has stalled with a new piece of legislation potentially complicating the bargaining process. The State Opposition, as quoted in a *Financial Review* report, alleges that new powers to be granted to the **Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission** could make negotiations over government bills the subject of a malicious complaint in the future.

Port Sale In Limbo

Opposition Leader **Matthew Guy** has shut down face-to-face negotiations with the State Government over legislation sanctioning the 50-year lease of the Port of Melbourne.

The move comes after Mr Guy was warned that upcoming **IBAC** legislation, to be voted on this year, could allow the watchdog to investigate horse-trading and conversations held during bill negotiations. Mr Guy announced that henceforth, all discussion over the sale of the port would be conducted in writing.

At present, the port lease is needed to fund to Government's \$6-\$9 billion election promise to fix 50 dangerous level crossings. But the business community was warned that the sale should not proceed without legislation, according to *The Herald Sun*.

This deadlock will add to the State Government's growing list of political woes. If a compromise cannot be reached, it will either force the government to negotiate with the

Greens and cross benchers to pass its bill, or it will be forced to follow through with a threat to sell the port without legislation.

The lack of legislative reassurance would almost certainly dramatically cut the sale price, with some claiming that businesses within Victoria are already nervous about 'sovereign risk'. This nervousness is said to have followed Labor's decision to scrap the **East West Link** contract.

TRANSPORT - RAIL

No consultation, I'm Angry

Residents in Melbourne's south-east who will live next to elevated rail tracks nine metres high are outraged at the lack of consultation before Premier **Daniel Andrews** announced the \$1.6 billion project.

The government has selected a consortium including **CIMIC** (formerly Leighton) and **Lendlease** as the preferred bidder to remove nine level crossings and rebuild five railway stations between Caulfield and Dandenong as per *The Age*.

Treasurer **Scott Morrison** gave the go ahead to the \$280 million sale of north-west Tasmania's 17,800ha **Van Diemen's Land Company** to Chinese billionaire Lu Xianfeng's Moon Lake Investments.

As reported in the *Herald Sun*, this has inflamed fears of a dramatic price rise in milk and cheese.

Throw Us in Front of a Bus

If sections of the Cranbourne-Pakenham line are elevated, paedophiles will take train trips in the expectation of a glimpse of children swimming in backyard pools beside the line. Meanwhile, areas below will become cesspits of crime as per an opinion piece in the **Herald Sun**.

Property prices will fall. Also falling, possibly, will be freight trains in the event of a derailment, right into those vulnerable backyards. The elevated line will be an eyesore, visible from far away. All in all, a suburban calamity.

These are just some of the reasons that residents living near the line have given for opposing the State Government's plan to create a sky train. These definitive explanations for opposing the plan were offered up on a Sunday, the very same day the Premier formally announced the project reports **Shaun Carney**.

The Government intends to raise the line nine metres above street level in three sections between Dandenong and Caulfield thus removing nine level crossings and creating five new elevated stations. The sky train sections will be in Clayton, Noble Park and the Carnegie-Murrumbeena-Hughesdale areas. All in all, the raised lines will run for 8.3 kilo. **Director, Rail Safety**

The *Financial Review* recently ran an advertisement for the job of Director, Rail Safety. Whoever gets this job will need to 'provide leadership that can inspire and motivate in a climate of organisational change, [and] lead a multi-disciplinary and highly functioning team of professionals.' An executive salary package of up to \$212,853 is being offered.

This advertisement continues: 'Transport Safety Victoria plays a crucial role in maintaining public confidence in the safety of bus, maritime and rail

transport for all Victorians, by ensuring compliance with transport safety legislation and promoting continuous improvement in transport safety outcomes.' Applications for the post close on March 14.

Give Me the Money

The Victorian Government is banking on a \$4.5 billion handout from the federal government to fund its **Melbourne Metro Rail** project as per the *Financial Review*.

Premier **Daniel Andrews** said Victorians paid taxes to the Federal government which should be returned in infrastructure, urging the Federal Government to support public transport infrastructure.

The Sky's The Limit

Trains would run two storeys above street level for several kilometres along Melbourne's busiest public transport corridor. This is a feature of secret plans to replace the city's level crossings with suburban sky rail.

