

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 more than twenty years.

The Pondering Edition



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Letter From Washington

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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.

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The editor with RSL badge seller and WW 2 soldier Fred Cullen

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Editorial Wondering

Yes. The stopping of the East West Link was a fair possibility after the Election last November. The follow up negotiations have left most business people and lawyers and others wondering. It comes under the general heading of sovereign risk. Which the editor defined, in his terms, in the last edition.

And after the Election, Victoria expected union ideas on wages (and other things: see Betrayed below for some of the detail) but now we have moved ahead to yet other things, such as the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre having its links cut to the private sector. Gosh. The very reason for your editor starting his day job in government facilitation twenty or so years ago, was to help some doctors overcome a Government fiat on them being able to have a privately owned X-Ray machine in what is now the Peter Mac. Many of us watch this particular space with much interest.

The sudden sacking of all Victorian water boards was a huge surprise as also the CEO of the Country Fire Authority, and several other senior executive positions. The Dandenong Rail Link has been purged of some privatisation themes. And will now be built elsewhere.

The 'move on laws' have been changed which gives unions and any other folk time and space to have a protest or whatever, in a street or wherever, but this may grow beyond certain bounds to cause inconvenience to business and others. With clever negotiation with a policeman, using fuck in the appropriate context, the Editor did find himself at a City lunch only a few minutes late rather than having to cross the Yarra at least a couple of times to avoid a protest of some kind in a major CBD street.

However, things are happening and although many of us may be puzzled as to who is supporting some of the actions behind the scenes, apart from the unions, there must be more to the longer term plans of the Government than that.

Your editor is off to Washington to attend a School Reunion and will be back after the next edition. More detail in Letter From Canberra.

Cover: Dog standing in a pond, pondering what is going on and as she gazes into the unclear water around and beneath.

Cancer Donations At Risk

A proposal to include 42 private hospital beds in the new \$1 billion Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre has been stopped by the State Government. The Government's decision, which has been described as 'secretive' and political, puts at risk \$20 million in philanthropic donations gathered for the VCCC by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

The original scope of the Parkville centre - which will be open in 2016 and include 160 public beds, 10 theatres and laboratory space for hundreds of cancer researchers - has already been reduced because of a \$10 million fundraising shortfall. A fresh warning has been issued by Peter Mac, which would have operated the private beds on the building's 13th floor, about further 'descoping' because \$20 million in donations wasn't secure without private facilities.

The VCCC says if some donations are withdrawn, it won't lead to fewer public beds. The Herald Sun can reveal that Peter Mac chair Wendy Harris, QC, told colleagues she is now considering her position in light of the scrapped plan, which had been endorsed by Victorian and federal governments last year. She has now resigned. How sad.

State government and politics

Betrayed

According to a 17-page document sent to Labor MPs by the United Fire-fighters Union secretary Peter Marshall, the union had been in a cosy relationship with the government, expecting a litany of favours to be brought in. The extent of the union's support for Labor was well documented, including: 23 days of firefighters door knocking in strategic seats; 40,000 one-on-one conversations with the public; 125,000 pamphlets handed out at train stations; 700 firefighters standing outside 109 polling booths in nine marginal seats asking the public to put Liberals last.

In an email to Labor MPs, Marshall says 'internal polling conservatively estimated a 4.5 per cent swing in seats where there was a firefighter presence - and up to seven per cent in some marginal seats.' The UFU document goes on to describe a dispute over the Government's failure to force the Metropolitan Fire Brigade to use an employee code of conduct outlined in the 2010 EBA, instead of processes currently used under the MFB Act.

ALSO, Also, it describes a meeting on March 31 in which Emergency Services Minister, Ms Jane Garrett was 'agitated and yelling' at a UFU staff member after she was asked to intervene in a disciplinary case involving alleged pornographic emails.

Premier Lunch Time

Premier Andrews speaks at a Rural Press Club lunch in April. He will discuss the Government's vision for rural and regional Victoria, at CQ Functions (the former RACV Club), 113 Queen Street, Melbourne on April 30. Join the RPC if you are interested in these issues. You need not be a journalist or a farmer.

Probe the Alliance

The Liberal-National alliance in Victoria is facing intense scrutiny, with a formal review set to question the carve-up of funding and seats following the Coalition's 2014 election loss. Victorian Liberal president-elect Michael Kroger is to appoint former Liberal leader in the upper house Philip Davis to conduct a sweeping examination of whether the Coalition agreement between the two parties remains beneficial.

As reported in The Age, Mr Kroger was the architect of an 1989 Coalition agreement in Victoria, but the two parties formally separated in 1999 after Jeff Kennett's election loss was blamed on a poor performance in the regions.

Gippsland Nationals Remain

The landslide result in the Gippsland South by-election shows country voters want a country party representing them, says newly elected Nationals MP Danny O'Brien. O'Brien will replace the former party leader Peter Ryan in the traditionally conservative seat in the state's east, after claiming almost three quarters of the votes on a two-party preferred basis.

According to the Herald Sun, the Upper House MP beat Liberal Candidate Scott Rossetti and Greens candidate Andrea Millsom, who ran a campaign focussed on the issue of coal-seam gas exploration.

In Victoria

Maria Rignoni, a Palmer United Party candidate has lost her bid to have ballots cast in the Victorian Election to be declared void, where her claim that 900,000 early votes cast were not cast in contravention of the Electoral Act.

Little Red Book Off Limits

Key briefing documents demanded by the state opposition will not be released by the State Government despite Labor railing against a similar move after the previous election. A Freedom of Information request by Opposition health spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge for the state bureaucracy's post-election 'red book' brief to the new Labor Government has been refused on the grounds that the document could be characterised as a cabinet document.

The briefing, which is normally prepared by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, outlines key challenges and offers frank advice across a range of policy areas, including on health, education, infrastructure and the economic outlook. In a letter to Ms Wooldridge reported in The Age, the Department of Health's senior freedom of information adviser Bronwen Wareing argues such briefing documents are exempt.

State Boss Quits

One of the key strategists linked to the Coalition's historic state election loss has resigned, calling the result 'bitterly disappointing.' Liberal state director Damien Mantach said he would be standing down as state director to take up a position in the federal system. His deputy also resigned.

Fight Fight Fight

An internal brawl is set to erupt within the

Coming Soon

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Victorian Coalition, with a group of Liberals pushing to change the agreement between the parties to reduce the Nationals power and reinstate three-cornered contests. In the latest sign of simmering tensions in the Coalition, The Age reports that the State Liberal council would debate a proposal to dramatically overhaul the partnership, with some accusing the Nationals of deliberately undermining them at last years Victorian poll. Watch this space. Or call the Editor.

Interesting.

The Victorian Coalition plans to exploit Premier Daniel Andrew's low profile, focusing on his infrequent public appearances and the perception he is inactive. Senior Coalition figures believe the Labor leader is susceptible to a campaign depicting him as doing too little for infrastructure and of hiding after winning last year's election. The Premier has been under heavy fire for failing to quickly resolve the contract issues over the doomed \$7 billion East West Link road and tunnel project.

Sounds Like A Plan

Big state infrastructure projects like Labor's \$11 billion Metro Rail Project could be paid for by ramping up state debt, with Premier Andrews labeling the existing discussion about the evils of public borrowing 'old and tired'. In an interview to mark his first 100 days in power, the Premier strongly signaled the new Labor government will consider lifting borrowing to deliver Labor's transport vision, provided it does not jeopardise Victoria's coveted AAA credit rating or budget position.

As a first step, the Premier told The Age that he will be ordering the state's new infrastructure adviser, Infrastructure Victoria, to hand him 'contemporary and detailed' advice on procuring and funding big projects. The top five challenges to the State government include ending the East West Link contract, delivering 20 level crossing upgrades, begin 'substantial' work on the Metro Rail project, deliver 100,000 jobs in two years and maintain a AAA credit rating.

Federal

East West Back Off

Tony Abbott has backed away from the East West Link, saying the federal government would fund other projects to tackle Melbourne's traffic congestion. In a major step away from recent rhetoric, Abbott told ABC morning radio that he would continue to talk to Premier Daniel Andrews about the city's traffic congestion.

Tackle Domestic Violence

Federal and state governments will spend \$30 million on a national awareness campaign to stop domestic violence as Prime Minister Tony Abbott told Parliament he will meet with Labor to discuss a bipartisan approach to the issue. Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women Michaelia Cash announced the campaign during an International Women's day lunch as reported in The Age.

PPP Must be Explained

Governments have only themselves to blame for rising opposition to infrastructure projects involving the private sector because they have failed to explain the needs and benefits of a given project, according to a World Bank authority on public-private partnerships. Mark Moseley, the lead lawyer for the World Bank's public-private partnership group, said governments were also failing to put in place pipelines of projects that could lure developers and reduce the risk of a 'one shot' bid process.

Moseley told The Australian preliminary figures for the first half of 2014 showed a continuation of the decline in private investment in developing world infrastructure programs that began in 2013.

Agriculture

No Cows Allowed

Cattle grazing would be banned in Victorian alpine, again, and red river gum national parks under laws proposed by the State Government. The former Coalition government allowed 57 head of cattle to graze in the Wonnangatta Valley in the state's east last year, to test if bushfire fuel loads would be reduced. Labor suspended the trial which was to see the number of cattle increased to 300 this year, arguing it lacked scientific merit.

