

LETTER FROM MELBOURNE

Saving you time. A monthly newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which affect business opportunities in Australia and beyond.



p11-14: Special Melbourne Opera insert

Issue 161 Our New Year Edition

16 December 2010 to 13 January 2011

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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, you only have to miss reading The Age or The Herald Sun twice a week to need Letter from Melbourne. It's more about business opportunities (or lack of them) than politics. It's not Crikey.com. We keep words to a minimum.

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.

For context. It includes events and people and society, and the weather if that is important.

Increasingly, Letter from Melbourne is developing a federal and national coverage and also an increasing synopsis of national business issues.

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EDITORIAL

Our government warming up.

Even some supporters of the Baillieu government have commented that it is getting off to a slow start. The fact is that all ministers need a chief of staff and specialist and other advisers in order to properly interface with the civil service, as they apply their new policies and different administration emphases. These folk have to come from somewhere and the better they are, the longer it can take for them to leave their current employment wherever that might be and settle down into a government office in Melbourne.

Some stakeholders in various industries are becoming frustrated, finding it difficult to get the interaction they need with a relevant minister. Just give them another week or two to get settled in, by the end of February. Also, keep in mind that the new government is auditing some of the activities of its predecessor, and this can take a month or three. And doing some research and reflection on the past and the future. With assistance from products such as the new **Affairs of State Victorian Government Chart 2011**, and our new chart **Coffee with the Minister**, your dealings with government ministers will be even more satisfactory.

Mother nature.

Many of us have become entranced by the capabilities of modern technology. Coupled with the plethora of rules and regulations laid down by various/many authorities, we have felt guided and safe within a fantastic nanny state. Yet we collectively sat back with wonder, and worse, as Mother Nature flooded large parts of our state, and generally reeked havoc nationwide. A tough few months. Floods, cyclones, bushfires - even metropolitan Melbourne copped its fair share of fury. We should not forget Mother Nature as we can never be sure when she will put on a turn.

Continued on page 3...



ABOUT THE EDITOR
ALISTAIR URQUHART

Alistair Urquhart graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, in Law, History and Politics, was admitted as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria, and remains a (non-practicing) member of the Law Institute of Victoria. Before that, he graduated from high school in Bethesda, Maryland, and had many opportunities to become aware of the workings of Washington DC.

For 30 years, he listened every Sunday evening to the late Alistair Cooke and his Letter From America. His 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.

His public affairs firm works with many engineering and information technology firms, other professional association and industry groups, on a wide range of issues, in Victoria, Canberra and overseas. Urquhart visits Canberra regularly. He may hold the record for miles rowed on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin.

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STATE GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Adapting to the prize

The new premier has not made big changes quickly as did Kennett when he became premier in 1992. Kennett had plenty of warning of his coming success. He was elected in completely different financial circumstances. The top level of the civil service management remains, explains *The Age*. The thrust of the first 100 days will be in doing the groundwork to implement the promises of their election campaign. The transition to government had been made more hectic by the two floods to hit Victoria, in December and in January. The new Ministers continue to be amazed by the large rooms that their ministries have, with not a lot of advisers and other staff to fill them.

State Audit Considers Privatisation

The State's finances will be independently reviewed for the first time since 1993 to ensure greater transparency, competition and more accountability for public sector organisations. The independent review of the state's finances will be chaired by **Dr Michael Vertigan**, a former secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance in Victoria. The terms of reference for the review include reports into Victorian finances, debt management, service delivery, infrastructure and public sector governance.

Positive human rights

Emily Howie and **Phil Lynch** of The Human Rights Law Resource Centre writes in *The Age* that the new government is in danger of taking a regressive step in relation to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. Attorney-General **Robert Clark**, while stopping short of saying he will repeal it, described the charter as 'riddled with flaws', saying that it 'could not continue in its current form'. It will be reviewed in 2011.

Election review

The Age writes that Federal Labor MP **Alan Griffin** is one of the team reviewing the ALP's loss in Victoria's November State election. News of the Victorian review comes as the panel investigating Labor's points victory at the August federal election is drafting its findings, a panel of prominent Labor figures – former State Premier **Steve Bracks**, Senator **John Faulkner** and ex-New South Wales Premier **Bob Carr**.

Flood enquiry

Premier **Ted Baillieu** has announced an enquiry into the summer floods. The review will be headed by **Neil Comrie** who is a former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. The enquiries findings are due in December with an interim report to be released in June.

Election closer in seats than votes

The Age revealed that the Coalition harvested more than 1.4 million primary votes, 270,000 more than Labor, but in most of the close seats Labor got votes where it mattered. After preferences, 1.633 million Victorians, or 51.6 per cent, voted for the Coalition, while 1.533 million, or 48.4 per cent voted to re-elect the Brumby government.

A chance for a landslide victory

Melbourne public affairs commentator **Des Moore** feels that Labor's 'deeply flawed' Government was ripe for a ballot box trashing and that the Coalition missed an opportunity. He wrote in *The Age* that the Coalition failed to present itself as having the main aim of lifting the role of the private sector, and demanding the public sector be subjected to increased competitive forces. Baillieu has also been shown as risk adverse on climate change policies.

Brumby set to quit politics

On 21 December, *The Age* correctly predicted that **John Brumby** would break his promise to complete a full term and announce an end to his 17-year career in Victorian politics, forcing Labor into a potentially damaging by-election just months after losing power to the coalition. Brumby previously held the safe Labor seat of Broadmeadows by a margin of 21 per cent, but he suffered a swing of 10.9 per cent against him at the recent election, far greater than the State wide swing against the Brumby government of 6 per cent.

Broadmeadows by-election

John Brumby's retirement will cause a by-election in the safe Labor seat of Broadmeadows, which was held by 71 per cent of the vote, despite a 10 per cent swing against the incumbent. **Frank McGuire**, brother of TV personality Eddie, a Broadmeadows native though not a resident, won the pre-selection after some court proceedings by ALP party factions, and is likely to be a party fixture for some time, the *Financial Review* pointed out. McGuire was not a party member at the time of his pre-selection. His most obvious formal political connection was as a chief strategist to the Australian Democrats many moons ago. The by-election will be held on 19 February, costing about \$350,000. The unions within the Labor

party fought McGuire's selection as a candidate.

Life goes on

Parliament, both houses, sat on February 8 for three days. With its members adapting to their new roles. Different smirks from different folks.

Brumby pension

The day after announcing his retirement, the *Herald Sun* pointed out that after 17 years as a state MP, Minister and Premier, **John Brumby** will receive about \$165,500 a year in super payments, topped up by other payments from his seven-year stint as a Federal MP. But despite recanting on his pre-election 'intention' to continue in Parliament, the 57 year old said he had not misled voters. Brumby said that after a break he would look forward to doing some work with voluntary non-government organisations, but had not considered a new job. He also claimed he had no regrets about retiring from politics and made the decision to quit Parliament only days before announcing his intentions. He hopes to be remembered for building a strong state that weathered the global financial crisis.

Black book

A black notebook left in a desk draw in the Premier's office has reignited the row over Labor's tactics in last month's election, and looks set to call a formal enquiry into the possibility the Brumby government inappropriately accessed Coalition e-mails. During the campaign **John Brumby** denied running a dirt unit but defended the right of his government to scrutinize the opposition. Former Attorney-General **Rob Hulls** repeatedly attacked Ted Baillieu and his colleagues as 'sooks' for complaining about Labor's tactics.

Consultation sham

It has come to light that former Victorian Planning Minister **Justin Madden** attended a meeting where a plan to run a phoney public consultation on the Hotel

EDITORIAL (CONT)

We need more (outdoor) education and training on how to live with our environment. What is also needed, however, is an appreciation and reflection on how we have lived in the past.

Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, who died 30 years before Australia morphed into a nation, was unspoiled by a modern techno/regulatory/bureaucratic state. He embodied how people could keep their wits about them. How one could have compassion for his fellow man and prepared to help those in trouble, be it too much rain or a lack thereof. We, all, have to keep our wits about us.

Adam Lindsay Gordon's statue shares Gordon Park, just near Parliament House, with a statue of General Gordon of Khartoum. He arrived in Australia in 1853. He led an interesting and active life as a horse breaker, mounted policeman, steeple chaser, member of the South Australian Parliament and poet. Sadly he took his own life at 37 years of age. In 1934, his bust became the only Australian poet ever placed in Poets Corner, Westminster Abby. Monuments to his memory are dotted throughout the continent, including his grave at Brighton General Cemetery and the statue which made this edition's front cover.

At the base of the statue,

'Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in ones own'

Cover photo by professional photographer John Tozer, www.imaginsight.com.au, of Adam Lindsay Gordon's statue in Gordon Park, Melbourne.

Windsor redevelopment was raised. Madden was implicated in the plan in the report by Ombudsman **George Brouwer**, severely undermining his claims that he was not aware of the plan to use a fake consultation as a pre-text to reject the \$260 project.

Get out of the house

In what he describes as a 'familiarisation programme', the incoming President of the upper house (the Legislative Council), **Bruce Atkinson**, wants MPs to visit places such as the University of Melbourne, VicRoads, the Port of Melbourne, the desalination plant and perhaps jails. Atkinson said some MPs' contributions to parliamentary debate are based on information gleaned from media reports, rather than a 'first-hand' look at what Parliament is debating. In 2007, Atkinson, a Liberal representing the region of eastern metropolitan, was praised by senior Labor Government members when he told Parliament he had visited a gay sex beat following his concerns over rising HIV rates and sexually transmitted diseases.

Premier orders MPs to curb their drinking

The Herald Sun revealed that in a mid-December parliamentary party meeting, **Ted Baillieu** warned new Coalition MPs to moderate their drinking in Parliament and to treat the location with respect. He also urged them to keep fit and try to maintain a healthy work-life balance despite the pressure of government. The newly elected Premier banned alcohol from the traditional party to mark the rising of Parliament on December 21. Australian Drug Foundation CEO **John Rogerson** commented: 'The Premier is not saying don't drink, he is saying drink responsibly, and that's the sort of genuine leadership we need on this issue.' This emphasis on alcohol comes after a series of allegations during the past four years against MPs, from both sides of Parliament, being drunk in Parliament and even in the chamber, particularly during late sittings. Baillieu, who doesn't drink alcohol, tea or coffee, said that MPs must set an example for others in the community.

Labor boss unsure over loss

The campaign director of Labor's State election said he would 'go to his grave' wondering if the loss was inevitable. ALP state secretary **Nick Reece** put the loss down to the 'it's time factor' and a successful Coalition campaign that turned the election into a referendum on a decade of Labor rule. 'We knew that if the election became a referendum on the previous 11 years we were toast,' he told the Melbourne Press Club on the 15 December. He also agreed with the analysis of Opposition leader **Daniel Andrews** that the election turned on the failure of services in the suburbs.

Electoral wilderness for Victorian Labor

State political editor for *The Age*, **Paul Austin**, wrote that not only had the ALP suffered a bad defeat but that the worst might be yet to come, '...in Victoria, we don't really do one term governments.'

Baillieu's new media advisor

The Age announced that ABC journalist **Josephine Cafagna** had been appointed to run Premier Baillieu's media strategy. Baillieu praised the Walkley

award winner's experience and her 30 year record in journalism. The former host of the ABC's State Loan program, Cafagna interviewed Baillieu as recently as December 3, less than a week after the election. She has previously worked for the 7.30 Report and Foreign Correspondent programs. She began the job as head of strategic communications in January.

Managing the message spins out of control

Melissa Fyfe, State politics reporter for *The Sunday Age* writes: 'The new Premier made two main points about how his government would communicate: no spin and a decentralized media unit. This, in itself, is spin. For Baillieu, the lesson is to rebuild Victoria's trust in government by resisting the seduction of total control. Make no mistake: this temptation – to minimize bad stories, maximize good – is almost overwhelming for governments. But Baillieu must find that line between the political and public duties of taxpayer funded media advisers.'