Designs have been submitted to the State Government to elevate tracks and stations along parts of the Cranbourne-Pakenham lines. If that elevation went ahead, it would clear the way for land underneath to be used for parks, car parks or shops. The concept would radically change the suburban Melbourne landscape.

It has already sparked concerns from some local councillors. As for the State Opposition, it has warned that building sky rails of that sort would split communities in half. But the *Herald Sun* has cited public transport and urban design experts who are saying that raised rail lines have worked in Canada, and would be far cheaper than road tunnelling.

Nor is it only on the Cranbourne and Pakenham routes that such proposals are being envisaged. A controversial plan to remove level crossings by raising tracks two storeys above streets will be considered for parts of the Frankston line. *The Herald Sun* revealed that designs for a suburban sky-rail have been submitted to the Government as part of the tender process for its multi-million-dollar Dandenong rail corridor upgrade.

Packed Trains At Crisis Point

More than half of Melbourne's railway lines are consistently crowded in the morning peak hour, with some trains carrying hundreds more passengers than they are meant to. In the worst case, on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, new data revealed that trains built to carry fewer than 800 passengers are crammed with more than 1,200 passengers before they reach the city.

Obtained through Freedom Of Information laws by the Victorian Greens, the data depicted a system failing to cope with the growth in passenger numbers. Between May 2014 and May 2015 an extra 4,500 commuters joined the Dandenong rail corridor crush in the morning over the four-day survey period, and that during this time just one extra morning peak service per day was added to the timetable.

The situation was mirrored on six other lines. In terms of increased passenger populations, the Frankston, Sandringham, Craigieburn, Upfield, Sunbury and Werribee lines all grew by between five and 12 per cent in just a year, yet only the Sunbury and Werribee lines received extra services, according to *The Age*.

Dangerous Curves

Victoria's regional rail network is in meltdown. Rapid wheel wear has forced **V/Line's** newest trains off the tracks for repair. Metro has also banned **VLocity** trains from one line after a train failed to trigger boom gates.

On average, 70 trains a day between Melbourne and the regions are being replaced by buses. The government said that a fix was imminent, but admitted that no quick end was in sight, and that the problem will continue for weeks.

It blamed V/Line for providing false advice, and **V/Line** chief **Theo Taifalos** has resigned. Rail experts, a recent *Age* report stated, blame curved tracks on the new \$3.65 billion Regional Rail Link, like the tracks existing on the overpass in North Melbourne, for the wheel damage. But the government says it is still investigating the cause.

V/Line: The Numbers

In late January and early February, 64 train services were replaced by coaches each weekday. As a consequence, 14 days of extra free travel were given to **V/Line** passengers, and approximately \$2 million per week during that time was lost in fares, according to the *Herald Sun*.

V/Line Costs Rising

The cost of **V/Line's** rail meltdown continues to soar, with hundreds of new train wheels having been ordered to take the place of those wheels that have rapidly worn down in recent weeks. Meanwhile millions of dollars have been spent on transporting by bus those travellers between Melbourne and regional Victoria who would normally use trains instead.

All 1,376 wheels on **V/Line's** VLocity fleet of 172 carriages are being assessed for replacement or re-profiling, due to excessive wear and tear. The repair job is expected to take until mid-2016 to complete.

Until then, coaches will be substituting for a good many **V/Line** trains. In numerous instances this substitution has increased travelling times. About 70 rail services a day are being replaced by coach, with the Gippsland line the hardest hit because **Metro** has banned the VLocity trains from the Pakenham line.

Metro also vetoed a **V/Line** proposal that Gippsland passengers interchange between **V/Line** and **Metro** trains at Pakenham station. The need for that transfer has forced **V/Line** to put its passengers on buses for the entire journey between Traralgon and the CBD. Regular **V/Line** commuters are counting the cost of disruption too, with many forced to rearrange their lives around **V/Line's** patched up transport service, according to *The Age*.

Plans Still Under Wraps

Two Victorian infrastructure projects, *The Australian* reports, are competing against 12 other proposals from around Australia for a slice of Commonwealth funding. **Infrastructure Australia** named 11 of the 14 projects that had been submitted for assessment with a full business case during a Senate Estimates hearing in Canberra.

The State Government has provided plans for the \$5.5 billion Western Distributor toll road and the Murray Basin rail upgrade, but is yet to provide a business case for its signature transport policy, the Metro Rail project. In the meantime, the Federal Government and the

Greens are urging the State Government to hand over the business case, to ensure that the project is assessed in time.