Environment Minister Lisa Neville told Parliament that the science had already been settled on the issue and the practice should be banned, as reported in the Herald Sun.

Don't Buy It, Farmers

Victorian and NSW farmers have called on Treasurer Joe Hockey to reject the \$1.45 billion sale of local meat processor and dominant small goods manufacturer Primo to Australia's largest meat works operator and exporter, Brazilian-owned JBS. The bold call follows a meeting of 200 farmers in Wodonga, reported in The Australian to discuss the absence of nine meat buyers from major abattoir companies at cattle sales in the northeastern

Victorian town of Barnawartha, which depressed prices.

Farmers, who claim the non-attendance was an organised industry boycott and have complained to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, are angry about the growing power of a few large meat processors.

Taste Our Milk

A Thai dairy company hopes to secure about 20 million litres of milk by buying farms in partnership with a Victorian milk processor. The company, Dutch Mill, confirmed it had bought its first Australian dairy farm at Waaia in northern Victoria with Australian Consolidated Milk. It leased the farm to a couple who supply ACM and will give them an option to buy the property in five years as reported in the Weekly Times.

Rodeo Not Approved

Animal rights group PETA is targeting small businesses for sponsoring legitimate events. And the group is threatening that 'customers are watching and hoping you'll make the decision to not support such events in the future' as part of the campaign. At least five sponsors of a recent Ballarat rodeo received a letter from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals demanding they withdraw their support for what it called a 'cruel and wrong' event.

In his response to PETA, Ryebucks Outfitters manager John Austin argued PETA was on a 'crusade' involving a 'small, predominantly urban demographic whose experience with animals is undoubtedly based on a pet cat or perhaps feeding magpies on their verandah.'

Arts

No Art yet

Docklands missed out on the chance to have its own contemporary Australian art gallery after developer Michael Buxton donated his 300-strong collection to the University of Melbourne, according to a press release from the Premier.

Age Tops Shortlist

The Age has dominated the shortlist for Victoria's most prestigious journalism awards, receiving more nominations than any other news organisation. Age journalists have received 31 nominations across the 26 Melbourne Press Club Quill award categories, ahead of 21 for the ABC and 21 for the Herald Sun.

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Education

TAFE Booster Package

An extra \$50 million will be given to Victorian TAFEs to help train young unemployed people to work in growth industries. The Premier announced this on top of a \$320 million TAFE rescue fund and the Back to Work package, and would be available immediately. The Premier said to the Herald Sun that TAFE's could apply for one-off grants for new and existing courses that met the needs of local employers.

Gonski Adrift

Victorian students have been steadily drifting from disadvantaged to more disadvantaged schools, increasing inequity in the state's education system, by the Need to Succeed group of educators. It comes as the Australian Education Union ramps up pressure on the State Government, accusing the Premier of 'undermining' the needs based Gonski school funding agreement.

Labor Gonski Withdrawal

The State Government faces a backlash from teachers and parents after refusing to guarantee that billions of dollars worth of funds earmarked for schools in the final years of the original Gonski deal would still be delivered. Only weeks after accusing prime minister Abbott of short-changing students for not honouring the last two years of the six-year agreement, Education Minister James Merlino has been unable to provide his own clear commitment that Victoria would also fully fund the scheme in years five and six.

As revealed by The Age in an Auditor-General's report the original deal signed by former prime minister Rudd and former premier Napthine would have provided schools with about \$4 billion from the Commonwealth in 2018 and 2019 - the final stages of the scheme when most of the cash kicked in - and more than \$3.2 billion in state funding over the same period.

But asked repeatedly if Victorian schools would still get the state's share - regardless of Canberra's decision to only fund the first four years - Merlino said the matter was now 'the subject of future budget considerations' and blamed the federal government for changing the goal posts.

Baby Boom Coming

Schools will need to cater for 759 more classrooms every year to accommodate 400,000 extra 'baby boom' students over the next decade. The Australian Council for Educational

Research is predicting a shortage of specialist teachers within 10 years, despite the present glut of teaching graduates. The council analysis is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing a 21st-century baby boom began in 2008 as reported in The Age.

As it has been

School students will be taught that Australian citizenship means 'different things to different people' in a national civics curriculum that was criticised for its politically correct tone. Kevin Donnelly, the education academic who co-chaired the Abbot's government's national curriculum review, complained of an 'anti-Western bias' in schools, citing a history textbook that tells students to compare medieval Christian crusaders to the 9/11 Islamic terrorists who attacked the World Trade Centre.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority said it was working to 'rebalance the curriculum' in light of the review, which had recommended a 'back to basics' emphasis on literacy and numeracy, more rigorous subject content and a greater focus on Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage. Plans for a repetitive and vague teaching of civics drew criticism from constitutional law expert Anne Twomey who reviewed the curriculum's civics and citizenship component as reported in The Australian.

Exam Fails 'Fixed'

Four former teachers and two students from Box Hill Institute referred the allegations to the state's anti-corruption watchdog in October and have also raised their concerns with new Higher Education Minister Steve Herbert. In a submission to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the group alleged that exam papers had been remarked so academically struggling international students could pass.

It is understood that in mid-2013 a number of exam papers were altered, increasing marks to reach a pass of 50. Box Hill Institute chief executive Norman Gray says he is confident that the allegations are unfounded as reported in The Age.

Virtual Program No More

An innovative virtual learning program for Victorian VCE students in small schools is in danger of folding at the end of the year unless extra funding can be secured. The Victorian Virtual Learning Network, an internet-based distance education service developed and driven by the Bendigo Senior Secondary College, has

been running since 2012 and provides VCE subject tuition to 44 schools in the state.

Changes to parts of the VCE curriculum in 2016 mean that several subject modules run by the VVLN need to be rewritten - and reanimated, rerecorded and re filmed - to comply. The process is likely to take several months and be costly as reported in The Age.

Schools Subject to Cramming

A new report by the Australian Council for Educational Research warns that Victoria's primary school population is growing at the fastest rate in Australia, putting pressure on teachers and their already strained schools. Victoria will need an extra 448 new primary school classes every year over the next decade to cope with its booming student population according to The Age.

Sad

Fifteen Victorian schools 'at risk of attack' will be given security guards and closed-circuit television systems amid heightened national security fears. The Herald Sun can reveal federal Justice Minister Michael Keenan announced \$18 million in funding for 54 Australian schools which requested assistance to hire security guards and buy security products to safeguard students.

The fears stem from the potential loan wolf and racist attacks at government, independent, Islamic and Jewish schools. It is the first time the Federal Government has provided funding for on-site security guards in the education system. Mr Keenan said the Government would continue to look at improving measures to safeguard students as racial and religious intolerance grows amid the rise of IS. More than half the schools are Jewish and Islamic schools, while 22 are government and independent schools.

Students Flock to Islamic Schools

Victorian students are flocking to Islamic schools in record numbers, with enrolments increasing by 70 per cent in the past eight years. Ilim, Al-Taqwa and Minaret colleges have recorded some of the largest student increases in the state as Muslim families settle in Melbourne's growth corridor suburbs. Independent Schools Victoria chief executive Michelle Green said families sent their children to Islamic schools because they wanted to honour their culture and beliefs as reported in The Age.

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Energy

Wind Farm Sickness

Recordings of infrasound and low-frequency noise from wind farms should be played into the bedrooms of random rural residents to investigate health concerns, Emeritus professor Colin Hansen from the University of Adelaide suggests. In a submission to the Senate inquiry, he says if a health concern from infrasound and low-frequency noise is proven, authorities should state what level of impact or 'collateral damage' is acceptable and set up a compensation fund to buy out affected residents.

Professor Hansen was a peer reviewer of the National Health and Medical Research Council's review of the health impacts of wind farms. Some residents living near wind turbines across the world have complained of sleep disturbance and other seasickness-type symptoms. The council said it would support research that addressed the relationship between wind-farm noise and health effects.

Nuclear the New Black

Nuclear power has switched from our greatest threat to our greatest saviour. For example, South Australia's Labor Premier, Jay Weatherill was opposed to all elements of nuclear power as a budding politician, but changed his mind in February. He thinks the industry may save his struggling state. According to columnist Andrew Bolt in the Herald Sun, South Australia has the stable geology and stable government to store the world's nuclear waste, safe from earthquakes and terrorists.

Despite much fear mongering, when incidents such as the Fukushima reactor was smashed by a tsunami in 2011, not one person died from the radiation and the WHO doubts any will. However, global warming has changed the state of play. Professor Hoegh-Guldberg says in fact that 'nuclear power can produce low-cost, carbon-free electricity improving the lives of billions of people.'

Environment & conservation

Cash Pot for the Environment

Hundreds of millions of dollars in environmental levies paid by Victorians have been sitting idle in government coffers. The money is gathered through landfill levies and flows into the Sustainability Fund, which provides money for environmental projects. The fund had a closing balance of more than \$311 million last year, up from almost \$238 million for 2013. Environment groups say money collected through landfill and other levies should be spent immediately on much-needed projects.

Environment Minister Lisa Neville has acknowledged the growing pool of money, saying she was aware of the fund's 'continually increasing balance' as reported in The Age. Auditor-General John Doyle last year raised concerns about the management of the water levy known as the Environmental Contribution Levy, ECL. It is expected to raise almost \$1 billion in total by 2016, although much of it has been spent.