Baillieu limits staff

Premier Baillieu has authorised the hiring of only 150 advisers – despite expanding the Cabinet with the appointment of 22 ministers. In contrast, the Brumby government had 200 advisers covering 20 Cabinet ministers. Baillieu said the changes were important because Victorians wanted less spin and more resources put into fixing problems.

Baillieu fights health reform

According to the *Herald Sun*, Premier Baillieu will fight **Julia Gillard** over her health reform plan if Victorians oppose it. Health Minister **David Davis** said the public had so far been ignored and the state government would open the issue for debate. Maps of the 46 primary care networks – down from former PM **Kevin Rudd**'s original 150 – would be released, and Davies said Victorians should examine them. Davis said that 'valuable Victorian health services need to be protected in any change, and my job is to stand up and make sure that happens.' The changes would allow providers of primary, GP and community health care to be administered locally and paid correctly from Canberra for services. All other states, except for Western Australia, have agreed to boundaries. Former Premier Brumby signed a deal for the Commonwealth to provide up to 60 per cent of financing for the State's health system, in return for 30 per cent of Victoria's GST revenue. Victoria's deadline was extended until the end of January due the state election.

Busy team

The Victorian Auditor General's Office, VAGO, completed nine reports tabled in parliament last October, for a total of 18 reports since July 2010. VAGO also tabled their Annual report during that busy period. One of its most significant interactions with parliament last year was through its involvement in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee review of the Audit Act 1994. The committee put forward 53 recommendations which address the Auditor-General's relationship with parliament, the conduct of audits of administrative functions within Victoria's Courts and avenues available to strengthen numerous operational audit powers and responsibilities.

Tales of bureaucracy

Premier **Ted Baillieu** swam into hot water by ignoring safety rules at a coastal beach and swimming in an area signposted as dangerous. He was promoting an anti-violence initiative at Jan Juc beach when he plunged into the ocean for photographers about 400m from the flagged area. The following day Baillieu encouraged Victorians to swim between the flags. Despite the controversy, surfing Victoria executive director **Max Wells** backed the Premier's swim as safe, because he was doing so with 'highly professional surfers'.

Team Baillieu

The *Australian Financial Review* revealed that **Michael Brennan**, a director at the accountancy firm PWC, would take on the role of chief of staff to Treasurer **Kim Wells**. Brennan worked as an adviser to Federal Assistant Treasurer **Rod Kemp** in the Howard government for two years before spending five years as a senior adviser to Finance Minister **Nick Minchin**. Former Liberal party state director **Peter Poggioli** will be chief of staff to the Minister for Business, Innovation, Tourism and Major Events **Louise Asher**. Poggioli was chief of staff to **David Kemp** – now president of the Victorian Liberal party – during his time as Federal Education Minister, before shifting to Prime Minister **John Howard**'s office to work with the Cabinet policy unit.

Peter Greenwood will be chief of staff to Transport Minister **Terry Moulder**. Baillieu has recruited the president of the Victorian branch of the Planning Institute of Australia, **David Vorchheimer**, as senior planning adviser. **Tony Nutt**, who was **John Howard**'s chief of staff, has quit his roll as head of the Liberal Party Victorian office and state campaign director to become director of the Premier's private office. The Party is advertising to fill Nutt's old position of State Director, applications by February 21.

Former Howard staffer **Perry Sterling** has been appointed as a key adviser. Baillieu intends to keep his election promise and cut the number of advisers from 200 under the Brumby Labor government to 150. Over 400 applications had arrived at Treasury Place for these 150 ministerial adviser positions by the end of January.

Labor pains

Victorian Opposition leader **Daniel Andrews** might have hailed from Labor's Left, but weeks into the job of leading a party derided for standing for nothing, he's been quick to insist that he is no socialist. Yet with the campaign post-mortem perhaps months away, the nation's youngest serving Labor Party leader at 38, and first member of the Socialist Left faction to head the Victorian branch in almost two decades, has a big sales job ahead. He claims the socialist label means less today than in the 1990s. 'We are not an ideologically tribal party, nor an ideologically tribal community the way that we were 20, 30, 40 years ago,' Andrews said in an interview with the *Australian Financial Review*.

'We proudly believe and will always defend the role the government has to play... not in a nanny state

way, not in an interfering way but in the empowering and properly supportive way,' he said. 'This notion of letting people stand on their own two feet, the individual above all else, government that doesn't interfere, and I would say in many respects that this is government that doesn't actually govern.' Andrews, who plays golf off a handicap, draws a distinction, too, between ideology and values. 'The values that guide me are not from the seminal writings of some Soviet,' he said.

Full disclosure

The lack of information in the latest Australian Electoral Commission funding documents has been criticised in *The Age* as an attack on democracy by leading governance expert **Ken Coghill** of Monash University. He claims that millions of dollars in political donations are veiled behind obscure fund raising bodies, trusts, and disclosure laws that mean only donations of more than \$11,200 must be revealed. By donating in small amounts, businesses are able to avoid public scrutiny and disguise how much they are actually contributing.

Broken promises

The Victorian opposition has pointed out that **Ted Baillieu** is breaking election promises just three months into his term as Premier. The \$45 million he promised Catholic and independent schools by the beginning of the first semester has failed to materialise and his electricity concessions for 800,000 Victorians would come six months later than expected.

Busy job

The Victorian Governor **David De Kretzer's** 5-year term finishes at the end of March. The Premier will be announcing the new governor soon.

BUSHFIRES

2 years on

For two years, now we have had regular monthly headlines on bushfires, particularly the Royal Commission and its findings, and the redevelopment of the affected areas. The new government focus will include 'bush fire mastery' and how best to use government and private resources at times of high bushfire risk, which in some areas is all the time. See the editorial.

Extreme fire danger

New Year's Eve was, according to the *Herald Sun*,

Victoria's 'first serious fire threat of the summer,' with strong winds, and the mercury rising above 40C by late afternoon. The highest temperature was recorded at Hopetoun Airport in the Mallee where it was a blistering 43.3C. Fire Services Commissioner **Craig Lapsley** said the fires over New Year's were mostly minor spot fires in the west and were quickly controlled.

Burn-offs on back burner

The Australian says that one of the wettest springs on record has left Victoria under prepared for the coming fire season, with less land preventatively burnt than the previous year, despite a near doubling of fuel reduction targets following the Black Saturday Royal Commission.

Former fire chief quits rally role

Former fire chief **Graham Fountain**, having quit the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in December following allegations of inappropriate behaviour involving a young lady at the MFB, has also resigned as the chairman of Rally Australia. The former chief executive of the Confederation of Australian motor sport also quit as a director of Rally Australia. His work at CAMS, included the overseeing of the Australian Grand Prix.

EDUCATION

Victoria the slowest in school building

According to *The Age*, Victoria's construction of halls, libraries and classrooms under the federal school building program is the slowest in the country, with just a quarter of projects completed. A report released by an independent task force set up to investigate complaints about the \$16 billion program, said 14 per cent of projects in Victorian government schools were yet to start construction and only 59 per cent of funding allocated to it under the scheme, designed to stimulate the economy during the global financial crisis, had been spent. The report states that delays in Victoria had generated 'frustration' at schools but had allowed the government to re-tender projects in order to achieve lower cost. It says program fees and overall costs in Victoria appeared reasonable, but the taskforce would continue to monitor results as more projects were completed.

Monash cut staff as enrolment falls

According to *The Australian*, almost 400 staff at Monash will take redundancy as Australia's biggest

university seeks to offset an expected decline in overseas student income. Vice Chancellor **Ed Byrne** said 356 full-time equivalent staff had accepted voluntary redundancy packages. Monash has just fewer than 8000 staff. More than 800 staff had applied for redundancy after Professor Byrne's announcement that Monash had to find \$45 million in savings.

Body of work

The *Herald Sun* covered a story about the decline in the use of human cadavers in medical education. University of Sydney's Professor of surgical anatomy, **George Ramsey Stewart**, claims that there had been a significant drop off in the teaching of anatomy by dissection over the decades. 'This has led to a wide variation in the amount of anatomy taught.' His paper was published in the Medical Journal of Australia.

Familiar names top the VCE table

Students at private and selective government schools dramatically outperformed those at public schools in this year's VCE. VCE subjects are marked out of 50, with a study score of 30 the average, and more than 40 considered an exceptional result. Below are the state's top schools by percentage of VCE scores of 40 and over.

Private: Beth Rivkah Ladies College, St Kilda East 35, Bialik College, Hawthorn East 35, Mount Scopus Memorial College, Burwood 35, Leibler Yavneh College, Elsternwick, 33, Huntingtower School, Mount Waverley 30, Loreto Mandeville Hall, 29, Melbourne Grammar School, 29, St Kevin's Collage, 29.

Government: Mac.Robertson Girls High School, 44, John Monash Science School, Clayton (very small sample size) 40, Melbourne High School, 38

Regional/Rural: Ballarat Clarendon College, 27, The Peninsula High School, Mount Eliza, 21, The Geelong College, 20.

Rural scores

Students in rural and regional Victoria are achieving lower scores than students in Melbourne. Analysis by the *Herald Sun* showed that 19 regional schools made the list of the state's 50 worst performing schools, compared with only 3 in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

Call to overhaul VCE

In the *Herald Sun*, a top education expert has branded the VCE a 'battleground' and called for its overhaul

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as 50,000 anxious students got their results on December 13. **Professor Richard Teese** said that students were put under too much stress and the educational outcome was questionable.

Refund adverts

The Australian government is running a multi-platform/multi media advertising campaign for the education tax refund, which provides up to 50 per cent back on a range of children’s education expenses. According to the ads refunds may be as much as \$397 for every child at primary school, and up to \$794 for every child at secondary school.

State fumbles federal funds

In *The Age*, it was revealed that Victorian government schools have been hit with protracted delays under the federal building project scheme, with only 7 per cent of science laboratories and language learning centres completed at high schools. Nationally, 61 per cent of the centres have been completed, according to figures from the Federal education Department, indicating Victoria is seriously lagging behind the other states.

Careful Catholics

Catholic clergy have been banned from giving children piggyback rides under child protection policies introduced by an outer Melbourne parish. The new policies, aimed at preventing abuse, include bans on inappropriate embracing, or contacting children through Facebook or SMS. Conduct deemed acceptable includes ‘high fives’, pats on the shoulder or back, holding hands with small children, handshakes, and verbal praise.

High school skills

High schools in Victoria will be encouraged to specialise in areas where there is a skills shortage, including information technology, maths and science, under any Coalition push to expand choice for students. According to *The Age*, the State Government is also pushing for business involvement in specialist schools, along the lines of Brisbane’s aviation high, run in partnership with Boeing Australia, to create pathways for students into the aerospace industries. Education Minister **Martin Dixon** said he would like to see more bilingual schools, as part of the coalition’s election pledge to make a second

language compulsory in every Victorian primary school. While Victoria already has some specialist schools, including the John Monash Science School and the Victorian College of the Arts, Dixon said this was just scratching the surface.

ENVIRONMENT

CONSERVATION

High tide

In the first detailed attempt to study the impact of sea level rises on low-lying coastal areas, the Federal government has released high resolution maps showing which areas would be inundated across parts of the Victorian coast, in an effort to help local government planning. A number of Melbourne bay side suburbs are shown to be under threat even by limited sea level rises, including Altona and Altona Meadows, St Kilda, Elwood, Aspendale and Chelsea. Popular summer holiday towns such as Point Lonsdale and Barwon Heads will suffer regular inundation, even under limited rises!

Tales of bureaucracy

The Age covered the Yarra Council’s ruling that **Judy and Bryce Inglis’** Dandenong Ranges rabbit shelter must close, permitting them to keep no more than two pet rabbits on their property. The couple, who have 16 rabbits in their care, six of which are pets, fear they will be forced to send the animals to other shelters, where they are likely to be destroyed. The Inglis’s say their neighbours have fed the council misinformation.