An Accident Waiting To Happen

Rail authorities failed to act on boom gate safety recommendations for 26 years, despite being warned of the risk of a catastrophic accident.

Victoria's rail network was plunged into chaos, as noted in the *Herald Sun*, after **Metro** banned **V/Line's** VLocity carriages from suburban tracks. It imposed this prohibition because a boom gate failed to close properly when a V/Line train approached a Dandenong level crossing.

Slow Track To Limbo

Public Transport Minister **Jacinta Allan** has apologised again for Victoria's regional rail crisis, flagging further compensation for commuters who, she conceded, could be inconvenienced for months, according to the *Herald Sun*.

Public Transport Treading Water

Public transport users were delayed by more late trains and trams last year than in 2014, as the punctuality of **Metro** and Yarra trams services deteriorated, figures show. Only **V/Line** improved its on-time running in 2015, although regional trains remain a tardier transport mode than metropolitan trains by a significant margin.

Fewer trains ran on time on 10 of Metro's 16 lines in 2015, and punctuality declined on 21 of 23 tram routes. Eight of V/Line's 11 rail routes improved their on-time performance last year.

The figures, provided to *The Age* by Public Transport Victoria, indicate that the state's public transport system is, at best, surviving. It certainly is not improving.

Commuters Hit By Metro Ban

Gippsland commuters travelling into Melbourne face severe disruption as they return to work, with Metro's ban on **V/Line** trains set to force them to switch trains at Pakenham, adding almost an hour each way to journey times, as reported in *The Age*. The **VLocity** track-to-gates signal failure is, apparently, well known among the state's train drivers.

Hell Off Wheels

Regional train passengers face disruption after **V/Line** reported its carriage wheels were incurring abnormal wear. **V/Line** says it is having to withdraw more carriages for servicing than normal at this time of year due to the problem, which has baffled its maintenance crews. An inner part of the wheel – the flange – is wearing away, creating the risk of a derailment if left unrepaired.

About a quarter of the latest VLocity fleet is off the rails for repair, compelling **V/Line** to cancel services across the state and run replacement buses. **V/Line** says that the exact number of carriages affected will vary each day depending on maintenance requirements, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

More VLocity Woes

A **V/Line** VLocity train coming towards a level crossing at Dandenong failed to trigger the boom gates that bar traffic from the tracks. This is certainly not the first time it has happened.

But the potentially dangerous systems failure is long standing and proving so worrying that **Metro**, which has charge over the whole

suburban rail network, immediately banned all **VLocity** trains from its domain.

Scope Adjustments Spark Crisis

The public servant overseeing the record \$20 billion public transport agenda made a series of cuts to the Regional Rail Link Authority/project that contributed to **V/Line's** current crisis. **Corey Hannett** is Co-ordinator General of Labor's major transport infrastructure program at the Department of Premier & Cabinet.

Mr Hannett was promoted to the most critical position in Victoria's Transport Department after un/successfully steering through to completion the 48-kilometre Regional Rail link between Southern Cross Station and Werribee. This link opened in June.

But a series of scope adjustments made to the landmark project more than five years ago to cut costs have reduced the benefit of the rail line through Melbourne's west and tarnished the public's view of the biggest expansion to Melbourne's rail network in 100 years. Rail experts also fear that the same compromised outcome is possible with the rail projects which Mr Hannett co-ordinates now, according to *The Age*.

TRANSPORT - ROAD

Bursting Point

The volume of traffic on Melbourne's freeways is on course to double in just 20 years, according to new **VicRoads** data published in *The Age*. Car and truck traffic has grown so rapidly in the past decade that on an average weekday more than one million people now travel on Melbourne's busiest road, the **Monash / CityLink / West Gate** corridor between Pakenham and Werribee.

Tulla Speed Crackdown

Speeding motorists will be targeted along the main route to **Melbourne Airport** where limits have been reduced as part of a \$1.28 billion CityLink upgrade as reported in *The Age*. Brakes have likewise been applied on the toll road between Flemington Road and Bulla Road, with a new daytime limit of 80km/h. At night, in a bid to protect people on the road working around the clock, a new limit of 60km/h will be enforced.