Harvesting Stocks Dangerous

Renewed commercial shellfish harvesting along a popular Victorian beach has sparked fears of irreversible environmental damage and infuriated locals. The decision to allow commercial harvesting of pipis in Venus Bay in

South Gippsland is controversial as the beach already attracts many 'recreational' harvesters. Recreational harvesting has proliferated in recent years causing tensions with residents who say many collectors ignore rules on catch limits, resulting in depleted stocks.

The Victorian National Parks Association has slammed commercial harvesting in Cape Liptrap Coastal Park, which includes Venus Bay, citing concerns that pipi numbers are in serious decline as reported in The Age. The association is calling for a 12-month moratorium of commercial harvesting in Cape Liptrap.

Plan Under Fire

The planned fuel-reduction burning of public land every year is flawed and is more concerned with burning as much land as possible, as opposed to targeting areas that are most at risk according to an environmentalist group in The Age. La Trobe University Professor Mike Clarke said the 'blanket' approach to burning 5 per cent of public land annually was also endangering several wildlife species to the point of extinction.

Save the Ducks

The Victorian hunting regulator has closed four wetlands to duck shooting to protect threatened species, but environmentalists say that the closures don't go far enough. The Game Management Authority announced the closures in preparation for the start of the duck hunting season. According to The Age, Authority chief executive Greg Hyams said Krause Swamp near Hamilton will be closed to protect the broilga, which is a threatened bird species in Victoria.

Kill the Koalas

Conservation scientists have urged the state government not to be swayed by media attention surrounding the killing of almost 700 koalas in Cape Otway. Deakin University wildlife and conservation biologist Desley Whisson, who has studied the Otway koala population, said the animals, which were euthanised in 2013 and 2014, were starving and had been selected because of their irreversibly poor condition.

According to The Age, koalas were re-introduced to Cape Otway in the 1970s, sourced mainly from French Island. Estimates suggest there are now about 11 koala a hectare at Cape Otway. According to the state government, a sustainable koala density in Victoria is considered to be less than one koala a hectare.

Electronic Dumping Prohibited

The State Government has made an ambitious pledge to ban 'e-waste' from landfill, forcing customers to take responsibility for its disposal. Victorian's will be encouraged to take their old TVs, mobile phones and computers to transfer stations or collection points, rather than dumping them on the nature strip or at the tip as reported in The Age.

Recycling businesses will also be asked to play a greater role in recovering and dismantling electronic components for future use, preventing materials ending up in landfill where toxic metals such as lead and mercury can seep out. Victoria's push to ban e-waste comes as the federal government reviews the National Television and Recycling Scheme, which requires industry to fund a growing proportion of e-waste. In the scheme's early years, recycling rates increased from 17 per cent in 2010 to 33 per cent in 2013. The national goal

is for 80 per cent of televisions and computers to be recycled by 2021-22.

Events

Our Best Friend.

From 1to 3 May at the Royal Exhibition Building. Discover the right breed for your lifestyle with 30-plus Breed Clubs and hundreds of Dogs on Show. Receive expert tips for a healthier, happier dog with presentations on training, behaviour and puppy survival. As one American president said: 'The more people I meet, the more I like my dog. That story is not for municipal officers!

Take Games Elsewhere

Melbourne major events veteran Ron Walker has called on Victorian politicians to ignore growing calls for the city to bid for the 2028 Olympic Games, before International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach's Canberra visit in April. The next Olympics is in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, followed by Tokyo in 2020 as reported by the Financial Review. Mr Walker, who oversaw his last race as chairman of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation in Melbourne said, however, that the scale of the Olympics has become too big for a city such as Melbourne to host...!

Tickets Fall Down

Discount early bird tickets will be sold to all four days of the Melbourne Cup Carnival for the first time this year in a move set to save racegoers almost 15 per cent on average entry costs. Punters who secure their tickets early will be rewarded with a cut-price admission to the iconic racing carnival with up to \$10 to be cut from the price of an individual ticket. Adults who buy tickets early to all four days will save \$33 according to the Herald Sun.

Well done.

Hundreds of Victoria State Emergency Service, VICSES, and Lions Club members took time out to ensure that drivers get to their holiday destinations safely. More than 40 Driver Reviver sites operated from April 2 to April 7. For more than 25 years, Driver Reviver has been a national campaign with one objective: to reduce road collisions by alleviating driver fatigue. Driver Reviver sites offer free tea, coffee, water and biscuits to help motorists rest and refresh in a staffed and safe environment. Give them all an OAM.

Kids Big Day Out

Victoria's biggest fun run celebrated its 10th birthday with more than 32,000 people running the 2015 Herald Sun CityLink Run for the Kids. For the first time, every participant was able to run or walk through the Domain tunnel. In addition, many Victorian families spent Good Friday at the Kids Day Out which was held under cover over more than 30,000 sqm. Entry was free and donations were given to the Good Friday Appeal.

Time for a Laugh

The Melbourne International Comedy Festival, from 25 March until April 19, will deliver almost 7,000 performances at 145 venues across Melbourne, in what is the country's biggest cultural festival and the third-largest comedy festival in the world. According to the Herald Sun, Australia's best comics including Hills, Judith Lucy, Wil Anderson, Fiona O'Loughlin, Dave Hughes, Effie and Joel Creasey will be



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performing.

Grand Prix Good Value

With the cost to taxpayers of staging the Australian Grand Prix set to top \$500 million in its 20th year in Melbourne, Ron Walker is remaining typically defiant about the true value of hosting the race. Mr Walker, who stepped down as chairman of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation after the 2015 race, told the Financial Review the money spent provided significant global exposure. 'For \$60 million to advertise Melbourne around the world is ... cheap.'

Australian Alliance to Save Energy

Last year A2SE focused its efforts on 2xEP - Doubling Australia's Energy Productivity by 2030. Their objective is no less than leading development of a 2xEP Roadmap for Australia, and gaining acceptance for implementing this roadmap from business groups in each sector of the economy, as well as from State and Federal Governments. The Doubling Energy Productivity Forum in April 2014 gathered 250 leaders talking about how to double energy productivity in each sector of the economy.

Together with a wide range of collaborators they then scoped a program of research, analysis, stakeholder engagement and communications to define how to achieve 2xEP and build the necessary support. This resulted in the publishing of the Energy White Paper, an energy focus at the G20 leaders' meeting and the COAG Energy Council announced a new policy framework. If interested in membership, please message tonywestmore@a2se.org.au. This item came from an email blog or similar.

Gaming

Crowns' Criminal Recruitment

Ruthless loan sharks are recruiting desperate Crown casino losers to babysit drug crops in Melbourne's suburbs reports the Herald Sun. Court records show how criminals are preying on out-of-luck punters to look after hydroponic cannabis setups worth millions. Judges have expressed frustration at the number of crop sitters who say they ended up minding the houses after coercion by the lenders.

Vices Let Loose

Scrutiny of Victoria's pubs, clubs, restaurants, gaming venues and bottle shops has plummeted by more than 70 per cent over the past four years. In 2012 the state's liquor and gaming authorities were merged into the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. Since then, The Age reports that the commission has been plagued by allegations of a drop in standards and a lack of direction.

Big Boys Make Some Noise

Casino mogul James Packer has locked horns with one of the biggest hotel groups in the world over the right to name his business Crown Resorts. The InterContinental Hotels Group, which counts Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts among its suite of hotel brands, has launched legal action to stop Mr Packer's casino group from trading as Crown Resorts as reported in the Herald Sun.

Health

Hospital Helipad Shut

The Royal Melbourne Hospital's helipad has been temporarily closed due to construction of a

nearby apartment block. The Herald Sun reports that there are now fears that helipads at up to 18 other hospitals - including the Royal Children's and Monash Medical Centre - are also at risk because planning rules are not in place to protect the vital flight paths.

Morning Sickness a Disability

Pregnant women with severe morning sickness could have a stronger claim to flexible work arrangements after the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ruled the condition was a 'disability' as reported by The Age.

Surgery Webcast Online

Victorians will have the chance to watch robot-assisted surgery live online in a world-first webcast of surgery from 10 hospitals across the globe. Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre is the only Australian hospital to take part in the 24-hour event, which will see Associate Professor Declan Murphy perform a prostatectomy. The Associate Professor told the Herald Sun that until now broadcasting live surgery had been limited to medical conferences, which were usually sold-out events.

Chief Executive Officer: The Lost Dogs Home

Inspirational leadership role with an iconic animal welfare organisation and competitive salary arrangements. Applications close Friday, 24th April 2015. Contact Sue Rogers for a confidential discussion on 03 9682 7044.

Business & investment

Tell Us the Plan

Victorian business leaders have urged the State Government to explain its strategy for growth and infrastructure. Since being elected at the end of November, the government has abolished the state's building code, moved legislation to drop 'move-on' laws for illegal pickets and has said it will not stick to the 2.5 per cent-plus efficiencies public sector wages policy.

Qube Logistics chief executive Maurice James said there was a lack of coherent strategy for growth and infrastructure in Victoria. 'It would be extremely difficult for me to go back to our board to ask for any significant capital investment into Victoria because of the uncertainty that exists.' 'It is also concerning that the Napthine Government had plans to develop Melbourne's second container terminal south-east of the city at Hastings, whereas the Andrews Government is looking at a site on the western side of the Bay.