Myxomatosis

At the Melbourne rabbit clinic in leafy, burrow-friendly Ferntree Gully, **Dr Narelle Walter** says she is taking 15 to 20 calls a day from worried pet owners who are concerned about the myxomatosis epidemic that seems to be hitting Melbourne. In Victoria rabbits are the third favourite pets after cats and dogs. Increasingly, Dr Walter says, they are kept by adults rather than children, hopping about while the owners are at work. Some suspect that people dote on their

bunnies more than they used to, which means more people are reporting their deaths or taking them to the vet when they are ill than would have bothered 10 years ago, when the disease flourished. Dr Walter advises owners to keep their bunnies indoors, if possible, especially at dawn and sunset. Outside, a mosquito net over the rabbit hutch and run can make a difference. **Dr Tristan Rich**, at Lort Smith Animal Hospital, suggests lighting a citronella candle nearby.

Vaccines for myxomatosis exist in Britain and elsewhere, but are banned in Australia. The concern is that a live vaccine could accidentally be released into the wild population, thus neutralising the disease as a pest control weapon. **Dr Peter Coe** at the CSIRO estimates that 90 per cent of adult rabbits are infected with myxomatosis but show no symptoms. ‘It’s nothing like 1950, when nearly 100 per cent of affected rabbits died. But it probably still kills 40-50 per cent of those infected,’ he says.

Population growth threatens parks

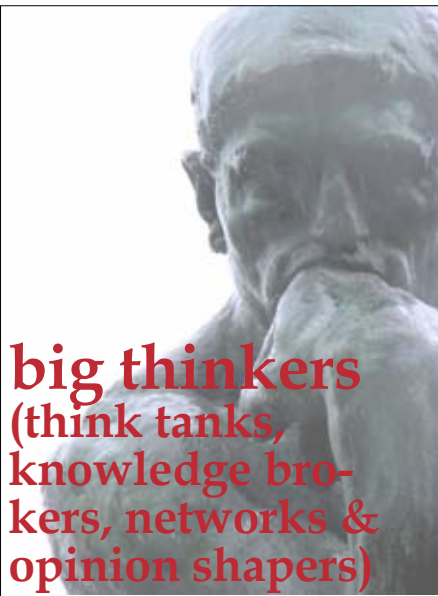
The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council report – virtually buried in the lead up to last month’s State election – argues for an increase of open space, given the millions of extra people expected in the coming years. The report said that Metropolitan municipalities such as Borrandara, Glen Eira, Stonington and Moreland had low levels of public open space and that other recreational areas would get harder to find over the next 16 years. VEAC is a public body set up by the former Labor government to advise on the protection and management of the environment and natural resources on public land.

VicForests focus

Set up by Labor six years ago, VicForests lost more than \$16 million over the 09-10 financial year and has required a taxpayer funded bailout, in *The Age*. Agriculture Minister **Peter Walsh**, and also the National Party member for Swan Hill, said the government was ‘committed to providing long-term security to the timber industry within a framework of world standard forest management practices’. He said the Coalition would carry out its pre-election promise to reduce from three to one the number of government departments to which VicForests reports. The former Labor government had promised to abolish the company and replace it with a new entity.

Wood for the trees

According to *The Age*, Victoria’s new Forestry/Agriculture Minister **Peter Walsh** has challenged scientific warnings that the timber industry is putting endangered species at risk of extinction, arguing that only a fraction of the state’s forest habitat is logged. Walsh, whose portfolio includes responsibility for state forests, denied claims that the forest industry was in crisis, but said it was ailing after years of gradual cuts to the allocation from state forests which has stymied investment. The Coalition has promised to restore industry confidence by guaranteeing access to current levels of state forest timber for up to 20 years. The commitment comes amid warnings from scientists, led by **David Lindenmayer**, an Australian National University ecologist who has worked in Victorian forests since the 1980s, that the



big thinkers (think tanks, knowledge brokers, networks & opinion shapers)

The 2009 edition of Affairs of State's latest publication Big Thinkers (thing tanks, knowledge brokers, networks & opinion shapers) has just been launched by historian Geoffrey Blainey.

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combination of bushfires and aggressive logging in the Central Highlands is putting threatened species such as Leadbeater's possum, the state's faunal emblem, at risk.

On a wing and a prayer

A report titled: 'The State of Australia's Birds 2010, Islands and Birds' was released as a supplementary to the December issue of Wingspan, Vol. 20, no. 4, the national magazine of birds. It contains 52 pages of fascinating stories and photos of birds in and around the Australian continent. Join Birds Australia, www.birdsaustralia.com.au

ENERGY

Electricity for water

Dr Peter Fisher works on climate change adaptation and water management. He wrote an opinion piece for *The Age* arguing for the merging of water utilities and power companies. He writes: 'Only two government agencies in this country – ACTEW in the ACT and the Power & Water Corporation of the Northern Territory – combine water and electricity, thus allowing an in-house exchange of ideas. A recent report by Britain's environment agency has suggested that water companies merge with energy producers to create more efficient partnerships for tackling emissions. The local challenge is the mismatch between an electricity supply sector, which is deregulated and operates nationally often with offshore ownership, and the water industry that remains in government hands with a local focus. Still, private public partnerships have proven that this is not necessarily a barrier.'

Power companies on notice

The *Herald Sun* reported that energy companies are being investigated over a surge in customer disconnections as electricity and gas costs sky rocket. Essential Services Commission Chairman Dr. Ron Ben-David has warned that switching off supply because of unpaid bills should be a last resort, and only after serious attempts to help consumers reduce debt. Power companies pulled the plug on 13,486 households last financial year, up 40 per cent. Gas disconnections increased 54 per cent to 15,473.

Power to the people

Minister Michael O'Brien told the *Herald Sun* that distribution businesses had no justification for challenging any recent price decisions in their attempt to grab more money from customers to upgrade and expand the electricity network. In a letter to the Australian Competition Tribunal, the Government has confirmed it will intervene if the companies get the go-ahead to appeal the ruling on their charges over the next five years.

Smart meters to get IQ test

According to the *Herald Sun*, the State Government may suspend the installation of electricity smart meters while it reviews this embattled project. Energy Minister Michael O'Brien will seek details on the cost and legal implications of delaying the roll-out ahead of an audit of the \$2 billion system. A full

review of the potential improvements, and whether it is worth dumping the scheme for an alternative, will be commissioned amid concerns that the consumer benefits have been overstated.

Clean-coal blackout

The *Financial Review* claims the approval process for a \$750 million coal-fuelled power station in Victoria is temporarily on ice while the State's environmental regulator awaits clarification on key elements of the plant's design. Victoria's EPA has asked the company behind the proposed 600 MW plant, HRL, to provide additional information before it will continue its assessment for a permit. The plant is being pitched as a clean-coal project because it dries and 'gasifies' the coal before it is burned.

WATER

Toxic campaign

According to *The Age*, toxic waste producers are fighting to ensure that their discharges into Victoria's sewers are not exposed to greater public scrutiny. Industrial customers and water business are waging a campaign to counter a call fro Victoria's Department of Sustainability for greater transparency in the trade waste sector.

Tasmania to the Murray

The Age senior columnist Kenneth Davidson writes: 'The Murray Darling plan cannot work, so it's time to look at alternatives'. Davidson claims that recent developments in technology now mean it is more expensive to operate the desalination plant than pipe twice the guaranteed volume of water from Tasmania. He also suggests that the new piping technology can be fully financed by private investment, and it can generate additional income for Tasmania by selling water that now runs into Bass Strait.

Road map slows to a trickle

Victoria's new Coalition government has conceded it will struggle to deliver a 'roadmap' for the state's water and sustainability future within 100 days of winning office, in what looms as its first broken promise. The roadmap will guide reforms to planning, regulation, pricing and management of water and urban sustainability issues, and it was promised under the coalition's 'living in Melbourne, living Victoria' policy. Under the 100 day promise, the roadmap should be delivered no later than the first week of March by a 'task force and external advisory panel' but new water minister Peter Walsh conceded there was significant doubt the deadline would be met: 'the 100 days was very ambitious and will be challenging - we will have [the task force and panel] set up, but to have a report in 100 days is going to be extremely challenging.' He also said the coalition's hopes of minimising the costs of the desalination plant would initially focus on a 'statement of obligations' created by former minister Tim Holding, which suggests the plant should run at full capacity so long as the State's dam levels are below 65% full. Later, *The Age* reported that despite Walsh's statement, the Coalition re-affirmed its commitment to meet the 100-day deadline. 'The government will be delivering on its

commitment.'

Push ahead with basin plan

The Age reported that calls for Murray Darling Basin Plan to be postponed have been rejected by the man left to run the controversial process. Murray Darling Basin Authority chief executive **Robert Freeman** expressed disappointment at his chairman **Mike Taylor's** departure and declared his intention to see the process through. Taylor quit the post after the Government rejected his authority's advice that it was necessary to prioritise the environment over social and economic needs when allocating water volumes. He has now been replaced by former New South Wales Labor MP **Craig Knowles**. Water Minister **Peter Walsh** said that he looked forward to working with him. The Australian Conservation Foundation said in *The Age* that Knowles had previously shown he could rise above partisan politics. Knowles rejected his predecessor's views and believes the authority's role is to balance social, economic and environmental factors equally.

Summer of '83

The lowest levels of water usage in nearly 30 years helped push Melbourne's water storages above 50 per cent last year, the State government says. Yarra Valley Water managing director **Tony Kelly** said households, business and industry used 346 billion litres of water in 2010 – the lowest consumption since 1983. 'Melbournians are to be congratulated for their water saving efforts,' he said in *The Age*.

Lakeside fun

Floods in September have transformed Lake Eildon from a dusty paddock into a haven for water skiers, manager of Eildon Caravan Park **Don Hewitt**, said in the *Herald Sun*. According to locals, the last time Lake Eildon was full was 1996.

GAMING

Bringing down the house

Victoria will be hit with tough new federal taxes to rein in problem gambling if the Coalition Government refuses to sign up to new technology forcing poker machine players to set binding limits on their losses. Victoria's new Gambling Minister, **Michael O'Brien**, told *The Sunday Age* the pre-commitment system should be voluntary. But in an interview with *The Sunday Age*, Prime Minister **Julia Gillard** said she was determined to introduce a mandatory system, honouring a deal with Tasmanian Independent **Andrew Wilkie** signed in September.

Fingerprint coding control

Playing the pokies in the future could look very different, with the Federal Government considering mandatory digital fingerprint recognition technology for gamblers. The government has promised to introduce a 'full pre-commitment scheme' forcing poker machine players to set binding limits on their losses. *The Sunday Age* was given an inside look at one tool under consideration: a USB memory stick that matches players' fingerprints to preset spending

limits. The Melbourne-based manufacturer said the digital technology would help tackle problem gambling by reducing spur of the moment losses.

Pushbuttons blow \$2.7 billion

Poker machine gamblers are on track to squander a near record \$2.7 billion this year. According to the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation, punters lost almost \$1 billion in the first four months of 2010 – more than \$7.5 million a day. The *Herald Sun* included a graphic illustrating the losses in 25 districts around Victoria.

HEALTH

Ambos hurt as backup fails

The *Herald Sun* reported that two paramedics were injured trying to move a 200 kg patient because a specialist vehicle was unavailable. When the stretcher collapsed under the morbidly obese woman, one paramedic suffered a rotary calf injury and the other a back injury. The ambulance union says the specialist vehicles were being used for non-obese patients and were unavailable to respond to paramedics who needed them. Ambulance Employees Australia state secretary **Steve McGie** said that of the five specialist vehicles in Victoria, three were in rural areas and were staffed by Ambulance Victoria employees.