Hail Deregulation

In a recent *Age* article, Professor Allan Fels, chairman of the Victorian Taxi Industry Inquiry, stated the following:

'Allowing ride-sharing services will improve the taxi industry for all. There are key faults with the present system of regulation:

'It restricts the number of licences and thereby limits the availability of taxis and hire cars. It inflates licence values (for which customers pay). It also makes entry difficult for businesses with new ways of delivering point-to-point services.

'Even if new players are allowed to enter, the model of regulation is based on the traditional out-dated way of doing taxi business and obstructs innovative ways of serving customers better and cheaply. For example, the current model requires meters in cars, despite **Uber** not using them.

'Regulation in all its dimensions has been captured by the industry with deleterious effects on safety, driver quality and service. The recent establishment of the **Taxi Services**

Commission has changed the balance, but a huge legacy of bad regulation remains.'

East-West Link Lives On

The controversial East-West Link, which the governments led by **Baillieu** and **Napthine** envisaged, was abandoned by Labor at a cost of \$1.1 billion to taxpayers. Yet it remains on the horizon as part of long-term transport planning for Melbourne. In the fine print of the business case for the **Transurban**-proposed \$5.5 billion Western Distributor toll road, the link between the Tullamarine and Eastern Freeways is included as part of a longer term transport network, as reported in *The Age*.

Car Levy Plan

A car congestion tax, and a special program devised to ensure that more people cycle and walk, are two things that have been recommended under a 10-year liveability plan for inner Melbourne. The *Herald Sun* stated that five inner-city councils including Melbourne, Yarra and Port Phillip have produced the blueprint, which calls for a reduction to the impact of through traffic.

Overcoming The Punt Road Nightmare

Why widen a congested north-south artery when there is a better solution? It is now widely acknowledged within transport policy departments that *per capita* car use peaked in 2004 and has dropped since, not just in Australian capital cities, but across other OECD cities as well.

Transport, it has been argued, ought to be seen less like a liquid and more like a gas. Liquids remain at constant volumes, while a gas will expand to fill its container.

This is the problem with widening Punt Road. The traffic, behaving like a gas, will expand to fill the available capacity, resulting in six lanes of gridlocked traffic, rather than four. Why would six lanes of gridlocked traffic be any better than four?

'One policy that applies relatively standard economic principles to transport would be to scrap a bunch of ineffective transport taxes and charges and replace them with road-user pricing. By removing vehicle registration, fuel excise and the parking tax and replacing it with a road-user charge, Melburnians will be offered the right signals and choices to make smarter transport choices.

'Second, the Victorian government's so-called congestion tax, which is applied to parking spaces (stationary cars), could be scrapped in favour of the proposed road-user charge, which would effectively convert this tax from a focus on parked cars to a focus on moving cars.'

These observations come from an article written by **Dr Elliot Fishman** in *The Age*. Dr Fishman is a Director of transport innovation at the Institute for Sensible Transport. He has advised the Prime Minister's Office, the New York City Department of Transportation, and local and state governments in Australia.

Self-Driving Cars Road Menaces

The self-driving car, that cutting edge creation that's supposed to lead to a world without accidents, is achieving the exact opposite right now. The vehicles have racked up a crash rate double that of those with human drivers.

The glitch? They obey the law all the time, as in, without exception. This might sound like the

right way to program a robot to drive a car, but good luck trying to merge onto a chaotic, jam-packed highway with traffic flying along well above the speed limit. It tends not to work out well, as reported in *The Australian Financial Review*.

Lower Limits

Road safety experts want a 30km/h limit in residential and school areas and streets with heavy pedestrian traffic. Road safety consultant **Bruce Corben**, who was at the Monash University Accident Research Centre for many years, said that a 30km/h limit in certain areas would bring safety and public health benefits, according to the *Herald Sun*.

Clearways for Punt Road

Daniel Andrews and Roads MP **Luke Donnellan** announced in *The Age* Labor's plan to scrap on road parking on Punt Road between the Yarra River and St Kilda Junction. The government aims to have the clearways in place by the middle of the year. **VicRoads** will undertake a 60-day consultation with residents and businesses until April.

WELFARE

Waiting Lists Years Long

Some Victorians are waiting more than four and a half years to see a specialist doctor in a public hospital before they can be considered for further treatment, including surgery. That's among the revelations in an often-shocking State Government report on the health system, a report which *The Age* has publicised.