The freight industry is also worried that rents at the Port of Melbourne are expected to increase by 800 times in preparation for the privatisation of the asset.' Mr James said to the Financial Review there was no doubt the changes the government has made to benefit unions was a worry for business.

Epping Market Launch

The shifting of the city's wholesale fruit and vegetable market will have an immediate impact on Victoria's road network, bringing calls for the urgent completion of the Metropolitan Ring Road. The market will start vacating its 35-hectare Footscray Road site in July and open at the new 70-hectare site on August 3. The massive \$600 million market will bring a much needed economic impetus to Melbourne's north with 600 direct businesses indirectly utilising the new facility.

Situated close to the Hume Freeway, Melbourne's gateway to the northern food bowl, the relocation is expected to ease truck movements in the heart of the city. But according to Keilor vegetable grower David Wallace reporting in The Age, many growers had concerns about the new market location and facility.

Woops

The Melbourne Wholesale Market relocation problems continue to worsen, according to market tenants. Growers Advisory Committee chairman, David Wallace said about 10 per cent of fruiterers had decided not to move to the new market, and several vegetable stand holders who had signed leases decided to hand them back because it was all 'too hard'.

Unsigned leases, increased operating costs, a lack of operating rules and relocation assistance were causing growers stress, according to the Weekly Times. Stand holders entered a bailout for space on the trading floor at Epping and signed their stand leases six months ago.

But the government has not yet countersigned the leases. A spokesman for Major Projects Minister Jacinta Allan was unable to comment, but maintained the opening date of the Epping site was August 3.

Industrial relations

No Projects, Idle Labour

Construction giants are warning of a job-killing drought of orders in Victoria in the next 10 months following the cancellation of the East West Link project by the State Government. A forum comprised of Leighton Contractors, Lend Lease, Fulton Hogan, John Holland, Laing O'Rourke and other major constructors has warned of a 'four figure' loss of jobs as work grinds to a halt as reported in The Australian.

Australian Industry Group Victorian director Tim Piper has urged the State Government in a series of meetings with ministers to bring forward projects to prevent the expected job losses. Mr Piper said there was a major gap in the project pipeline, with East West Link cancelled and the West Gate Distributor and Metro Project still years away.

Justice & police

Clean Board Resigns

The entire board of Greyhound Racing Victoria has quit over the live baiting scandal, despite a Racing Integrity Commission report clearing it of any knowledge of animal cruelty in the industry. One hour after Racing Integrity Commissioner Sai Perna exonerated the four person board at his press conference, Attorney-General and Racing Minister Martin Pakula announced the government had accepted the resignation of the board.

Land Bank Probe

Get-rich spruikers Henry Kaye and James McIntyre and a former Slater & Gordon lawyer are under investigation over controversial land-banking schemes into which investors have tipped more than \$100 million. The probes by corporate regulator ASIC, and the Victorian Legal Services Commissioner, come as property industry firms including architects Fender Katsalidis have distanced themselves from development companies linked to Kaye and/or his family on the fringe of Melbourne and regional centres according to The Age.

Database Months Away

The Adult Parole Board is yet to complete an electronic database for parolees, despite it being one of the key recommendations of a high-level review commissioned after the murder of Jill Meagher into how the justice system failed. Former High Court judge Ian Callinan made 23 recommendations to overhaul the parole board in his damning 2013 review, including the creation of a comprehensive electronic database and case management system as reported in *The Age*.

Three Barristers Nice

A leading Queen's counsel has been made a judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria in one of three judicial appointments announced by the State Government. Barrister Peter Riordan fills the vacancy of Justice Stephen Kaye who was recently appointed to the Court of Appeal. Respected barrister Carolene Gwynn was also appointed a Magistrate with John O'Brien to replace Magistrate's John Murphy, who has retired, and Sharon Cure, who will become a Magistrate in Tasmania as reported in *The Age*.

Juveniles Denied Education

Leaked Education Department memos detail concerns about misuse of taxpayer funds and conflicts of interest by bureaucrats who previously managed aspects of Victoria's juvenile justice education program. The memos, from 2014, query the decision by one education official to use their private company to supply services to the youth justice education program, which teaches Victoria's offenders who are aged 10 to 21.

The memos provide a rare insight into one of several issues gripping Victoria's Education Department and which involve serious questions about the use and oversight of state education funds across multiple schools and education programs.

Tougher Laws Doors Closed

The introduction of tougher penalties against motorists who open car doors into cyclists' paths has failed to have any impact on the sometimes deadly offence, the State Government said as it rebuffed calls to crack down harder on 'dooring' after the death of Italian Alberto Paulon. As reported in *The Age*, Roads Minister Luke Donnellan said fines for dooring jumped sharply two years ago, but with no benefit. The on-the-spot penalty for dooring was increased from \$148 to \$369. The maximum court-imposed fine rose to \$1476.

Sex Attacker Let Loose

One of five alleged sexual offenders employed by Victoria's largest disability provider, Yooralla, worked 32 shifts while being investigated by police on suspicion of repeatedly raping a disabled woman at another disability provider. *The Age* revealed the overseas worker at the centre of the latest case was hired by Yooralla after he was sacked by the other provider in early 2013 over his alleged repeated rape of an intellectually disabled woman.

The revelations come as Victoria's ombudsman announced the terms of reference of a major inquiry prompted by reports in *Fairfax Media* and the ABC's *Four Corners* program about Yooralla's repeated mishandling of sexual assault cases.

Government Enters Bitcoin Market

The Victorian Government will sell millions of dollars worth of bitcoins on the open market in coming months after taking possession of assets confiscated from a Warrandyte drug dealer. The bitcoins were seized in 2013, but the State's Asset Confiscation Operations, ACO, had to wait until the man's case had been heard. Bitcoins were created in 2008 for trading within computer games, for online shops and for transferring money online. According to *The Age*, they are usually traded in fractions depending on how much money users want to transfer.

Rights and Responsibilities Review

The State Government will review Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to ensure it is robust and effective. Attorney-General Martin Pakula has appointed Michael Brett Young - CEO of the Law Institute of Victoria until 2014 and previously managing partner at Maurice Blackburn - to lead the review. Introduced by the former Labor government in 2006, the Charter contains 20 fundamental human rights based on those set out in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

During the last term of government, the Coalition significantly reduced the emphasis placed on the Charter and made cuts to Charter education and training for government departments. The report - which will include consultation with key stakeholders and submissions from the public - will be delivered to the Government by 1 September 2015, before being tabled in Parliament on 1 October 2015 according to a media release from the Premiers office.

Clear the Streets

Nearly 6,000 cars were impounded by the City of Melbourne last year. A total of 5,537 vehicles were impounded from clear ways while the remaining 426 were impounded after being deemed abandoned. The City of Melbourne disposed of 63 vehicles at public auction in 2014 according to the *Herald Sun*.

Local government

Mayors Dramatic Intervention

Geelong mayor Darryn Lyons has been granted a full intervention order against a Breakwater man over allegations of stalking and threatening to kill. Geelong Magistrate Ron Saines ruled George Douglas, 41, must not go within 50 metres of the mayor for two years as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

ALGA Priorities Set Down

The Australian Local Government Association has established its priorities for the year ahead, with the restoration of indexation of Financial Assistance Grants, FAGs, the top agenda item for the ALGA board. ALGA President Mayor Troy Pickard said the focus throughout 2015-16 will be on Financial Assistance Grants, the Reform of the Federation and Taxation White Papers, the future of natural disaster funding and developing ALGA's election campaign platform in the lead up to the 2016 election.

ALGA will continue to be involved in debate surrounding natural disaster funding, and advocacy on the importance of investigation in mitigation, not just recovery after disasters according to an ALGA media release.

Geelong's Cash Injection

Council cash is pouring back into central Geelong months after the axing of a scheme to fund community projects in the suburbs. In the last package for the city centre, Mayor Darryn Lyons announced a new Central Geelong Major Heritage Fund to help owners restore historic buildings.

The injection of ratepayers' cash into the city centre follows the demise of a scheme that gave councillors \$600,000 a year each for projects in their own wards, such as playgrounds and sports facility upgrades.

AG Corruption Tensions

The Auditor-General accused the Municipal Association of Victoria of lacking proper accountability and being unable to show processes make a difference in relation to fraud and corruption. The MAV gets about \$56




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million a year in taxpayer, ratepayer and council funding. Auditor-General John Doyle strongly criticised the MAV's reaction to his audit, saying it was 'marked by repeated challenges to my mandate ... its inability to provide evidence in a timely fashion and sometimes its refusal to provide certain information' as reported by the Herald Sun.

Fix it Hendo

Corangamite federal member Sarah Henderson has called on the City of Greater Geelong and the Colac Otway Shire to do more to fix mobile black spots in the region. Last year, Ms Henderson nominated 19 towns in her electorate as priorities for the federal government's \$100 million Mobile Black Spot program, but she is hoping for extra financial support from local councils. Applications from mobile network operators and providers to improve mobile coverage in nominated locations closes on April 16.