New Ministers

Premier **Ted Baillieu** has appointed **David Davis** as Minister for Health and Ageing, **Mary Wooldridge** as Minister for Mental Health, and **Nick Wakeling** as Parliamentary Secretary for Health. Davis said the key priority was the development of a 12-year plan for the Victorian health system: the Health Services Plan 2022, which includes a new metropolitan health plan to be delivered within 150 days of taking office; a rural and regional health plan; and a 12-year capitol works plan. Minister Wooldridge is married to **Andrew Barling**, a surgeon and her older brother is **Michael Wooldridge**, a former Federal Minister for Health. Wooldridge has chaired the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, been a director of the Breast Cancer Australia Network and is a current director at the Otis Foundation, providing rural retreats for women with breast cancer. There are currently three nurses in Parliament and the Health Minister is a former chiropractor.

Internet Health

The Better Health Channel was named the top health and medical information website in Australia for the second consecutive year – <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthvictoria/apr10/anniv.htm>

The fear of fat

In a submission to the State Government seen by *The Sunday Age*, the AMA described obesity as 'Victoria's most pressing public health issue', and called for a \$25 million advertising blitz to help tackle the crisis. They want a campaign modeled on recent New York City Health Department ads, which showed a man drinking a beaker full of body fat, and shoveling down 16 sachets of sugar. Health Minister **David**

Davies said he would consider funding the AMA's proposal as part of its next budget and recognized 'the importance of tackling obesity as a significant public health issue'.

Dangerous times

New figures released in *The Sunday Age* show a spike in workplace deaths in January over the past decade. It included a map of regional Victoria and Melbourne pinpointing the location of fatalities with deaths shared roughly equally between the two.

Christmas hospital blues

In *The Age*, **Dr Pauline Chapman**, an emergency physician who has worked in several Victorian hospitals, said the 'granny dumping seasons' were well known to doctors, who often dealt with families spinning stories about their relatives' health and simply showing up to say they couldn't cope. Dr Chapman said she had also seen lonely elderly people come in on Christmas Day with minor complaints so they could be with people and share a Christmas lunch. **Dr Simon Jenkins**, an emergency physician at the Austin Hospital, said hospitals also tended to be magnets for distressed people suffering from mental illness or other social problems at Christmas.

Safety helmet?

An article in *The Age* said that three Australian children had died after being strangled by their helmets between 2003 and 2009. All three deaths occurred while the children were engaged in activities other than bike or skateboard riding. The claim was attributed to four Australian pathologists who had conducted a review of forensic science records.

Jeff's Shed

The Australian Men's Shed Association, Beyond Blue and the Movember Foundation have joined forces to launch a new community networking site, The Shed Online, where blokes can connect. On the site, Beyond Blue chairman **Jeff Kennett** shows off his shed, and Australia's first man, **Tim Mathieson**, displays his in the salubrious grounds of Kirribilli house. Mathieson says he seeks refuge in his shed to 'escape' from the house.

Call an ambulance

The state's ambulance crisis is set to worsen with Ambulance Victoria slashing its graduate program, despite a desperate shortage of paramedics. The 10 per cent graduate recruitment cut, which will mean 25 fewer paramedics in service, is caused by a lack of funding. Ambulance Victoria's acting manager of regional services, **Gary Cook**, said in the *Herald Sun* that the organization didn't have the money to take on more graduates. Victoria's new health minister **David Davis** was given a list of urgent priorities needed to fix the State's ambulance service by the ambulance union in early January.

DIY dangers

Homeowners planning DIY projects this summer are reminded to stick to tasks within their skill level and wear appropriate protective gear. Consumer Affairs Minister **Michael O'Brien** says statistics showing DIY tasks killed 15 people each year, and seriously

injured more than 2000, were alarming.

Dog day afternoon

Alfred Hospital's psychology department is bringing in a Labrador named Boags once a week as 'pet therapy' for patients. Occupational therapist **Caitlin Orr** said there was evidence pet therapy had positive effects on mental health and general well-being.

Pink Lady

The breast cancer lobby's 'pink steam roller' is diverting public awareness and funding from ovarian cancer and contributing to the disease's lower survival rates, a leading specialist has claimed in *The Age*. **Dr Orla McNally**, director of gynecological oncology at the Royal Women's Hospital, said recent figures in the medical journal *The Lancet* showed Victorian women with ovarian cancer were less likely to survive than those in other Australian states and countries. 'We have a massive breast cancer charity lobby in this country, which acts as a bit of a 'pink steam roller' to the other cancer sites, and that is something that impacts on our ability to increase awareness about ovarian cancer and to get more women the treatment they need for this disease,' McNally told *The Sunday Age*.

Charlton hospital flooded

There were fears that the flooded town of Charlton in Victoria's northwest would lose its local hospital. Uncertainty about the future of the hospital had taken a toll on the staff, 90 per cent of whom had flood damage in their own homes. The chief executive of the East Wimmera Health Service, **Kathy Huett**, told *The Age*: 'It has been really, really, heart-wrenching. A number of the staff are distressed, so we're providing counseling services.' The Department of Health deployed a mobile clinic to the town in the absence of a functional GP clinic and hospital. A written statement from Victorian Health Minister **David Davis** said Charlton Hospital would be either re-opened or re-built.

Nurse deadline

Thousands of Victorian nurses and midwives are at risk of being unable to work at the start of February because they have not registered with the new national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals. A spokeswoman for the regulation agency, **Nicole Newton**, said about 5,000 of the States 84,400 nurses had not had their applications processed on time, despite being told last year the deadline was December 31. She said a grace period of one month meant any nurse or midwife not registered by the end of January would not be able to practice, and would have to start the registration process again rather than transferring from the Victorian register to the national one. Acting Secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation **Paul Gilbert** said that, although nurses were responsible for their own registration, his office had received more than 400 calls from members reporting difficulties registering with the new Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency in recent weeks.

E-Health program faces axe

Health Minister **David Davis** admitted in *The Age* he

is facing 'a genuine dilemma' with what he called the 'myki of the health system.' The HealthSMART program – five years late and \$35 million over budget – is supposed to link computer systems in hospitals and introduce processes such as electronic prescribing. But clinical applications are only partially running in just four hospitals, and doctors say patient safety is compromised by inadequate procedures that cause them to duplicate paperwork, chase test results and compete for access to computer terminals. In a state budget submission the Australian Medical Association called for a further \$328 million to be invested on health technology over the next four years, with a focus on providing ready access to patient records, test results and medication details.

AMA Victoria president **Harry Hemley** said health technology in Victoria bordered on embarrassing, and 'patients would be appalled at the lack of IT, computers and activity between different areas of the health system'. Davis said the HealthSMART program, launched by the former labour government in 2003, had been 'botched in its introduction' and was tens of millions of dollars over budget without achieving its stated aims. Dr Hemley said many promises had been made about HealthSMART's ability to revolutionise technology in hospitals, but the project had been bitterly disappointing despite the hundreds of millions of dollars invested.

West Gippsland Healthcare group chief executive **Ormond Pearson** said: "We've really replaced business systems, and HealthSMART hasn't proven to be the most efficient system and has caused us some grief." Victorian Healthcare Association chief executive **Trevor Carr** called for an honest dialogue about the program and 'transparency around the real cost of implementation'.

Sunk cost

The State Government should stick with Victoria's bungled \$360 million health technology program because it was finally starting to deliver some benefits, a health expert has argued in *The Age*. **Mukesh Haikerwal**, the Federal government's clinical adviser on health, said the HealthSMART program had 'a long and tortuous history,' but savings would not be made by ditching it, only to start again from scratch to build an electronic system to share patient information in hospitals. HealthSMART, originally due to be completed in 2007, replaced existing financial management systems in hospitals. It was also supposed to introduce clinical systems for electronic prescribing, ordering tests and reporting results in Victorian hospitals, but those programs are now only partially running in just four hospitals.

Dr Haikerwal said part of the problem with HealthSMART was that it was not designed in conjunction with clinicians, who say patient safety is compromised by existing procedures that lead them to duplicate paperwork and chase test results. He said Geelong Hospital had successfully created its own system to share patient histories, test results and medication details across its network and with GPs in the community. He said one of the few clinical benefits of HealthSMART is a medication

management system now in place at Eastern Health, which includes the Box Hill and Maroondah hospitals.

Another Rule

Personal video cameras are being banned in birthing suites by Victorian hospitals worried about legal repercussions, staff privacy and unnecessary distractions.

Mental health delay

A planned overhaul of Victoria's mental health laws may be delayed up to a year and key reforms – including a movement to involve families and carers in making treatment decisions – are being reconsidered by Mental Health Minister **Mary Wooldridge**. Wooldridge said Victoria's mental health laws needed to be overhauled, but the former Labor government had not allowed sufficient time for feedback and a number of areas of contention had emerged from submissions on its draft bill received in December. She said she would extend the date for submissions until the end of February.

INVESTMENT

BUSINESS

The Department of Business and Innovation's Invest Victoria magazine headlines IBM to build global R&D lab at the University of Melbourne, Foreign investors choose Melbourne for R&D, and ABS survey Melbourne – US partnership to bring stem cell therapy to market.

Unemployment rises in State's regions

Victoria's regions are suffering from a rise in unemployment, despite the overall improvement in the state's labour market and economy. The towns and regional centres outside Melbourne recorded unemployment of 6 per cent at the end of September, up from 5.5 per cent a year earlier, according to figures released by the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. In Melbourne, where three quarters of Victoria's labour force lives, unemployment fell for the same period from 5.5 per cent to 5.2 per cent. In Southbank and Docklands, unemployment was just 1.5 per cent.

Sotheby's auctioned off

Sotheby's Australia has changed hands after the chairman and principal shareholder **Tim Goodman** sold out of the business just over a year after founding it. His vice-chairman and national head of art, **Geoffrey Smith**, succeeds him. Ports and rail operator Asciano has removed controversial chief executive **Mark Rowsthorn** after his holding the position for four years. He has been replaced by former DHL Express boss, **John Mullen**.

Next

Since winning the Miss Universe competition in 2004, **Jennifer Hawkins** has become the face of retail giant Myer, amongst other brands, and has her

own swimwear range called Cozi. But, according to the *Herald Sun*, a rift has developed between her and Myer management, resulting in her exclusion from the company's 'G'day Australia' show in Los Angeles.

Cutting through tender red tape

John MacPherson wrote in *The Age* that navigating your way through the tender process of government can be a real challenge. He recommends that, to get your name and business recognized, organise a meeting with the relevant internal contacts in which you can provide information about your goods and services, and let the department know how you can be of benefit to them. The Local Industry Capability Network and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry could provide information about upcoming events where suppliers can meet government buyers.

Anti-competition

According to *The Age*, national laws to curb anti-competitive behaviour by banks are likely to be expanded to crack down on grocery and petrol retailers – including making the private exchange of any pricing information a crime. Treasury and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission have urged Treasurer **Wayne Swan** to press ahead with an overhaul of consumer protection laws, building on measures to stamp out 'price signalling' by banks as announced in December.

Open on Sundays

New laws have been introduced to allow businesses to trade on Easter Sunday. Where as previously, only those with less than 20 employees could operate on the public holiday, now any business can open. Labor made Sunday trading legal in 1987, but the Easter holiday had still forced shops to close.

Online shopping

Online shoppers are increasingly looking overseas for bargains. Spurred on by a strong currency, this trend is a serious challenge for Australian business, wrote Isabelle Oderberg in the *Herald Sun*.

Licence fee relief

Liquor licence renewal bills have been halved for 10,500 small businesses and community clubs. The discounts, which will save some clubs more than \$800 a year, are the first step in a liquor licensing revamp which will include automatic suspension of licences at problem venues and discounts for pubs and clubs with good records. Consumer Affairs Minister **Michael O'Brien** told the *Herald Sun* local service and sports clubs were a low risk when it came to alcohol linked violence and deserved to be supported. 'These sorts of clubs are the glue that holds the community together, and the Government should the making it easier to get together and enjoy sport or do good work for the community,' he said.