New data on waiting times for public hospital care also show that some people with urgent referrals for problems such as suspected cancer are waiting months to see a specialist doctor. This happens even though urgent surgery is meant to be done within 30 days to meet government targets.

State Looks Sick

Victorian emergency patients are paying the price for a funding crisis in the nation's public hospitals, and doctors warn the worst is yet to come. A quarter of all urgent cases are waiting too long for treatment in the emergency department, according to the **Australian Medical Association's** Public Hospital Report Card. And about 25 per cent of Victorian patients needing semi-urgent operations, such as hip replacements or cataract surgery, also wait longer than the recommended time.

The report concluded health services were

facing a growing funding crisis. It blamed this crisis not upon the hospitals themselves, but on the political process, in particular on budgetary decisions, according to the *Herald Sun*.

SOCIETY

We're Drowning

Life Saving Victoria has put a business case to the State Government for more money as clubs struggle to modernise outdated facilities. **Anglesea SLSC** president **Warren Clarke** said his clubhouse, built in 1962, was on the verge of becoming unsafe, according to *Echo*, a publication of the Bellarine and Surf Coast.

Desal Tap Tips Closer

A dramatic drop in Melbourne and Geelong's water storage has pushed closer the first order of water from the controversial Wonthaggi desalination plant. And if an order of 50 gigalitres is made from the multibillion dollar plant, water bills will rise by up to \$15 a year, as reported in *The Age*.

Australia's Coffee Culture Myth

Australia ranks a lowly 42nd in the world in terms of *per capita* coffee consumption, even after the boom of the last two decades. The average Australian consumes just three kilograms of coffee each per year, a rate only marginally higher than that of the tea-obsessed United Kingdom (2.8 kg), according to the latest data. To make matters worse, Australia is also one of the few countries in which instant coffee consumption far outstrips that of freshly brewed coffee, according to *The Age*.

Sex Changes Fall Short

Sex workers in Victoria will be able to advertise with full body pictures and spruik their ethnicity under changes to the state's sex work regulations. The **Vixen Collective**, a sex worker organisation, said in *The Age* that the government should tackle the real issues facing the industry, including full decriminalisation and an end to mandatory health testing.

Melburnians Of The Year

Bryan Lipmann AM, was on work experience at a homeless shelter in the 1980s when he realised there had to be a better way to look out for vulnerable elderly people in our community.

Today the not-for-profit public Wintringham is the largest provider of services to the elderly homeless in Australia. It has facilities in the city centre, Flemington, Kensington and throughout the suburbs, employs more than 600 people and houses or cares for up to 1,700 people every



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night. The Melburnian of the Year is an annual award that recognises inspirational role models, as reported in *Melbourne* magazine.

VALE

Velvet Voice Goes Silent

British broadcaster **Terry Wogan** has died aged 77 after suffering from cancer. The veteran broadcaster, known for his velvety voice, was one of the UK and Ireland's the best known stars. A statement from his family said that **Wogan** died surrounded by his family, according to the *Herald Sun*. His warm Irish brogue and sly, gentle humour filled British television and radio to decades. He died surrounded by loved ones after a short that brave battle with cancer. Prime Minister **David Cameron** said that Britain had lost a huge talent.

Avant-Garde Pianist Dies

Visionary Canadian-born pianist **Paul Bley**, a pivotal figure in the avant-garde jazz movement particularly known for his innovative trio and solo recordings, has died, aged 83. Bley died of natural causes at his winter residence in Stuart, Florida.

Bob Carter Dies

Climate change sceptic Professor **Bob Carter**, who was removed from a university post because of his outspoken climate views, has died aged 74 of a heart attack. He was author of *Counter Consensus* (2010) and co-author of *Taxing Air: Facts and Fallacies about Climate Change* (2013), as reported in *The Age*.

Parkinson, Cecil, Lord, aged 84. Former Tory Minister (London). Enjoyed a spectacular career under **Margaret Thatcher** until he was brought down by his affair with **Sara Keays** his secretary.

Boutros Boutros-Ghalib, a veteran Egyptian diplomat who helped negotiate the country's landmark peace deal with Israel but then clashed with the US when he served a single term as United Nations secretary-general has died. He was 93.