Melbourne

Melbourne City Council is moving toward a blanket ban for smokers lighting up in outdoor sections of restaurants and cafes, describing the move as inevitable to the Herald Sun. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said Victoria was the only state that did not have the law. If given the green light, this would mean smoking would become illegal for diners anywhere in the City of Melbourne's municipality, which includes the Hoddle Street grid, Queen Victoria Market, Docklands, Lygon Street, parts of South Yarra, East Melbourne and Kensington.

Pay Rise Burns Ratepayers

Victorian homeowners could face a huge rise in the fire services levy if a claim for a 30 per cent pay rise for CFA firefighters is accepted. Farmers, homeowners and business owners could be hit with an 80 per cent hike if the rise is accepted, the Victorian Farmers Federation says. VFF president Peter Tuohy said the rise was based on the \$1.6 billion cost of the pay claim, revealed by the Herald Sun.

Yarra Still Polluted

Despite having promised four months ago to introduce a new Yarra River Protection Act and to establish a new trust to develop better planning controls around the river, the State Government still cannot say when or how it will follow through on the pledge. The Yarra River-keeper Association and not-for-profit group Environmental Justice Australia will convene for a forum at the Abbotsford Convent to encourage government to keep its promise.

Before it was elected last year, Labor said it would 'introduce a Yarra River Protection Act to guard the river corridor from inappropriate development' and to set up a new trust to 'standardise planning controls for the Yarra, and work with agencies to promote the rivers amenity and significance.' According to The Age, Industrial pollution no longer pours into the river from businesses such as the former Alphington paper mills or the Mobil dock at Coode Island.

Instead, it is the proliferation of hard surfaces such as storm water drains, development and roads surrounding the river that now cause much of the pollution. There are 11 councils along the course of the Yarra responsible for planning on its banks, and at least three agencies - Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and

the Environment Protection Authority - that oversee its health.

Barack's 'Imperfect' Face

After six months under wraps, a 31-storey portrait of Indigenous leader William Barak was momentarily unveiled to the world in early March. The 85-meter face has been created in the balconies of a new Grocon apartment building at the former Carlton United and Brewery site on Swanston Street as reported in The Age.

Grocon's national design manager David Waldren said they were still not completely satisfied with the depiction of the tribal chief and therefore would spend another six months making sure it was perfect. William Barak was an elder of Melbourne's Wurundjeri tribe, an artist and social justice leader, credited with 'building a bridge between black and white culture.' He died in 1903.

Hello Hello!

If you're considering running an event, starting up a social enterprise or small business, or hosting a business event, you could be eligible for a City of Melbourne grant. Applications for grants may be made for social enterprise, small business, business events or an events partnership program. Contact jem.wilson@melbourne.vic.gov.au.

Melbourne's Big Spenders

City workers, residents, visitors and students spent \$2.4 billion on retail and hospitality in the City of Melbourne in 2013-14 according to a council media release. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle joined the Minister for Tourism and Major Events John Eren to release the one year report card on the implementation of the Melbourne Retail and Hospitality Strategy 2013-2017.

Tunnels and Tall Towers

Probuild Constructions has been chosen to build the 92-storey Aurora Melbourne Central tower planned for La Trobe Street. According to the Herald Sun, 95 per cent of units have already been sold. The skyscraper will feature 941 residential apartments, 250 serviced units, shops and offices. Aurora will also have an underground link to Melbourne Central, Emporium, Myer and David Jones retail precincts. The 286m tower will be Australia's third tallest tower after Eureka (297m) and Gold Coast's Q1 (323m). One bedroom units cost from \$394,500.

Media, multimedia & IT

Watch This Space

Apple made its case for consumers to buy its forthcoming smartwatch, positioning the device as a quick way to handle the brief interactions that fill their days, from meeting reminders to short messages to calling for a car. It has also been highlighted as a fashion accessory.

Planning

Build Social Housing Everywhere

The Victorian Government has pledged to trial 'inclusionary zoning' for land sold by the State Government, in a policy that could require 10 to 15 per cent of new construction to be affordable to first-home owners and low income families. However in a speech at a property industry function, Planning Minister Richard Wynne said the social housing units would not have to

be build 'on site'.

'The development community had reservations about how they could include low-income housing within their top-end apartment projects. Dr Judy Stubbs, a housing specialist from the University of New South Wales said she had no problem with low-income homes generated through inclusionary zoning being built off-site, as long as the new houses were constructed in the same council area, close to transport and jobs' as reported in The Age.

Plan Melbourne Redrafted

A group of senior advisors to the previous government who quit after claiming political interference in their work writing Melbourne's 40-year planning strategy have been reappointed to rewrite parts of the plan. The planning strategy is the key document guiding Melbourne's growth until 2050.

Planning Minister Richard Wynne said Plan Melbourne had under the previous government 'become at least in part, a political document aimed at last year's election rather than 2050'. The Age reports that under the previous government Plan Melbourne had been 'reframed around the East West Link proposal and the scrapping of the Melbourne Metro tunnel'.

Thinking outside the normal square

According to The Age, these are the top 10 solutions to Melbourne's housing crisis. First, converted shipping containers - low-cost design-driven alternative living arrangement. Second, modular spaces - where elements can be changed at will. Third, adding new homes in old backyards - particularly where backing onto a lane.

Fourth, urban villages - where facilities are held in common to save space and costs. Fifth, rooftop gardens - lets face it, we don't need our own backyard anymore. Sixth, dual-key homes - we ought to design family homes so that they can easily be split into two separate dwellings.

Seventh, prefabricated spaces - companies make beautiful prefabricated packages which combine to create a home or add an existing one. Eighth, tiny portable homes - square homes of less than 9.3 metres which became popular after cyclone Katrina wiped out many homes in 2005.

Ninth, public private investment in housing - encourage investment through government partnerships with the private sector. Tenth, repurpose existing buildings - converting warehouses or other buildings to apartments.

Hoddle Street Reform

A radical new traffic system will be introduced on one of Melbourne's most gridlocked roads as part of an ambitious State Government plan to reduce congestion in the inner city. As negotiations continue over the East West Link, the State Government has asked VicRoads to examine ways to 'streamline' Hoddle Street by completely redesigning the way cars travel on the north-south connection.

The \$60 million plan would involve piloting 'continuous flow intersections' - designed to reduce delays by giving right-turning traffic a dedicated lane on the far right-hand side of the road as cars approach a junction. The Age reports that the system has worked successfully in several United States cities but is considered

controversial, not least because it often requires widening roads and acquiring more land.

Both the chief motoring lobby group and public transport advocates expressed doubts about the project, and government insiders are nervous about how they will implement the policy without disrupting one of the city's major arterials. A spokeswoman for Roads Minister Luke Donnellan said VicRoads was investigating options for continuous flow intersections and other streamlining measures along Hoddle Street.

Port Joint Development

The City of Greater Geelong will partner with a State Government department to prepare an implementation plan for the Portarlington harbour redevelopment. The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will prepare the plan.

Racing Plans Slowed

Planning Minister Richard Wynne has pared back a controversial approval for thousands of new apartments that was granted by the previous government to the powerful Moonee Valley Racing Club. In a new development plan reported in *The Age*, to be gazetted by the government, Mr Wynne will introduce a strict rule to stop the racing club building apartments and townhouses higher than three or six levels around the edges of the massive site - where the racing club's grandstand now sits.

The House Always Wins

Councils are almost redundant in the decision-making for controversial residential developments in Melbourne's suburbs, according to an RMIT University analysis of permit applications. Almost 9 out of 10 refused permit applicants went to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and in 73 per cent of cases the councils decision was set aside and the permit granted.

When councillors supported a development and residents appealed to the tribunal, 85 per cent of council decisions were upheld, the report by Joe Hurley and Brendan McRae showed. Once councils and the State Government set planning rules for an area, the power of a council to influence contentious applications diminishes considerably, according to *The Age*.

Burning Melbourne

High-rise towers built across the CBD are being fitted with 'third world' materials that are a fire risk, a leading engineering expert has warned. Jonathan Barnett, who worked on the US 9/11 terrorist attack investigation, said the lives of thousands of people could be at risk. It comes as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade investigates a Docklands inferno, which had flames shoot up 20m on the building's facade.

Towers Make Streets Hostile

The proliferation of skyscrapers in central Melbourne has made many city streets 'hostile' and windswept, new Planning Minister Dick Wynne says. 'There are some parts of the city that are quite hostile at street level. The way some of the buildings have been constructed, you can be blown off your feet.'

What Goes Up, Don't Come Down

Melbourne city is already home to 30 skyscrapers taller than 150 metres, more than in Sydney, Beijing or London. Another 40 are

proposed or under construction, including the 100-storey Australia 108. 'If there is nothing structurally wrong I would expect [these buildings] would last decades and decades - up to 100 years,' Tony Crabb, head of research for Savills Australia, said. Towers looking a bit tired after about 40 years are generally given facelifts, where entire lift and air conditioning systems often need to be pulled out and replaced. Victoria's former state government architect, John Denton, warned that Melbourne was creating 'a new problem for the future' in new poor-quality apartment buildings, which he says could need major repairs within a few decades as reported in *The Age*.

Hot Bidding for Prahran Land

The location of a promised high school in Prahran is up in the air, with Wesley College trying to secure land earmarked for the long-awaited school. According to *The Age*, the former state government announced \$20 million to build the new school, and a committee recommended that it should be co-located with the Victorian College for the Deaf on St Kilda Road.