ICT

Brunswick slow in rollout test

The Age reported that fewer than half of the properties in the Brunswick national broadband network test site

have signed up for the scheme more than a month after consent forms were due back. The deadline for the return of the forms was indefinitely extended at the end of November after a poor response rate from the inner-city suburb, but NBN Co said the extension would not interrupt construction. The high proportion of renters in Brunswick is being blamed for the slow take-up, as landlords need to give their permission for the cables to be run into the properties.

NBN Co wants to install fibre optic cable into homes and businesses in Brunswick to test their network design and construction methods, ahead of the nationwide rollout planned for later this year. The cable does not provide properties with broadband, but ensures they will be 'broadband ready' when the network goes live.

iPhone owners' sleep in

On the 1st and 2nd of January, unsuspecting iPhone owners were left to slumber as their alarms failed. This most recent problem was a glitch only for alarms set specifically for January 1 and 2, and did not affect settings for recurring alarms. As a result, the editor of *Letter from Melbourne* was late for an early-morning appointment (with bagpipes) at a golf club to wake up some of the next generation.

E-purchasing panel

The e-Services panel, a three year old scheme run by the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance, issued a request for tender to industry in January before the expiry of its existing arrangements in June. However, the government is yet to give the green light for a central purchasing mechanism to continue. This is leading to industry fears that the cost of tendering for government business could skyrocket if technology services procurement is devolved back to individual agencies. 'The release of the RFT is currently on hold whilst the new State government is briefed on the project,' a Department of Treasury and Finance notice said. The e-Services panel has proved popular with agencies and industry because it greatly reduced the cost and administrative burden associated with tenders for smaller projects.

iCan't

Staff at Victorian hospitals will continue to queue for computers with internet access for some time, after the Coalition government decided to ditch the trial of 500 Apple iPads. A Health minister spokesman said in *The Age* 'core wire-less infrastructure' that the tablet computers required was lacking from the plan. President of the Australian Medical Association **Dr. Harry Hemley**, warned the government that dumping the trial would 'set hospital information technology improvements back significantly.'

AGRICULTURE

Floods hit hard in north

A Department of Primary Industries audit of the damage from Victoria's summer floods reveal that nearly 30,000 sheep were killed or injured as a direct result of the torrential rain. More details of the devastation were published in *The Age*, with over a

quarter of a million chickens killed, 4,100 km of farm fencing lost, along with many hundreds of farm-related structures. At the time of the audit, 133,150 hectares of grazing pastures and 76,909 hectares of crops were unusable, on top of 123,200 tonnes of hay and 5245 tonnes of stored grain that were ruined.

Murray plan 'bias'

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has warned 'inequalities' will occur between farmers and rural towns on either side of the same river because Victoria will implement plans to save the river system later than other basin states. A letter sent to Federal Water Minister **Tony Burke** on September 14 reveals that the authority has been negotiating with state governments, particularly Victoria, to try to line up a new plan 'to ensure equity between states'.

Irrigators fear man-made flood

In a bid to regenerate the river's red-gum forests, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority wants to unleash seven-day environmental flows averaging 60,000 megalitres a day. The 'environmental watering' proposal is a part of the Authority's eventual plan to rescue the long-suffering Murray Darling River system. But the National Irrigators Council says the Authority has failed to properly consider the risks of flushing huge volumes of water down the Goulburn – especially in relation to vulnerable farms, homes and businesses. In a formal submission, the NIC is highly critical of science and data used by the Authority.

Different viewpoints

The flood crisis has plunged the Murray Darling rescue plan into a fresh row over whether the government should delay its controversial reforms, given the enormous volume of water flowing into the system from the Queensland deluge. National Farmers' Federation president **Jock Laurie** told *The Australian* that six months of strong flows into the Murray Darling 'biased the government time to sit back and make sure they get this right.' The Australian Conservation Foundation called on the Gillard Government to honour its commitment to timetables.

Locusts lasted longer

The Age reported in December that Victorian farmers' hopes of the locust plague easing following recent cool weather had been dashed with the discovery of second generation locust hatchlings in Katunga, north of Shepparton.

High-country coalition

In *The Age*, environmentalists who drove the cattle drovers out of the high-country were concerned that the Coalition's victory would mean a return to alpine grazing and destroy the progress seen there so far. Grazing was banned two years after the 2003 bushfires, with a parliamentary task force recommending at least a 10 year hiatus to allow native flora to regenerate. There is no timetable in place, but the Environment and Climate Change Minister, **Ryan Smith**, says the government remains committed to bringing cattle back to the Alpine National Park.

Just one week after this story was run, cattle began to trickle back into the park under the banner of a '6 year

continued p15...



Lee Abrahmsen – Winner of the Herald Sun Aria 2010 Award

Lee Abrahmsen has been one of Melbourne Opera's own for a number of years, performing principal roles which include Michaela in *Carmen*, Mimi in *La Boheme*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Adele in *Die Fledermaus*, Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* and the Nursing Sister in *Suor Angelica*, and most recently, Cio Cio San in *Madame Butterfly* which has just concluded a most successful season. Add to this the excitement of a month ago, when Lee was announced 2010 winner of the 86th Herald Sun Aria, one of the most prestigious awards in opera.

Monash University Partnership

Earlier this year it was announced that Monash is to become Melbourne Opera's University Performing Arts Partner.

The company will perform regularly at Monash campuses thus greatly enhancing the cultural life not only of the University, but also of local communities. This is an important part of Monash's mission.

Additionally, in conjunction with the School of Music at Monash University, Melbourne Opera will offer performance experience to both undergraduate and post-graduate students. The staging of *The Tell-Tale Heart* in 2011 will be the first of these collaborations.

Melbourne Opera is thrilled to be taking this important step forward with one of the world's leading universities. The partnership will greatly enhance our ability to offer professional performance opportunities to artists at the start of their careers, as well as broadening the geographic reach of our performances.

We are particularly pleased to be able to offer performances of all our productions in the Alexander Theatre at the Clayton campus. With 508 seats, the theatre boasts a fine acoustic for opera, as well as an orchestra pit.

Subscription Season

The Board of Melbourne Opera is delighted to announce the company's inaugural subscription season.

As part of our commitment to producing quality opera at affordable prices, the company has scheduled three productions that are sure to please our patrons – *The Merry Widow* (Lehar), *Faust* (Gounod) and a new production of *Carmen* (Bizet).

The subscription season will offer our patrons the opportunity to reserve the best seats at discounted prices.

All performances are at the recently refurbished Athenaeum Theatre, and those who have been to a recent production there will be well aware of the vastly superior seating now installed, new carpet and of course – a fabulous orchestra pit.

We will write to all our patrons under separate cover to alert them to the initial subscription offer – so watch your mailbox in December and January. *The Merry Widow* opens on March 10 so you will need to act quickly.



Matthew Toogood was our resident Chorusmaster until he succumbed to the call of Europe, Berlin in particular. In early 2009 Matthew decided to try his luck in obtaining a position at a German opera house. After exhaustive interviews he managed to be offered not one, but four opportunities to work in Germany and chose to go to Komische Oper Berlin, which has developed into one of the highest-profile opera houses in the German-speaking world. In 2007 it was voted “opera house of the year”, and its choir soloists received the title of “opera choir of the year”. Matthew joined the music staff as a solo repetiteur. Previously he was based at Oper Frankfurt undertaking a Praktikum as chorus repetiteur. Life is very busy, as evidenced by a note from him received this week –

“I had a stage orchestral rehearsal for “Im Weissen Rössl” this morning, for which I had to conduct the onstage band-S, and then a run through of Prokofiev “Love of Three Oranges” - and I’m about to head back in for a long stage orchestral rehearsal playing piano in the pit for “Rössl” this time”

This is just one day in Matthew’s life! During the European summer he managed to return to Melbourne to guest conduct a number of operas, such as Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci with Melbourne Opera and Verdi’s Macbeth with Heidelberg Choral Society. Now based in Berlin, he has already participated in a conducting masterclass with Colin Metters, and with the Komische Oper he conducts backstage Die Meistersingers von Nürnberg, and works on numerous operas including: Die Schneekönigen, La Traviata, Rusalka, Im Weissen Rössl, Salome, Rigoletto, Le Nozze di Figaro, and Dialogue of the Carmelites.

We hope Matthew will be back mid 2011 to do more with Melbourne Opera, if his schedule permits.



Pagliacci (Leoncavallo) 2010 | Vanessa West as Nedda | Gary Rowley as Tonio
Photo: Robin Halls

Commissioning Patron

In 2011, all three of our main productions will be newly commissioned operas.

Commissioning a new production is not undertaken lightly by the Board, but it is required to keep our repertoire fresh and appealing. We have attempted to minimise costs by hiring the sets and productions from other opera companies, but either costs or, in one case – the liquidators, have meant this is not to be.

The cost of a new production is about \$35-50,000 more than staging a remount of an existing opera – and we have an opportunity in 2011 for those donors who wish to become a Commissioning Patrons to invest in three productions. The commissioned opera will, for as long as it remains in our repertoire, be acknowledged as being commissioned by the said patron. The productions available for 2011 are Merry Widow, Faust & Carmen. Contact Greg Romanes for more information (9224 5283).

New warehouse premises

Many of our supporters would be aware of the tremendous assistance we receive from the Athenaeum Theatre and its friendly staff. This includes greatly reduced theatre rental, and the use of their facilities for our rehearsals and functions.

This support is provided through the auspices of the theatre’s directors, Glenn Elston, Barry Janes and Greg Hocking. Recently however, one of the directors, Barry Janes, has elevated this backing to new levels by providing us with free warehouse facilities at his premises at Kingsville, a delightful suburb that lies between Yarraville and Footscray.

The disused supermarket will be developed in to six townhouses in due course but in the

meantime Barry has let us use the space while we find new accommodation for our sets, props and costumes. These were housed in a warehouse in Abbotsford but we have been forced to move following a recent change in ownership.

This support is worth thousands of dollars and more than offsets the cost of moving – which involved about 11 trips with a 13 tonne truck, three huge skips for rubbish and the tireless efforts of Greg Carroll, Tony Rive and their crew. This is the unglamorous side of opera that fades in to the background on opening nights.

Needed items

High on the shopping list for 2011 is a set of timpani. At present we hire a set for each performance at, as they say, great expense to the Management. By buying a set (cost approx. \$3,000) we will save this rental and will recoup our investment after 4 productions. We would be delighted to mount a brass plate with your name on these timpani if you wish to donate \$1,000 or more towards their acquisition.

Sponsor Profile

Melbourne Opera enjoys a fine and prestigious address in Collins St. We are based on the mezzanine level at 401 Collins, near the corner of Queen St. It is a beautiful old building (used by General Douglas MacArthur as his Melbourne headquarters during WWII) and boasts outstanding conference and event facilities.

This office space is provided to us – free of charge – by our very good friends at Roy Morgan Research. Chairman Gary Morgan and CEO Michele Levine never miss a performance and are vocal and invaluable supporters – they also print all our programmes, posters, newsletters and stationery – many thanks to Gary and Michele.



New Board members for Melbourne Opera



**Mrs Jennie
Cameron**

Jennie is the immediate past Chair of the National SIDS Council of Australia and has worked at Board, CEO and National Marketing management level in such organisations at St John Ambulance Australia, The Spastic Society of Victoria, and is Past President of Women Chiefs of Enterprises ACT Division and member of the ACT Philanthropy round table. Jennie also runs her own business importing clothes and textiles of India and Asia working with fair trade organisations.



**Mr Peter Francis
OAM**

Peter has been a practising lawyer for many years and is a Partner in the law firms, Maddocks. He is Chairman of the Board of Bapcare Ltd, a large aged care and family service provider in Victoria and Tasmania, and is a Board member of Whitelion which works with young people at risk in the community. Peter is also President of the Elgar Society in Melbourne.