Cook, Hunter Louthier Ramsay, aged 69. One of the editors best friends in life.

Legge, Professor John, aged 95. A life-long involvement in the **AIIA**, first joining in 1947 where the library has been named in his honour. In addition to his branch commitments, John was also active at the national level, including

as chair of the **Research Committee** from 1973-1978. He also authored a book on the history of the **Institute, Australian Outlook**, which was published in 1999.

John's main research and teaching interests were the history of modern Indonesia and historiography. He was appointed the foundation chair of History at Monash University in 1960.

Allan, Christopher John, aged 74 **Anderson**, Dr Brian John, aged 86. **Atkinson**, Henry Forman MBE, LDS, MSc, DDs, MDSc, FDSRCS, aged 103, Emeritus Professor of the University of Melbourne.

Bartels, John Terence, aged 87. **Bermingham**, John Francis Leslie, aged 84. RAAF.

Birdstrup, Alan Ernest, aged 90. **Bowie**, David, aged 69. Musician. **Bradley**, Dianne. **Broadhurst**, Patricia. **Brokenshire**, Dorothy Myrtle, aged 83 **Brown**, Jill. **Burren**, **Pauline Barbara**, Melbourne Rotary and much much else. **Burrows**, Prof. Graham Dene OBE, 77. Much in life including President of the Royal Society of Victoria.

Cameron, Des, aged 93. Wheelchair Priest, ordained by Archbishop Mannix in July 1960. **Chamberlain**, Ian. Licensed private pilot **Clark**, Tim Marcus, aged 83. Former Managing Director of the State Bank of South Australia. **Cook**, Hunter Louthier Ramsay, aged 69. School and university friend of the Editor, Teacher.

Condon, Dennis, aged 89. POW, soldier, farmer. **Conlan**, Peter Kennedy, aged 77 years **Craighead**, Robert Frederick, aged 78. **Crockett**, Laurence Peter, aged 90. **Deane**, Lt Col FW (Bill), aged 88.

De Fegely, Ruth Ricardo OAM, aged 84. Oh! Gosh! What a wonderful Lady. Liberal Party. Farmer. She had a good run. **Dennis**, Michael Vinicombe Syme, aged 83. **Drohan**, Neville. **Earle**, Morrell Frances Armytage 'Min'

Everist, Neil OAM. Architect, rowing coach, Chairman of the Geelong College Boat Club Committee for 40 years. He had a good run. God Bless. **Falkingham**, Peter Hartley, aged 85.

Ferguson, Kevin. Past Director of Mental Health First Aid Australia **Flinn**, Daniel, aged 55. Licensed private pilot. **Fordham**, Jack. **Fox**, Alan. **Garamszegi**, William. **Gill**, Ray **Giraud**, Lynette Elizabeth, aged 88.

Grogan, Dennis Brendan. **Hateley**, Donald, aged 68. Licensed private pilot. **Howell**, Christopher John. **Humphris**, Leonard John

Trener (Terry), aged 90 years. **Hutton**, Jeanette Rosemary, aged 77. **Jakobi**, Robert James. **Lodge**, Keith James. **Luscombe**, Peter, aged 53. **Kurrie**, Reverend Canon Stanley Wynton OBE, aged 93 years. **Leek**, Rodney.

Legge, John David AO, aged 94. Foundation Professor at Monash University. Aust Inst. Of International Affairs. **Luscombe**, Peter "Rocky" John, aged 53. **MacFarlane**, Alan OAM EM. **Morey**, John. **Morgan**, John Lloyd. **Muirhead**, Edmund Gerard. Member of the Physics Department, University of Melbourne. **Nettle**, Dr Denis Jon (PhD), aged 59

Oatley, Robert, aged 87. Businessman, wine maker, yachtsman. **Parker**, Jacques Henri, aged 88.

Payne, Adora Frances Barclay, aged 85. **Pont**, Michael Joseph. **Proudfoot**, Duncan McLean, aged 91 **Robertson**, Malcolm, aged 82. Theatrical all-rounder. **Shears**, William 'Blake'.

Stewart, Norman Alexander, aged 92. **Stroud**, Desmond John, aged 75. **Swan**, John, aged 90. Educator with flair. **Van Wunnik**, Petrus Franciscus Josephus, aged 86. Chiropractor, artist, orator. **Whitelaw**, Jennifer Ann, a 74.