Mariner Tower Challenge

A skyscraper planned to tower over Flinders Street's rundown Forum Theatre has led some of Melbourne's leading business and philanthropy figures to join a legal bid disputing the planning minister's authority to have approved it. Opposition Leader Matthew Guy, as planning minister last year approved a plan by developer David Marriner to build a 32-storey hotel and apartment tower behind the heritage-listed Forum. The plan was bitterly opposed by Melbourne City Council. Lord mayor Robert Doyle said it failed to respect the theatre's heritage and significance. Now lawyers for Planning Minister Dick Wynne are defending his predecessor's authority to have approved the project as reported by *The Age*.

New Activity Centres for the Wynne

In his most significant major approvals since taking office, Planning Minister Richard Wynne has signed off on five new 'activity centres' in middle and outer Melbourne in a bid to generate more jobs and higher density residential development. He has also signed off on the demolition of Dallas Brooks Hall in Albert Street, East Melbourne, which is to be replaced with an apartment and office development.

But Mr Wynne has required developers Mirvac and the site owners, the Freemasons, to cut down the height of the building to around 12 levels - two or three stories fewer than they wanted. The new activity centres signed off on by the government are in Epping, Cranbourne, Werribee, Moorabbin and Footscray. According to *The Age*, the new zoning for the areas is designed to attract businesses and residential developers to the areas by specifying where certain types of projects are desired.

A New Vision for Elizabeth

A radical idea to improve the city - rip up Elizabeth Street and incorporate and revitalise Williams Creek, the hidden waterway under the roadway down to the Yarra River. Gilbert Rochecoste, founder and managing director of urban design firm Village Well, has himself become internationally known for his ability to work with communities, businesses and governments to make great spaces and places

in which to live and work.

'Melbourne has matured to where it now needs a major catalyst for its next evolution to remain the world's most liveable city,' he says. He also says that Elizabeth Street is a bit of a 'poor cousin' of CBD roads, and is badly in need of change.

Hidden Issues Coming to the Boil

A new book, *City Limits: Why Australia's Cities are Broken and How we Can Fix Them*, argues against the economic orthodoxy of the daily commute. For at least the last 40 years, all the net increase in employment has been in the services sector, and the services sector exists mainly in cities.

Columnist Ross Gittins reports that the biggest trend in city property prices is not just big rises over time, but the way inner-city prices are rising so much faster than outer-city prices as people seek 'proximity' or, or closeness to the centre, with all its facilities and jobs. For the five mainland state capitals, 60 per cent of all the employment growth over the past five years to 2011 occurred within 10 kilometres of the centre. But due to high property prices, 55 per cent of the population growth has occurred 20 kilometres or more from the centre.

According to *The Australian*, this big economic and social problem has facilitated a growing spatial divide between where the jobs are and where people live. Improving public transport is expensive and can only be part of the solution, where there is a need to increase supply of semi-detached homes - terraces, townhouses and low-rise blocks of flats in inner and middle suburbs.

Fighting Battles at Home

Returned Service people believe the Veterans Access Network, VAN, office in Geelong should not close. The Department of Veteran Affairs initiated a consultation period earlier this year to get feedback from various stakeholders (ex-service organisations and other agencies) about the model of service delivery at the Malop Street Office.

Across the nation, the Department of Veteran Affairs has often offered their service delivery through a Centrelink office. Geelong and District Vietnam Veterans Association president Reiny Nieuwenhof said stakeholders across the Geelong region strongly believed the closure of the VAN office would be detrimental and developed a submission to DVA arguing why it believed the VAN office should not be closed.

Collins House Development

Melbourne-based company, APG, will co-develop the 57-level Collins House tower on airspace atop the historic Makers Mark building, which has a street frontage of just 11 metres. The super-thin, super-dense structure will rise 195 metres and offer 263 flats according to *The Age*.

These Streets Were Made for Walking

A Victorian-first study, led by Professor Billie Giles-corti, the director of Melbourne University's McCaughey VicHealth Unit for Community Wellbeing, is a new measure of liveability: the Transport Walkability Index. The internationally used measure is based on three aspects: mixed-use planning, population density and street connectivity.

According to The Age, the researchers found inner areas tended to be more walkable, but there were anomalies. Docklands, developed as a shopping and entertainment precinct in Melbourne's CBD, scored within the third least walkable areas in Melbourne. The report cited the linear road network, lack of intersections and low mix of dwellings as obstacles to walkability. As reported in The Age, there were also areas in outer Melbourne, such as Dandenong, that were very walkable.

Sport

Dons Shoot Back

A group of senior Essendon players is considering launching a class action against the AFL, and possibly the club, if found guilty of doping offences. The Herald Sun reveals that players would be seeking damages in the Supreme Court for breach of duty of care and for breach of contract in relation to the supplements scandal. AND. AND. And the Dons beat last year's Premier's last Saturday night.

Cage Fight Approval Won

The first cage fight in Melbourne will be held in November after the state government moved to lift a ban on enclosures. Mixed martial arts events are currently legal in Victoria but the caged octagon ring, popularised by the Ultimate Fighting Championship, has been illegal until now.

Mixed martial arts bouts were previously confined to boxing rings according to The Age. Melbourne fighter Vik Grujic and many of his contemporaries said the decision was well overdue. 'Mixed martial arts in Melbourne will no longer fall behind the rest of the world because of ignorance.'

Punters Kicking Yummy Goals

Pressure is mounting on Etihad Stadium and other sporting venues to lower food prices after the MCG wound back the clock with menu prices not seen at the game for a decade. The most dramatic decreases came for a bottle of Mount Franklin water, which reverts from \$5 to its 2001 price of \$3, Don hot dogs are down from \$6.50 to \$4, and salad down from \$11.50 to \$8.

The changes do not cover alcohol, although beer trays will be free, having previously cost \$1. AFL Fans' Association president Gerry Eeman praised the MCG for its move in The Age.

Transport - ports

Whats more ImPORTant?

The Age gives a good summary of the ports issue and surrounding political considerations as excerpted below. Selling the port - or more accurately, leasing it out long-term - is a policy both sides of politics took to November's state election, though each had different ideas about how to use the one-off windfall. One potential flashpoint is over how many years the port would be leased to a private operator.

The former Government planned to offer a medium-term lease of 40 years to avoid locking up valuable inner-city real-estate for a century, but Labor may seek a longer-term lease to increase the sale price, ranging from \$5 billion for a medium-term and \$6 billion for a longer-term lease. The State Government has pledged to put the money towards sinking the 50 remaining level crossings. The port is very good

earner for the state. It returned a public dividend of \$43.7 million last financial year, from an after-tax profit of \$77.8 million. With a \$1.6 billion expansion of Webb Dock under way, the Port of Melbourne is not expected to reach capacity until the late 2020s or even 2030s.

This gives the State government time to assess the viability of its BayWest plan. If a recent feasibility study which shows BayWest is too shallow for big ships proves true, Labor may be forced to turn to Hastings again, which was the preferred location last time it was in government.

Port in Doubt

Laws that would create a new independent agency to prioritise Victoria's road, rail and port needs won't come before Parliament until mid-year, Treasurer Tim Pallas said in the Herald Sun. Mr Pallas said although he favoured a second major Victorian port being built near Geelong at Bay West, the State Government would be guided by Infrastructure Victoria on an ideal position for the second freight hub.

ACCC Action Urged

The bosses of the nation's most powerful stevedoring companies, Asciano and DP World, held meetings with the chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to demand an intervention into the country's ports after the Port of Melbourne slapped an 800 per cent increase on stevedore rents.

Port Sale Backdown

The maritime union is calling for Labor Party support to overturn Premier Daniel Andrews' plan to sell the Port of Melbourne at the ALP conference on 28 March. Mr Andrews has said the billions of dollars in expected revenue will be used to fund the removal of 50 level crossings across Melbourne. MUA branch secretary Kevin Bracken's motion - which has been seconded by United Firefighters Union secretary Peter Marshall - says the discussion needs to be around better ways of funding transport infrastructure rather than just selling off public assets.

Transport - air

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Avalon's Future in the Sky

An \$11 million dollar package between Jetstar, the airport and Linfox for the passenger carrier to continue its operations at Avalon expires at the end of April. Jetstar's only flight route from the airport is to Sydney, five times a day, and City of Greater Geelong mayor Darryn Lyons was the public face of a 'use it or lose it campaign' in June asking people to book their flights to and from Avalon instead of Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport. Corangamite federal member Sarah Henderson said, 'In December 2013, the former State Government provided a multi-million dollar rescue package to secure Jetstar's operation at Avalon for at least 15 months.'

Transport – rail

Guess What (1)

Myki's Hidden Dysfunction For four years, the controversial Myki public transport fare system has been delayed across country Victoria according to the Weekly Times. Electronic Myki readers and 'top up' machines have been sitting idle at country train stations since 2010 when the Coalition Government decided many of Myki's problems were too big to be solved. Passenger groups say transport zones need to be solved before Myki can progress beyond the big regional centres. There are up to 13 fare zones beyond Melbourne. A Public Transport Users Association spokesman said Myki 'can't quite cope with the fare structure.'

Guess What (2)

The Myki Ticketing system is up for re-tender

Upgrade Off

An upgrade of the Dandenong railway line has been put on hold by the State Government. The government announced in late March that it had rejected a private consortium' proposal for a multi-billion dollar upgrade of the line.