Endowment Fund

The key challenge we face over the next decade is to build a sustainable business model for Melbourne Opera. By doing this we will be able to concentrate on raising our production values and improving the conditions for our singers, orchestra and stage crews.

We have two broad income streams – ticket sales and donations. By introducing a subscription season and active, clever marketing, we will endeavour to boost our ticket sales – and we will encourage increased donations by establishing an Endowment Fund.

Great institutions the world over have been started, and have prospered, through endowment funds. Stanford University, for example, was established by a \$5,000,000 endowment from Leland and Jane Stanford in 1891. Today it is one of the world's leading universities.

We have similar grand plans and aim to have our \$5,000,000 endowment fund by 2015, and \$10,000,000 by 2020. An endowment fund is invested wisely, and as part of the income is used and part is reinvested – the fund continues to grow in perpetuity. This provides us with the certainty and independence to create and stage great operas, and to nurture promising young careers.

Our endowment fund is open to all and is tax deductible. Obviously donations are welcome at any time, and we can create a sub-fund for gifts of a significant size. These may be to support a particular activity of the company in perpetuity – such as the orchestra, young singers, conductors or musicians.

Be sure to remember Melbourne Opera when you make or modify your will – bequeathing a percentage of your estate is a very effective way to support the endowment fund. Contact Greg Romanes for any further information—9224 5283.



**Mr Charles (Sandy)
Clark**

Sandy is Chairman of Brown Brothers Millawa, having recently retired as Chairman of Aviva Australia Holdings Limited and Melbourne Grammar School Council. He is director of the Myer Family Company Limited, a trustee of the William Buckland Foundation, a director of the Myer Foundation, governor of the Arts Centre Foundation, Chairman of St Paul's Cathedral restoration, and a director of a number of private companies.



Mr David Pitt

David is currently Vice President (Finance) and CFO of Monash University. He oversees the financial management, funding and capital works programs of Monash world-wide. David is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a member of the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia and has a First Class Honours Science Degree majoring in pure mathematics and statistics, a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne and an MBA from RMIT.

New CEO

Greg Romanes joined the company on July 1 as Chief Executive Officer. Greg has many years' experience in the not-for-profit area, having headed up development for the Australian Red Cross, the RSPCA and the Australian Ballet School. More recently he introduced structured philanthropic activities to Melbourne Football Club and was involved in the successful debt demolition campaign that has put the club back on track, and will see them win a premiership in 2012.

Greg has been a regular patron of Melbourne Opera for many years and has a deep love of classical music. He has two teenage daughters who are yet to share this love.

The Tell-Tale Heart

At the 2005 Castlemaine State Festival, Melbourne Opera presented the world premiere of Melbourne composer Dennis Vaughan's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, from the story by Edgar Allan Poe, a one-man opera starring James Egglestone, directed by Hugh Halliday, and conducted by the composer.

This devastatingly theatrical piece, innovatively staged in a mine building, was the smash hit of the Festival. In (mid) 2011 we will be remounting this production in conjunction with Monash University – as part of our new partnership. The orchestra will consist of handpicked students from the Music Faculty and will again be performed under the baton of Dennis Vaughan.



Dame Joan Sutherland OM AC DBE



It was with great sadness that the world learned of Dame Joan Sutherland's death on 10th October 2010. Along with her husband Richard Bonyngue Dame Joan was a founding Patron of Melbourne Opera, and we pay tribute to an outstanding artist and proud Australian who generously gave encouragement and friendship to many young Australian singers starting their careers. Melbourne Opera pays tribute to her outstanding contribution to opera singers the world over, and we will remember her with affection and respect.



The Barber of Seville
(Rossini) 2010 production
Photo: David Wyatt



Madame Butterfly (Puccini)
2010 production
Photo: Robin Halls

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scientific study into the effectiveness of grazing on reducing bushfire risks in Victoria,' according to *The Age*. About 400 head of cattle have been introduced to six sites over 25,600 ha (3.6% of the park) until the end of grazing season on April 30. The National Parks Association is outraged by the return of the cattle, and the potential for full-blown grazing. The Gunaikurnai people, traditional aboriginal owners of the area have added their voice to the chorus of condemnation claiming the Baillieu Government of "stepping over the mark."

GM crops

An opinion piece in the business section of the *Herald Sun* by Alan Moran supported the use of genetically modified crops in Australia. He points out that GM crops have been adopted by farmers around the world and now represent 70 per cent of US corn and 80 per cent of its soy production. 'Australia's regime of regulatory overkill in GM seeds is denying productivity gains to our farmers,' he said.

JUSTICE

Solicitor-General

The Attorney-General has advertised for the senior role of Solicitor-General, to be the Victorian government's primary legal advocate and adviser to appear as Senior Counsel for Victoria in legal proceedings particularly in the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the High Court, and represent Victoria at various forums, www.ewki.asia. Nearby, and not to be mistaken, the Attorney-General of Victoria is seeking to recruit a senior and highly skilled lawyer to become the next Victorian Government Solicitor.

Better tracking required

Victoria Police is unsure how many injuries its members inflicted or how many times they had used force as recently as five years ago, casting doubt over its ability to compare current trends of violence with historic figures. These are just some of the inaccurate violence-related statistics kept by the force despite a damning report by the police watchdog last year that found the police had repeatedly ignored calls to fix the inaccurate reporting and under-reporting of violence.

Better tracking

The *Herald Sun* wrote that Victoria Police's DNA database has matched criminals to unsolved crimes they weren't even suspects for. In the past decade the forces database has linked possible offenders to more than 100 murders and rapes, and thousands of less serious crimes.

Police suspended senior officer

A senior policeman in charge of a key crime squad has been stood down after he was implicated in an Office of Police Integrity investigation. The head of the sexual crime squad, Detective Inspector **Glenn Davies**, was yesterday suspended on full pay on the instruction of the chief commissioner. Davies had a reputation in police circles as a rising star and

had been placed in charge of a series of sensitive investigations.

Review of child abuse allegations

The Age reported that new Community Services Minister **Mary Wooldridge** has ordered Commissioner **Tony Geary** to probe whether the Department of Human Services falsely told a complainant that it had conducted several independent investigations into the allegations of child abuse though such investigation had never taken place. Wooldridge's role in the case – her first investigation in a child protection matter as Minister – signals the new Government's desire to inject independence into the handling of complaints against the DHS. Victoria's child safety commissioner will investigate whether authorities mishandled allegations that two young children were abused or neglected in what is the first intervention by the Baillieu Government in a child protection case.

Gas Leak Compensation

The *Herald Sun* reported that residents affected by the Cranbourne landfill methane gas debacle may have to wait years for compensation. A Supreme Court judge set down a trial date for a class action on the part of the residence of 800 affected properties at Brookland Greens. **Justice Robert Osborne** said the trial would start in July 2011 but it could extend well into 2012, or four years after the leak was detected, before the legal action is finalised. The lawyers for the residents said they were angry at the delays and the refusal of the council, the Environmental Protection Authority, or any other defendants to accept responsibility. **Manisha Blencowe**, of the law firm Slater and Gordon, said the delays had put a huge financial and emotional strain on residents. Lawyers are pursuing damages for diminished property values and loss of use and enjoyment.

Fault in child sex retrials

Judges' mistakes in instructing juries in child sex cases have caused almost two thirds of retrials ordered in Victoria this year. An *Age* analysis of criminal appeals this calendar year has found that 7 of 11 retrials ordered by the Court of Appeal involved allegations of sexual offences against children under 16 and incest. Mistakes made by the county court judges causing miscarriages of justice in child sex cases included incorrect instructions and omitted information.

Police drag-net

Three men will be charged with illegally netting a huge haul of fish from Port Phillip Bay. Fisheries officers found 832 fish in two vehicles intercepted on the Nepean Highway in Carrum and Edithvale in Melbourne's southeast. Senior Fisheries officer **Dave Green** said in *The Age*: 'to have such a large quantity of undersized fish killed can be devastating to the sustainability of any ecosystem.' The trio had their catch, nets, and one of their vehicles seized, and face a maximum penalty of \$10,000 and six months in prison.

Dirty Money

The *Herald Sun* says Victoria Police are locking a legal clamp on drug dealers' homes at a rate of one a

week in an unprecedented pursuit of criminal assets. The blitz on traffickers has resulted in property worth up to \$43 million being frozen over 18 months. In that time courts have issued 90 restraining orders relating to properties, on the application of Victoria police. At least 80 per cent of those involved were people who had used houses to grow marijuana hydroponically. Clandestine drug manufacturing laboratories and houses where illicit drugs were found made up the rest.

Leadfoot

Victorian drivers were nabbed for more than 1.6 million road offences last financial year. Almost 1.3 million speeding fines were distributed, despite campaigns to educate people about the dangers of speeding. About 150 people a day were sprung using mobile phones while driving and 380 day were caught doing more than 15km/h over the speed limit. Despite 40,000 fewer fines being handed out than in the 2008-2009 financial year, errant drivers still paid out about \$330 million in fines. Police Minister **Peter Ryan** said in the *Herald Sun* that drivers often forgot their licence was a privilege with obligations, not a right.

Blitz on the Fritz

In Victoria, more than 12,500 speeding motorists and 1,560 drink drivers were taken off the road during a blitz between December 17 and January 9 that nabbed 1,623 drivers every day. Another 3,175 drivers were detected using mobile phones and 2,241 not wearing seatbelts, while 753 disqualified drivers and 1,463 unlicensed drivers were caught during the operation.

You can run but you can't hide

Thai police charged two men with the Melbourne murder of 'good Samaritan' **Luke Mitchell**, sparking a clampdown on a growing knife culture in Melbourne. The Sanctuary Lakes chef, 29, was stabbed five times and kicked as he lay on the ground outside a 7Eleven store in Sydney Road, Brunswick. He had earlier stepped in to break up a brawl outside a nightclub two blocks away.

Bail justice quits

A Victorian bail justice who is a close associate of an alleged organised crime figure has resigned from his judicial role. The resignation of Melbourne property developer and boxing promoter **Brian Amatruda** as a bail justice comes after revelations in *The Age* in October, about his links to an alleged drug trafficker **Fedele 'Freddie the Bear' D'Amico**.

Law attacks the homeless

The Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic has written to the Yarra Ranges Shire urging it to repudiate a by law proposal prohibiting the 'placing' of vehicles on a road or public space without a permit. The rule imposes penalties of up to \$2,389 for a breach, which would effectively 'criminalise' vulnerable people forced to resort to their cars or vans for shelter, according to **James Farrell**, the principal lawyer at the clinic. Farrell has warned the use of the terminology 'placing' may also be problematic for residents and visitors to the area. In a letter to the shire – co-signed by the



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Council to Homeless Persons – Farrell has alerted council members to their obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. However, **Kerry Avery** of the Yarra Ranges Shire defended the law and told *The Age* he was upset by the suggestion that the shire was attacking the homeless!

These things happen

In a mid-November story in *The Age* it was reported that **Roger Prescott**, the recently bankrupted former Victorian state Liberal minister, had been hit by a second lawsuit from the liquidator of the failed Environinvest group of tree plantation schemes.

EVENTS

Couta Classic

On January 4, the annual KPMG Couta Boat Classic was held at Sorrento. Business leaders and politicians raced in 59 Couta boats, the usual faces in the photos.

Grand Prix

Efforts will be made to cut the cost of the Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park, race chairman **Ron Walker** said. *The Age* quoted him as saying it was ‘business as usual’ after meeting Premier Baillieu, who has not ruled out dumping the race, a day after Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** called for Melbourne cut its losses and ditch the event when the contract expires in 2015.