Hirst, John. Aged 73. One of Australia's most honoured and prolific modern historians, he was primarily associated with the History Department at La Trobe University. His numerous books include *Australia's Democracy: A Short History*; *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*; and *Convict Society and Its Enemies*.

Martin, Sir George. Aged 90. Best-known as 'the fifth Beatle,' because of his hands-on role as record producer at the height of the Beatles' fame. Over a career that spanned more than five decades, he was responsible for no fewer than 30 Number One hit singles in the UK and 23 in America.

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Some Other Items

Broken Spirit

The **Spirit of Tasmania** broke free from its Melbourne moorings, causing significant damage and leaving hundreds of passengers stranded on the ship on the 13 January.

A **Spirit of Tasmania** statement said the ramp was damaged when winds of up to 100km blew the ship off its moorings as a cool change hit the city at about 6pm, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Test Of Spirit

The damaged **Spirit of Tasmania II** is grounded until it passes a seaworthy test and passengers' travel plans are delayed as the shipping company attempts to clear a backlog.

The damage bill for the ramps cars used to access the ship was still being counted. Nine of the 10 ropes used to moor the 28,000 tonne ship snapped during the 100 km/h wind gusts in a freak act of mother nature, about an hour before it was due to set sail.

The ship's owner, **TT Line**, said no cars were being loaded onto the ship the time. No major injuries were reported but many passengers spent a night on board, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Uber Green Light

A dedicated ride sharing license should be set up in Victoria to allow services such as Uber to be regulated, a task force on taxi and hire cars has found. A special task force handed options to public transport Minister **Jacinta Allen** last July about how to regulate ridesharing in Victoria.

The issue for the government is complicated, with some ministers and MPs concerned about the impact on taxi operators and license plate owners who have paid tens of thousands of dollars for license permits, as reported in *The Age*.

Good CEO Job

The southern boundary of Mitchell Shire is situated just 30kms north of Melbourne's CBD, with its most northern boundary only 90kms from Victoria's capital city. The Shire covers a total area of 2,864sq kms and offers urban, peri-urban and rural landscapes. Situated along one of the Nation's most significant transport corridors that links the Australian eastern seaboard with its capital cities, Mitchell Shire boasts excellent transport connectivity and its diverse communities access excellent education and hospital facilities.

Davidson Executive at executivejobs@davidsonwp.com

Pet Project Spans 50 Years

After 50 years of volunteer work for **Lort Smith Animal Hospital**, animal advocate **Virginia Edwards** AM has come to realise the North Melbourne institution is as much about helping people as animals.

She says its prime role might be providing vet care to the needy, 'but caring for the animals makes the owners happy and their quality of life improves, as well as the animals. It's a two way street,' as reported in *The Age*.

Shattered Watson Faces Brownlow Stripping

Jobe Watson could become the first **AFL** player to be stripped of a Brownlow Medal, following his shock 12 month doping ban, according to *The Herald Sun*.

Dos and Don'ts

Restrictions and approved behaviour for the banned Essendon 34 in season 2016 are as follows:

Players can attend AFL and other football games, talk to players and coaches from their teams on a social level, train away from their clubs with other banned players, work in the media at AFL games.

Players cannot play football at any organised level, enter clubrooms at grounds on match day, enter their clubs premises, train under club-devised programs.

Under **World Anti-Doping Agency** rules any violation would take their ban back today one.

The AFL anti-doping code states any violation of the code with mean a new period of intelligibility equal in length to the original period of ineligibility shall be added to the end of the original period of intelligibility, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

Key Men Didn't Follow Rules

James Hird believe the disregard of protocols at **Essendon** in 2012 led to the darkest day in the **AFL** when 34 players were banned for 12 months.

Hird said a list of club rules governing the use of supplements for the players was not followed by key football department personnel, as reported in *The Herald Sun*.

Essendon Coach at the time, **James Hird**, said 'this is a miscarriage of justice for 34 young men.' **Hird** served a 12 month ban and quit the club last year.

2012 **Brownlow** medallist **Watson** could be stripped of his medal, after **AFL** chief executive **Gillon McLachlan** said 'the awarding of this medal needs to be reviewed in light of today's decision.'