According to The Age, the State Government has its own plans for the line which will cost \$30 million compensation to be paid to the Rail Transformation Consortium, consisting of MTR, John Holland and UGL Rail, for the intellectual property it has put into the project.

The project's original cost was \$2 to \$2.5 billion and the consortium would have received 20 years of payments for operating the line, from 2019. Under the revised plans, 37 new high-capacity trains, capable of carrying 20 per cent more passengers than current trains will be ordered. The trains are expected to enter service from 2018.

Treasurer Tim Pallas said the project cost could blow out to \$3.1 billion and take longer than projected, and the government has decided to proceed with its own upgrade of the line, with a new tender process to start in May.

The deal, the first under the state's unsolicited proposal rules, introduced by the State Government, was for the consortium design, build and operate part of the city's train network in the south-east. It would effectively have privatised that line and the government said this would be problematic if the contract with the existing operator, Metro Trains, owned by MTR, was not renewed in 2017.

Graffiti Derailing Productivity

Melbourne trains were hit by more than 1,000 graffiti attacks last year, almost half of which took place while the train was in service, as vandals became more adept at stopping trains in their tracks or invading restricted railway areas. Vandalised trains must be taken out of service promptly to be cleaned, causing disruption to passengers, although Metro will often leave a graffitied train in service in peak times as reported in The Age.

Trains On Time, Almost

Metro's annual profits have risen more than two-thirds since it replaced Connex as Melbourne's rail franchisee five years ago, as the company has become increasingly skilled at meeting performance targets which attract government bonuses. Metro, a subsidiary of Hong Kong based rail operator MTR, was paid \$1.188

billion in subsidies for operating Melbourne's suburban rail network in 2013-14.

It made an after-tax profit of \$46.22 million, documents filed to financial regulator ASIC reveal, of which \$39.29 million was paid in dividends to its shareholders. Fairfax Media revealed that Metro was altering hundreds of services a week to stick to the timetable and avoid paying financial penalties for lateness. The company cut short 399 services in the first week of March, including 95 peak services, to get delayed trains back on schedule.

Public Transport Minister Jacinta Allan said the performance measures in the government's contract with Metro sometimes produced 'this perverse outcome'.

New Station Swamped

A landmark railway station in Melbourne's west, which opened less than two years ago, is already failing to cope with demand. The \$110 million Williams Landing station opened in April 2012 and is used by commuters in the boom suburbs of Point Cook, Truganina and Williams Landing, which are forecast to collectively house about 90,000 residents by 2030. Public Transport Minister Jacinta Allan said pressure on Williams Landing would be relieved with an opening of the Regional Rail Link in June.

Fire Burns Rail History

Four of Melbourne's historic red rattler train carriages were damaged and two heritage-listed buildings were destroyed in a big coal fire. Firefighters were called to the Newport rail yards in Melbourne's inner-west about 1.30am where flames had engulfed two workshop sheds. The sheds, which housed historic locomotives and carriages for restoration, were built between 1884 and 1888 as reported in The Age.

New Portal to Southland

The Government will include toilet facilities in the design after community dismay at the Southland Station proposal released by the former State Government, which lacked basic facilities. Southland is set to become the fourth busiest station on the Frankston line, moving up to 4,400 passengers a day. The feedback period will be open until mid-April and all comments received will be considered when the design of the new station is finalised in May 2015. Major construction is expected to begin in the second half of 2015, with the new station to open in 2017.

Trains in the Pipeline

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announced 30 carriages would be made in Ballarat by train manufacturer Alstom. The move guarantees 70 local jobs and comes at the 11th hour, with previous contracts expected to expire in July. The new X'Trapolis trains will be on metropolitan tracks by mid-2017.

Off the Beaten Track

Melbourne's treasured W-class trams could soon become a rarer sight on the city streets, if a proposal to slash the number of City Circle trams that operate is accepted by the State Government, despite an ongoing \$8 million restoration of four W-Class trams in Bendigo. Public Transport Victoria and Yarra Trams have proposed to run the City Circle tram in one direction only, effectively halving the service, which is popular with tourists as well as being

used by city workers and residents.

According to The Age, the City Circle line is a free service that runs around the perimeter of the central business district and through Docklands. It exclusively uses Melbourne's historic W-class trams, running clockwise and counter-clockwise at 12 minute intervals.

Transport – road

Don't Be a Dictator

Sovereign risk and the subsequent cancellation of public-private infrastructure projects in the developing world have made headlines over recent decades. Interestingly, a World Bank report found that 'only 48 private infrastructure projects in the developing world were cancelled from 1990-2001, a small fraction of the nearly 2500 projects that reached financial closure over this period'. Premier Andrews said on 3AW: "I didn't sign these contracts."

True, Premier, you didn't, but nay sensible first world government knows you ought to be bound by contractual obligations of your predecessors in the same way the previous Government was bound by the disastrous Myki and Desalination plant contracts of the previous Labor government. There is no way the State Government can escape paying substantial compensation to the East West Link consortium, despite his misleading statements to the contrary before the state election, without taking the extraordinary step of using the Parliament, like a third-world despot, to rescind Victoria's obligation according to Tim Smith, the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition, in the Herald Sun.

Builders Wrote Their Own Deal

A special deal guaranteeing hundreds of millions of dollars of compensation for the dumped East West Link was initially drafted by the consortium contracted to deliver the toll road after the Napthine government asked it to do so. Senior sources close to the project have confirmed the previous government was so keen to reassure East West Connect it would get its money after a Labor promise to scrap the \$6.8 billion project it asked the consortium to draft a so-called side letter guaranteeing taxpayer-funded compensation even in the absence of a valid contract according to The Age.

Up There

Sustainable Infrastructure

UrbanGrowth NSW seeks submissions from relevant proponents with demonstrated capability in providing innovative sustainable infrastructure alternatives including their technical, commercial, operational, and legislative requirements.

The solutions are being sought as a potential alternative to traditional servicing methods that are currently planned to support future development in the Parramatta North Urban Transformation, PNUT, precinct in the Greater Western Sydney region of New South Wales. Closing date 14 May 2015 at 2pm, www.urbangrowthnsw.com.au/etender, reference 2831/15.

Missed It By That Much

Stickers warning taxi passengers to look out for bikes will begin appearing in Melbourne Cabs in April, as the taxi industry moves to tackle potentially fatal door accidents with cyclists. Between 2006 and 2010, 56 cyclists were hit

by an opened taxi door, the study for the Road Safety Action Group Inner Melbourne found. According to The Age, this accounts for 13 per cent of dooring incidents.

Roads Make Room

The Victorian Greens have reignited their war with motorists by drafting legislation for new road rules that would enshrine a 1m buffer between cars and cyclists as reported in the Herald Sun. The minor party, which has five MPs in the Legislative Council and two MPs in the Legislative Assembly, will push for the legislation to be endorsed by Labor as it was blocked during the previous state Parliament.

Sydney's Daily Speed Limit

The speed limit on Sydney Road will be permanently lowered to 40km/h, 24 hours a day, following a cycling death. An 'emergency meeting' in Brunswick produced few firm plans to improve safety on Sydney Road, a congested arterial in Melbourne's north that is among the most dangerous for bike riding in the city.

Short-term changes will include building speed humps at intersections, tweaking traffic light signals to give pedestrians priority and removing some parking spaces, according to Brunswick MP Jane Garrett in The Age. But an online petition to remove all on-street parking along a short stretch of Sydney Road where Mr Paulon was killed was not endorsed at the meeting.

Secret to Less Traffic

The Grattan Institute's Jane Frances Kelly and Paul Donegan argue it takes only a 5 per cent reduction in traffic to improve movement on choked roads, which peak-hour toll roads could deliver. Their book City Limits: Why Australia's Cities are Broken and How we Can Fix Them suggests a peak-time toll on inner-suburban main roads and cheaper tolls, or none at all during off peak times.

Some people will prefer to pay the toll to take the road, but workers traveling to clients during the day, such as tradespeople, would have more time to travel to more jobs if traffic was better spread throughout the day. It would also be another incentive for drivers to use public transport. Research has found 17 per cent of car trips in the morning peak are for recreation and shopping trips in Melbourne and 19 per cent in Sydney - trips that could shift to off-peak times or public transport.

Full Speed Ahead

Victoria's 70km/h and 90km/h speed limits are set to stay after the State government scrapped plans to progressively remove them. The decision ignores Transport Accident Commission evidence that the risk of a fatal smash doubles with every 5km/h speed increase above 60km/h.

The surprise decision followed a campaign by community newspapers and transport group RACV. As reported in The Age, Minister for Roads and Road Safety Luke Donnellan said the speed limit changes were halted to give the community certainty.

Utilities

We're Water Wise

Melbournians used less water over summer, helping limit storage losses. The city's water storage declined 5.1 per cent over the past

three months - from 78.4 per cent to 73.3 per cent - a result in line with the long-term summer average. According to Melbourne Water supply manager Michelle Riley in the Herald Sun, it is encouraging to see lower water consumption despite no restrictions being in place.