Former Premier **Jeff Kennett** gave his two cents on the issue in a two page spread opinion piece for the *Herald Sun*, arguing Victoria should try to retain the prestigious event. However, in another blow to the embattled event, the Defence Department has announced that cost-cutting had put a stop to aerial displays by the Roulettes aerobatics team and RAAF F/A-18 fighter jets at the Grand Prix, offering to send a hot air balloon instead.

MELBOURNE

Rained out

Following storm havoc across the state, the front cover of *The Age* was dominated in early February by the headline: ‘Victoria Swamped’ and an announcement of emergency grants accompanied by the promise of more wild weather to come.

Police, VicRoads and the State Emergency Services warned Victorians to be patient and prepare for long traffic delays. The authorities said that flood damaged and closed roads would make commutes difficult.

A bone to pick

The skeleton of Phar Lap has been on loan to the Melbourne Museum to coincide with the 150th Melbourne Cup. But now the bones must be returned to the Te Papa Museum in New Zealand where Phar Lap was foaled in 1926. The Victorian government has spent about \$90,000 shipping the skeleton across the Tasman.

15 cut out Oliver

The restaurant Fifteen in Melbourne is getting a new identity after splitting with celebrity chef **Jamie Oliver** and his London based parent company. The chef, **Tobie Puttock**, and property developer **Adam Garrison** say it will be renamed The Kitchen Cat, and that its role as a commercial restaurant that trains disadvantaged youths will remain. The newly named Steppingstone Foundation – formerly Fifteen Foundation (Australia) – will involve other Melbourne restaurants.

Rosati to go

The Zagame family, owners of Rosati Restaurant in Flinders Lane, have applied to have the iconic building demolished and replaced with a nine-story tower. The National Trust, however, is objecting to the proposal on the grounds that the building and surrounding area may be worthy of heritage protection.

Nylex clock’s time may come

Melbourne’s Nylex clock may tell time again, after the state government promised to discuss switching it back on with its owners. Planning Minister **Matthew Guy** told the *Herald Sun* he would try to meet the site administrators to discuss the cost of switching it back on, nearly 2 years after it was shut down because it was too expensive to operate. ‘It is an icon for Melbourne and it would be good to see it working and working well,’ Guy said. The sign was turned off in March 2009 when Nylex went into voluntary administration.

Art celebration

The National Gallery of Victoria celebrated its 150th birthday on February 3. The actual birthday of the gallery is May 24, the same as Queen Victoria.

Mayor’s map

Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** has mapped out a five-point plan for Melbourne in the Sunday Herald Sun. The Lord Mayor said much of his strategy was based on simple solutions to erase unsociable behaviour and provide a better experience for the millions of people who visit the city each day. Topping the Lord Mayor’s list of gripes was graffiti and litter, especially cigarette butts and the acrid smell of burning butt bins. He also issued a call for more common courtesy on the streets. The Lord Mayor’s final comment was reserved for the MCC’s own Christmas decorations: ‘I’m the first to admit that they look tired,’ he said.

Garden City

Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** wrote an opinion piece in the *Herald Sun* on the state of foliage in and around Melbourne. According to him, there are roughly 65,003 trees in Melbourne. The Mayor said that the trees of Alexandra Avenue, planted in 1901, are coming to the end of their lives and this has been accelerated by drought. The trees in the Carlton South Gardens are more than 100 years old and failing. The elms in Fitzroy Garden in Victoria Parade were planted in the 1880s and are old for urban trees. The trees on St Kilda Road are in a terrible condition and have reached replacement time. He summarised by saying that ‘we have to continue adapting and protecting but also to plan for our next urban forest... I wouldn’t mind betting that many people will want to go back to the future: the Garden State’.

Fine by me

The Melbourne City Council will install electronic sensors under 4,500 parking spots in the CBD and Southbank to alert parking inspectors to the location of cars that stay too long. The system replaces the technique of marking car tires with chalk and will make 20 council employees redundant, a side effect *The Age* claim will likely result in industrial action. The system will cost \$3 million but is expected to increase fine revenues by almost \$8 million over the next four years.

Scientology HQ

Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** has admitted on radio that he made a mistake accepting an invitation from singer **Kate Ceberano** to open a new Scientology headquarters. Premier Baillieu refused an invitation.

PLANNING & BUILDING

Opening moves

The Baillieu government has made its first planning intervention, with planning minister **Mathew Guy** restricting high-rise developments near the Shrine of Remembrance to 60 meters. *The Age* has labelled the decision as a 'victory' for Melbourne's most influential businessmen and the most active Liberal party supporters who are among the beneficiaries. The first development to be affected by the change is a proposed 88-meter apartment tower at 35 Albert Road.

The Age noted that the powerful individuals who objected to the proposed tower, own stakes in the neighbouring apartment building 'Domain'. Had construction gone ahead, Domain's views of Port Phillip Bay would have been obstructed. A Planning Department spokesman, however, said that individual objectors had nothing to do with the 60-meter limit, and that the policy had been formed 12 months before the application for the tower at 35 Albert Road was submitted.

Property chiefs warn of unit's glut

The Age writes that two major property players have broken industry ranks to warn buyers about an oversupply of poorly located apartments in the development pipeline. **Rob Pradolin**, general manager of developer Australand, which has \$400 million in projects underway in Victoria, predicts that 30 to 40 per cent of apartment projects currently advertised for Melbourne would not go ahead. He predicted banks would control the market by confining lending for construction work to less risky developments in prime locations.

His comments came less than a fortnight after Melbourne property stalwart **Max Beck** warned in the **Australian Financial Review** of a potential slump in apartment values if the banks funded all three 'mega-projects' proposed. Proposals for 33,451 new apartments in 293 Melbourne building sites are now being advertised to buyers. The figure has leapt from 18,585 apartments in June 2008, according to research by property agency **Oliver Hume**.

Density destiny

Dick Gross, former mayor of the City of Port Phillip and a past president of the Municipal Association of Victoria, writes in *The Age*: 'Planning is the one area where all governments fail equally. All tiers of Government have failed to bring the community on board.'

Changing density

Planning laws that made building high density apartments near train and tram lines in Melbourne easier have been dumped. In one of his first official acts as Victoria's new Planning Minister, **Mathew Guy**, overturned the former Brumby Government planning laws facilitating high-density residential developments near public transport, and began an overhaul of the State planning system. The Minister told *The Age* that instead of sprinkling high-density

housing across Melbourne, the Baillieu government would look at massive strategic developments in specific sites close to the CBD, including at Fisherman's Bend, the 20 hectare E-Gate site just off Footscray Road, and the area around Richmond station.

Regaining clout on big projects

State government says it will restore the city of Melbourne's influence of major developers in the central business district, despite its move to axe a committee that gave the council clout over big planning decisions. Planning Minister **Mathew Guy** said his decision to dump the six-month old Central City Standing Advisory Committee, whose members included council and State Government representatives under an independent chair, was made for 'structural, not personality' reasons.

In the docks

With the northern side of Docklands and industrial parts of Footscray, West and North Melbourne the next to be developed, heritage advocates are hoping that some of the old biscuit and butter factories, goods stores, rail lines, cargo sheds, stencilled signage and manufacturing plants can be protected. 'They are developing Docklands as though it is a Greenfield site... not as the earliest and prime heritage place in our city,' David Maloney of the National Trust told *The Age*.

Financial hitch for Windsor revamp

The Age reports that the development decision that caused the most damage to the former Brumby Government and its Planning Minister, **Justin Madden**, may have been for nothing. Doubt is clouding the financial viability of the \$260 million Windsor Hotel project. The owner and developer of the Windsor, the Halim Group, yesterday admitted it had proved difficult to secure bank finance to start building and the redevelopment was undergoing another redesign to make it profitable. **Mike Smith** said the project's starting date had already been pushed back two years until late 2012 because of planning issues and it could be delayed further because of tough financial conditions.

Permits for further redevelopment were finalised in November, but a heritage requirement to cut 5.6m, the equivalent of two floors, from a proposed new adjoining building on the corner of Bourke and Spring

Streets meant the future of the project was now uncertain, he said.

Coalition eyes Crown land

The Coalition will scour government-owned land around Melbourne for potential new residential development sites, in a bid to ease the city's problem of increasingly unaffordable housing. Planning Minister **Mathew Guy** said the stocktake of government-owned land was likely to start this financial year, and would examine all state land holdings within the urban growth boundary.

Toorak tower defeat

Victoria's planning appeals Tribunal has rejected a controversial bid by media personality **John Rothfield** to build a 12-story South Yarra apartment tower that backs on to a heritage street. The decision followed arguments from Stonington Council and nearby Oxford Lane and Cunningham Street residents who claimed the development would ruin their quiet neighbourhood and set a dangerous planning precedent.

Sign of the times

Motorists are seeing red after approval was given for nine speed limits on a 7 km stretch of road. Confused drivers say it is 'bureaucracy gone mad' after VicRoads made 14 speed limit changes in a little over 11 km. Duncan Elliott, Metro South East regional director for VicRoads, said: 'VicRoads is undertaking a speed zone and signage review along this section of road. Speed limit signs and speed advisory signs before corners and bends are being investigated.'

Stamp duty cuts

According to the *Financial Review*, home buyers and campaigning politicians love a cut in stamp duty. Victorian buyers will enjoy one in 2011, courtesy of **Ted Baillieu's** electoral win. The stamp duty for first home buyers on the purchase of a principal place of residence priced at \$600,000 will be halved. It will be phased in over four years with the first cut, of 20 per cent, due on July 1. The incentives will provide \$13,000 to eligible buyers in Melbourne and \$19,500 in regional Victoria over and above the \$7000 Federal Government first-time grant. It is not clear whether the Baillieu Government will extend the current payouts to first-time buyers beyond the planned July 1 cut off. Victorian buyers and sellers will also have, on or before September 1, tighter rules on cooling off periods.

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Pipe dream

The Age reports that Melbourne Council's planning chairman **Peter Clarke** has proposed underground garbage pipes could be installed throughout the CBD and Docklands.

Cr Clarke, who saw the system at work in Barcelona and London on a recent trip, said the pipes would remove the need for noisy garbage trucks clogging up streets and get rid of open bins in the city's lanes. 'Installation requires digging up the street to lay its 500mm pipes. We could start with Swanston Street during the works next year (2011) and roll out from there.' A report is expected to be considered by councillors by March.

School or grass

The Abbotsford Convent Foundation has given in-principle support to plans by one of its 130 tenants, the Sophia Mundi Steiner School, to erect new classrooms on Covenant land known as the Goats' Paddock, between the school and the Collingwood Children's Farm. The private school, housed in St Mary's Covenant building, would pay for the construction of the single storey classrooms and rent the land back from the Covenant Foundation. However, the plans have created a public backlash, according to *The Age*, as the buildings will occupy grassy open space overlooking the Yarra River.

Housing bubble

Melbourne has scored near the bottom of a global ranking of housing affordability, raising fears that runaway house price increases in recent years have made Australia a less equitable country. The Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, which ranked 325 markets by affordability, listed Melbourne as the world's 321st most affordable city, more reasonably priced than only Sydney and a handful of other locations. Some of the more eyebrow-raising statistics published in *The Age* claimed that London is more affordable than Geelong.

An architect's approach

The new Premier wants a national review on the soaring costs of construction, saying it is one of the key issues he will champion at his first COAG (Council of Australian Governments) meeting in February, *The*

Age reports. He cited the controversial desalination plant as an example of a very expensive project that would cost the taxpayer for decades to come.

DOCKLANDS

New broom

Docklanders can expect to see VicUrban possibly merged into a new urban renewal authority. Also, the authority may rapidly expand the precinct to the north, with the E-Gate project gaining increased significance. VicUrban assumed development responsibility for the Docklands, following the merger of the Docklands Authority and the Urban and Regional Land Corporation in 2003. VicUrban has been without a chairperson since former chairman **Tony Darvall** left the post last July. In December, its CEO **Pru Sanderson** resigned.