Essendon chairman **Lindsay Tanner** says 'the supplements program of 2012 was a mistake of the highest magnitude.' The club has accepted the ruling and will need to find extra players to play this season.

The **AFL** has also accepted the **CAS** ruling. Chairman **Mike Fitzpatrick** says 'it has been a very dark period but the last four years will not define **Essendon** and it will not define Australian football.'

'This unfortunate episode has chronicled the most devastating self inflicted injury by a sporting club in Australian history', according to **ASADA** chief executive **Ben McDevitt**, as reported in *The Australian*.

Canine Life Rules

If dogs could teach us we would learn such things as:

- ◆ When loved ones come home, always run to greet them
- ◆ Never pass up the opportunity to go on a joyride
- ◆ Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy
- ◆ When its in your best interest – practice obedience
- ◆ Let others know when they have invaded your territory
- ◆ Take naps and stretch before rising
- ◆ Run, romp and lay daily
- ◆ Thrive on attention and let people tough you
- ◆ Avoid biting, when a simple growl will do
- ◆ On warm days, stop and lie on your back in the grass
- ◆ On hot days, drink lots of water and lay under a shady tree
- ◆ When you are happy, dance and wag your entire body
- ◆ No matter how often you are scolded, don't buy into the guilt thing and pout... run right back out and make friends
- ◆ Delight in the simple joy of a long walk
- ◆ Eat with gusto and enthusiasm but stop when you have had enough
- ◆ Be loyal
- ◆ Never pretend you are something you are not
- ◆ If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it
- ◆ When someone is having a bad day... be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently

*Applying the above lessons to
your life should make it less rough!*





Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
"Working for business. Working for Victoria."

Letter from Melbourne
11 March 2016

Mark Stone
Chief Executive
Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry



Action Oriented Budget Needed to Drive Growth

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry calls on the Andrews Government to take action in its upcoming 2016-17 Budget to improve Victoria's competitiveness.

The Victorian Chamber's pre-budget submission prioritises the reforms needed to address challenges and drive new growth opportunities across Victoria.

Our priority recommendations for the 2016-17 Victorian Budget:

1. Ensure expenditure growth does not exceed revenue growth.
2. Increase the payroll tax threshold from \$550,000 to \$850,000.
3. Reduce the average WorkCover premium rate to 1.20 per cent of payroll.
4. Accelerate the pace and breadth of regulation reform.
5. Commit to commence the Metropolitan Ring Road in this term of government.
6. Improve skills, education and training to build workforce capabilities and opportunities, now and into the future.
7. Develop and fund a new international engagement strategy for Victoria.

Continuing responsible economic management that keeps public sector spending and wages growth in check is vital to ensuring Victoria keeps its Triple-A rating.

A strong focus on job creation needs to continue in the May Budget with measures that lower the cost of doing business and encourage employers to hire.

Increasing the payroll tax threshold from \$550,000 to \$850,000 would drive employment and give us the upper hand over NSW and WA, whose payroll tax thresholds are much higher.

Job growth would also be spurred by reducing the average WorkCover premium to 1.20 per cent of payroll, saving business over \$50 million per annum.

The Government's existing 25 per cent regulatory reform target needs to be stretched to 30 per cent by 2017 and at least half of the identified reforms need to directly benefit small business.

An action oriented budget needs to get on with Victoria's infrastructure task. A commitment to commence the Metropolitan Ring Road from Greensborough to Ringwood in this term of government is required. Getting construction on the Western Distributor project underway also needs to be a priority.

These projects will cut travel times, reduce congestion, lower freight costs and improve the ability of workers to go where the jobs are.

It is vital that Victoria fast tracks state education and training reforms that restore confidence in the training system and improve its quality.

At a time of rising youth unemployment it is more important than ever that we strengthen employment pathways, such as boosting apprenticeships and training in key sectors for Victoria including retail, hospitality, tourism and trades.

In our increasingly globalised world, this year's State budget needs to get more Victorian businesses internationally engaged. This is why the Budget needs to fund a new international engagement strategy for Victoria.

These pro-business measures will give Victorian business the best chance to stay competitive and must be front and centre for the 2016-17 State Budget. *The Victorian Government will release its budget on Tuesday 3 May 2016.*

Please visit www.victorianchamber.com.au for further details of the Victorian Chamber's budget submission.

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

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