Society

Goulburn Sick Spot

The Goulburn Valley has emerged as the sickest spot in Victoria, with more than one in six residents seeing a GP more than 12 times a year, twice the national average. The Herald Sun reports that 880,000 Australians see their GP more than 20 times a year and account for 17.1 per cent or \$2.8 billion of the non-hospital Medicare spend.

Farewell Shorebirds

Right now over five million shorebirds are migrating from Australia to breed in the Arctic - for some that's the equivalent of doing 309 consecutive marathons with only one or two drinks along the way. From 21 March to 19 April, BirdLife Australia will be celebrating its annual migratory shorebird event, Farewell Shorebirds. They are challenging Australians to join the birds, by registering their human-powered kilometres against the bird-powered kilometres. Visit the website for more information www.farewellshorebirds.org.au

Reject Reform and We are Dead in the Water

I am continually delighted that the government of which I was part is still quoted as the model for public sector reform says Jeff Kennett in a Herald Sun opinion piece. I often think about those years from 1992 to 1999, just to reflect on the zeal for reform that existed then and on the teamwork that delivered outcomes that remain largely in place 16 years after my government was defeated.

The team included not just politicians and public servants, but junior public servants, the business sector and even the union movement. It is so disappointing that there has been little or no reform since, anywhere in Australia.

Top Cop Now Top Dog

Former top cop Ken Lay will take over at Greyhound Racing Victoria after its board quit en masse over the live baiting scandal. According to the Herald Sun, the former Victoria Police chief commissioner was tapped by Racing Minister Martin Pakula, as were ex-Essendon chief Ray Gunston and leading industrial relations lawyer Judith Bornstein.

Royal Movements Down Under

Prince Harry will have a four-week secondment with the Australian Defence Force at barracks in Sydney, Perth and Darwin in April and May. It will include joining his father, Prince Charles, at the Gallipoli commemorations in Turkey on April 24-25. After this, Harry will tour New Zealand as a civilian as reported by the Herald Sun.

Formalities Finally Falling

Australia is finally moving to overturn a 300 year old law banning a monarch's firstborn daughter from the throne. The reform, agreed to by all Commonwealth nations back in 2011, also lifts a ban on the monarch being married to a Roman Catholic. The support of all 16 Commonwealth realms where the Queen is head of state is required before it becomes law.

Australia will be the last of the 16 nations to pass the bill. All Australian states had to accept the change before Canberra could approve it. The Herald Sun revealed/quoted that Western Australia did not give its approval until last November.

Eureka Flag not Union Property

The unions, particularly the Construction Forestry Metal Engineering Union have hijacked the Eureka Flag. The Eureka Stockade had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with any union. They were miners and many other small business people protesting against ever rising licensing costs which affected monetary incomes of people who did not have the right to vote.

Make no mistake, having the Canadian-designed flag upheld by Daniel Andrews and James Merlino's membership and support of the tainted CFMEU really does make fair-minded Australian's blood boil. (Not quite sure where these words came from..)

New Baby Gorilla

Gorillas at Melbourne zoo have welcomed a new baby into the world. The tiny western lowland gorilla is the seventh to be born at the zoo, but the first in 15 years. The first-time parents are mum Kimya, originally from Sydney's Taronga Zoo, and silverback Otana, who was shipped over from England as part of an international breeding program. Gorillas are classed as critically endangered, with numbers in central Africa dwindling according to The Age.

Blainey Shift in Thinking

Eminent historian Geoffrey Blainey says he now sees 'parts of our history with fresh eyes' and says that at the beginning of his career, 60 years ago, it was 'daunting to write about indigenous history because there was no chronology.' Archaeological discoveries, and the development of technologies such as radiocarbon dating that have provided evidence of human existence on the continent stretching back almost 50,000 years, have dramatically changed that, he writes.

This article was prompted by the publishing of Professor Blainey's new work, *The Story of Australia's People: The Rise and Fall of Ancient Australia*. It is a revised and updated single-volume reworking of two of his best known books, *Triumph of the Nomads* from 1975 and *A Land Half Won* from 1980, that were at the heart of history wars.

That conflict - sparked at least in part by a 1984 speech Professor Blainey gave in which he warned of the dangers of unchecked Asian immigration, but which quickly expanded to criticism of his observations in the two earlier works on the nature of Aboriginal society - drew in many of the country's leading public intellectuals and even two prime ministers, Paul Keating and John Howard.

It became emblematic of how Australia viewed its existence before and after the arrival of Europeans, and gained momentum with the 1988 Bicentenary. Professor Blainey's claim that Aboriginal women practised infanticide as a form of population control, and that Aborigines faced greater threats of violence through intertribal warfare than they ever did from the European migrants enraged many on the Left.

In the preface to the new work, Professor Blainey acknowledges that it 'differs in many

ways from its parent volumes, which were based on the state of knowledge and intellectual atmosphere in the 1970s.'

Vale (obituaries)

Appleby, Claire (22.03.15) Archer, John McRae. Bamblett, Dr Alf Adrian John (1944 -2015) - Victorian Aboriginal leader. Baranowski, Fiona (07.03.15). Batram, Andrew (03.06.25 - 20.11.14) - Four times Australian sprinting champion, had a 65 year marriage and served as a local GP.

Betts, Geoffrey James (10.05.20 - 27.02.15) - Geelong businessman. Bourke, Dr John - World authority on equine medicine and the use and effect of drugs on horses. Brash, John - photographer of Heide Museum of Modern Art. Brodie, Michael Thomas (21.10.55 - 12.03.15). Bull, Joan Helen (15.05.26 - 28.03.15) Burrows, Eva (2015) - 'the people's general' in the Salvation Army.

Christian, Elizabeth (12.10.67 - 24.12.2012) - Respected emergency physician who died of breast cancer. Byrne, Geoffrey Michael (12.03.15) - County Court Judge. Collier, Vernon (27.03.15). Conron, Dr Geoffrey (02.03.15) - Compassionate erudite, physician and psychiatrist. Copley, Guy (02.03.15). Credlin, John (Jack) Edward (03.02.24 - 09.03.15). Crane, Rodney Phillip

Davidson, Dawn - Victorian Golf Club. Douglas, Graham Francis (10.03.15) - Aged 84 years old.

Doyle, John - past president of the St Vincent's Senior Medical Association. Evans, Arthur Brodie David (03.03.15) - Aged 97, a stalwart of the Canvas Trade who served in the RAAF signals in WWII. Flanagan, Pauline

Friday, Carol (24.03.15) - Nurse and just celebrated her 68th birthday. Killed in the Germanwings flight 4U9525 crash in southern France. Friday, Greig (24.03.15) - Graduate Melbourne engineer. Killed in the Germanwings flight 4U9525 crash in southern France.

Grey, Philip Frederick (10.03.15) - Aged 85. Guy, Josephine (07.08.1947 - 23.03.15). Ham, Francis (Dr) Frank James (16.03.15). John, Adams - Pianist and supported of the Australian Jazz Museum.

Jones, Dr Catherine Anne (Kate) (05.10.49 - 13.03.15) - respected woman who served in many roles and positions. Leggo, James Russell.

Landale, Keith Raleigh (15.10.52 - 02.03.15). Nugent, Peter (01.07.61 - 28.02.15) - Barrister. Parsonson, Ian (04.05.25 - 05.02.15) - Veterinary scientist. Peck, Andrew Hugh Jarvis (30.03.56 - 03.03.15). Rofe, Robert (10.01.1926 - 19.12.14) 29 year principal of Brighton Grammar School.

Seymour, Alan (06.06.27 - 23.03.15) - author, playwright.

Vukotic, Masa (17.03.15) - 17 year old killed while running along the Koonung Creek Linear Park at 7pm when she was stabbed to death at random.

Wagstaff, Stuart - Australian actor and television legend. popular in the 1960s through to 1980s.

Yuncken, John

Churcher, Betty - Died aged 84. An artist and a scholar as a former National Gallery of Australia director.

Skills, innovation and exports key to keeping Victorian small business competitive

By Mark Stone

Improving small business skills, strengthening innovation and leveraging new export opportunities must be the priority of governments to keep small business competitive and create jobs.

These are the key findings of VECCI's Small Business Taskforce report, "Small business. Big opportunities", released recently.

Small business is important business. Ninety eight per cent of Victoria's businesses are small. Though small in size, they are big on innovation, major employers and key drivers of economic activity, investment and trade.

In recognition of this vital contribution, VECCI's Small Business Taskforce has developed a series of policy recommendations to drive further small business growth and success through 2015 and beyond.

The report outlines priority areas for policy makers including reduced red tape and cuts to direct business costs, improved small business access to competitively priced finance and new initiatives to raise the skills of small business operators and their workforces.

Governments must also work harder to improve small business access to government purchasing and more effectively leverage public and private sector partnerships to strengthen small business innovation.

In light of the exciting growth opportunities presented by the Asian Century and recently signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), it is more important than ever that we get more small businesses into exporting.

The report's priority areas include:

Skills: Support the skills growth of small business workforces and management.

Costs: Lower small business direct and indirect costs.

Exports: Get more small businesses into overseas markets.

Innovation: Encourage more small business innovation and entrepreneurship.

Finance: Improve small business access to competitively priced finance.

Procurement: Provide small business with greater opportunity to sell goods and services to government.

We seek a commitment from governments at all levels to make small business a priority by taking up the recommendations contained in our agenda.

Mark Stone,
Chief Executive of VECCI.



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