Planning minister **Mathew Guy** says that the 20 hectares of railway yards to the north of the docklands/ Docklands, known as E-Gate, would become a priority for urban renewal under the new government.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Two socialists

Yarra Council's former mayor **Jane Garrett** left the council in November after she was elected as a Labor member for the State seat of Brunswick. Now, after a recent recount of votes cast in the council's 2008 election, Socialist Party candidate **Anthony Main** will take her place. The Victorian Electoral Commission found that Main had easily outpolled the Greens candidate. The council already has one Socialist Party member, **Stephen Jolly**.

Abuse of power

A Hume councillor has been found by Ombudsman **George Brouwer** to have abused his position and council resources to benefit his own business interests and mislead the Department of Immigration. **Adem Atmaca** was initially investigated following allegations he received a \$5000 bribe to modify a planning permit.

Council debts

The heavy floods throughout Victoria have left rural councils heavily in debt. Fourteen mayors from flood-ravaged communities in western Victoria have appealed to the state government for emergency funding to fix thousands of damaged roads and bridges.

SPORT

Stifled aggression limits Australian performance

The Age reported Cricket Australia's Players Union claims that forcing players to tone down sledging has resulted in poor team performance. Australian Cricketers Association chief executive **Paul Marsh** said 'I think there is no doubt the team's performance has been affected'.

Ambition for 2011-02-14

The Victorian-based AFL teams aim to double their memberships according to a recent *Herald Sun* item. Including Hawthorn with 29,239 is targeting 60,000; North Melbourne with 10,138 targeting 32,000; Western Bulldogs with 15,309 targeting 35,000; Geelong with 10,000 targeting 42,000; Richmond with 18,000 targeting 46,000; St Kilda with 15,218 targeting 45,000; Melbourne with 18,851 target 35,000; Carlton with 11,434 targeting 50,000; Collingwood with 32,710 targeting 60,000 and Essendon with 24,570 targeting 47,000...!

Bombers on the move

The sport section of the *Herald Sun* on December 17 had an informative piece on Essendon Football Club's new home at Melbourne Airport. It will include training grounds with dimensions matching the MCG and Etihad Stadium. The Bombers confirmed they were vacating Windy Hill for a new state-of-the-art facility on Melrose Drive, 18 km from the CBD. Chairman **David Evans** said the club was forced to act after falling behind in footy's 'arms race'. The move is expected to cost \$25 million and be completed by the 2013 season. Evans said the Bombers would maintain a presence at Windy Hill, the club's home since 1922, including the continuation of its hall of fame, merchandise shop and poker machine venue.

Evans said the Bombers might have left Windy Hill even if they had successfully resolved a dispute with the neighbouring bowling club, which had refused to vacate its prized parcel of the precinct to provide room for the bombers to upgrade their facilities. The Melbourne Airport training base will be built in partnership with the Australian Paralympic Committee, guaranteeing \$6 million in federal funding. Further funding will be sought from the AFL and the state government. **Bruce Haymanson** was confirmed as the new number-one ticket holder and replaces former Federal Finance Minister **Lindsay Tanner**, whom the club said had played a role in securing the airport contract!

Flooding takes its toll

The \$100 million Eastern Golf Club's plan to relocate from Doncaster to Yering in the Yarra Valley has been blocked by a planning tribunal as a result of fears that



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the course would eventually be inundated because it was on a flood plain. Environmental activists had opposed the move due to fears that sediment and chemical fertilizer would run off the golf course and contaminate the Yarra River and nearby Sugarloaf Reservoir, part of Melbourne's water supply.

Player privacy

In late December the AFL Players' Association, AFLPA, 'demanded' laws be changed to better protect footballers privacy. AFLPA chief executive **Matt Finnis** told the *Herald Sun* 'I'd like to see a greater understanding among the community of what damage can be done when people don't respect the privacy of high-profile people'..... The call came as the girl at the centre of the AFL photo storm threatened that she would not be silenced and vowed to post more scandalous pictures on the Internet. She told the paper that the next lot of photos to be released would be of Carlton and Sydney players. She pledged to continue taking revenge on St Kilda, a club she says mistreated her...

Cable AFL

Pay television will be able to bid directly for the exclusive rights to four weekly AFL matches under a Federal Government move to ease the rules for pay television to bid directly for TV rights. According to the Financial Review, Communications Minister **Stephen Conroy** is close to finalizing a deal with the AFL which will ensure that Friday and Saturday night games can still be purchased by free-to-air television networks and include the best two games of each round. Such a deal could inject billions into the AFL and NRL as the rights to more quality games are made available for pay-TV to buy.

TOURISM

Wheel of Fortune

It has been almost two years since the Southern Star Observation Wheel was closed due to structural faults, possibly caused by a string of hot Melbourne days! Melbourne Lord Mayor **Robert Doyle** announced that he was pleased to see the beginning of the wheel's reconstruction. The first of seven spokes to fit the new Ferris wheel left its manufacturer, BMC, in the Latrobe Valley on January 10.

High dollar's cost

Tourism operators told *The Age* that the number of visitors from Britain and the rest of Europe could decline as much as 15 per cent this year because of the higher Australian dollar and weak Northern Hemisphere economies and currencies.

Flood warnings swamp Murray tourism

Murray River tourism operators told the *Herald Sun* that they have lost thousands of dollars in cancelled bookings because of alarmist government flood warnings. Government departments issued warnings after heavy rains in November caused concern among thousands of campers who normally spend the summer on the banks of the river. Torrumbarry Hotel owner **Allen Bolden** said the lack of business was destroying his livelihood. He claimed a senior

State Emergency Services official had admitted 'Black Saturday syndrome' had caused the warnings.

Oprah effect

Tourism Victoria's website has doubled its number of hits since the screening of **Oprah Winfrey's** TV specials. Almost 90,000 page views were recorded in January, a tourism Victoria spokeswoman told the *Herald Sun*.

Island paradise

A Mornington Peninsula group has submitted preliminary costings for two islands at Spoil Ground, about 15 km from Williamstown to boost Victoria's tourism arsenal. One of the islands, of roughly 6 ha, would be modeled on Perth's car free Rottnest Island. It would have restaurants, a harbour, five-star and backpacker accommodation. The second island would be a marine park, similar to the naturally occurring mud Island in the bay's south, with visitors allowed but not encouraged to view resident bird and fish life.

TRANSPORT

RAIL

'Warts and all' review of Myki

Premier **Ted Baillieu** has not ruled out scrapping the Myki ticket system as the government awaits the findings of an independent audit of the beleaguered smartcard by Deloitte. 'It has been unsuccessful and we need to now make a judgement, based on facts and based on information we will elicit from this review. This is in the best interest of all Victorians.' The private operators of the state's public transport system, including Metro Trains and Yarra Trams, have made submissions to the Government review of Myki. The smartcard system began operating on Melbourne trains on December 29, 2009, and on trams and buses on July 25, 2010.

The expansion of Myki to V/Line services had been deferred and plans to switch off the Metcard system by Easter had been pushed back. **John Ferguson**, a spokesman for Kamco, the company that runs Myki, said the company had made a submission to the review. The news came as Transport Ticketing Authority research found only 75,000 of the 800,000 Myki cards in circulation are used on a typical weekday. On (the week of) Monday February 13, Baillieu is expected to announce a decision to somehow modify the Myki system. Dumping the system outright has been deemed unlikely, as it would result in a protracted and costly legal battle as a result of the governments breaking contract.

Off the rails

The biggest rail project in Australia's history, the Regional Rail Link comprising a 47 kilometre rail line from Melbourne to Werribee, may be abandoned. According to the Baillieu government, Brumby hid the true cost of the \$4.3 billion plan and says a revised estimate predicts a blowout of about \$880 million. A federal money commitment has also been put on

slow. A (new) rail link to Melbourne Airport from the CBD has been mentioned in the context of excessive car parking fees at the airport.

Transport price hike

Premier **Ted Baillieu's** Government is poised to order Melbourne's first public transport fare rise in two years. Commuters can expect to pay 20c more for a zone 1 daily ticket, bringing the cost to seven dollars. The change of government means commuters have a reprieve from the usual January 1 increases. It is believed that the Government will introduce the increase in either March or mid-year. The previous government had gone into caretaker mode before a decision could be made on fare changes. Industry sources said fare increases took about six weeks to implement.

Next stop: under construction

Two new stations will be built at Lynbrook and Cardinia with the Department of Transport calling for expressions of interest for art at the new railway stops.

More money for Myki

When the Metcard system is turned off in 2011, further costs are expected as the government exercise of supplying 'short-term' Myki tickets has turned out to be far more expensive than predicted. Myki is a reusable smartcard for public transport, but the new system includes short-term disposable tickets. They will be available in Melbourne when Metcard ends. Each short term Myki ticket has a computer chip and cost the Government about \$.35. Metcard, with its cheaper magnetic strip, cost \$.03. When the government signed the \$1.35 billion Myki contract, it expected 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the trips would use a disposable ticket.

Out with the old

Victoria's beleaguered Myki ticketing system has hit more difficulties, with 20,000 smart cards not giving senior customers the travel benefits they are entitled to, including free weekend travel and discounted weekday fares. At least 300 seniors card holders have been over charged as a result of the mistake. Tellingly, the remaining 19,700 are yet to use their card.

Underclass underpass

Dirty, smelly, wet, dark, crowded and dangerous. According to the *Herald Sun*, that is how visitors to the city centre have summed up the Elizabeth Street underpass at Flinders Street Station. New transport Minister **Terry Mulder** also criticised the underpass, which is the gateway to Southbank for visitors to the city. **Daniel Bowen**, of the Public Transport Users Association, said the dank subway was in need of a revamp, especially with the growing number of people using it. In response to the calls, the underpass was pressure cleaned for the first time in 5 years on January 2, and Metro Trains has ordered new light fittings which should be installed by the time Letter from Melbourne goes to print.

Ticket inspectors get violent

A report by the Victorian Ombudsman **George Brouwer**, tabled in Parliament on December 21, included CCTV footage showing passengers being

thrown to the ground, grabbed by the throat and tackled by gangs of aggressive ticket inspectors. The highly critical report also found that even when the incidents were referred to the Department of Transport no action was taken against the inspectors.

The little engine that couldn't

For only the second time since taking control of Melbourne's train network, Metro has met its monthly performance targets. During December 88.3 per cent of trains ran on time, only just earning Metro a pass mark, with the minimum government imposed target being 88 per cent. According to the *Herald Sun*, the only other month in which Metro achieved this minimum standard was September – nine months after taking over the suburban network.

Conflict of interest

The Age ran a story on **Ross Alexander**, a senior Department of Transport civil servant who in 2005 oversaw the Myki tender for the Victorian government, and was then placed in charge of multi-billion-dollar tenders for Melbourne's train and tram systems. Alexander is now joining construction giant John Holland, a 20 per cent shareholder in Metro Trains. Alexander has been executive director of the Department of Transport projects division, which is responsible for overseeing and awarding work to the construction industry. John Holland, in addition to its 20 per cent stake in Metro also last year led the winning consortium for a 370 million dollar contract with the Department of Transport to extend the Epping line to South Moran.

John Holland was also named this month as one of three construction companies shortlisted to build a large section of the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link, a new track from near Werribee to Southern Cross station. Before working at the Department of Transport, Alexander was director of business strategy at National Express, the rail operator that abandoned Melbourne's trains in 2002. Ken Coghill, from Monash University's governance research unit, said that any public servant who had been in a position to affect a company's financial fortunes should not accept work from that company for some time.

ROAD

New speed cameras

The *Herald Sun* reported that the State government is set to rake in tens of millions of dollars a year from 32 new speed cameras switched on in December. After a decade attacking Labor for revenue raising, the new Baillieu administration is about to widen the speed camera nets. The Department of Justice published a list of the 32 new camera sites after the appointment of the new government. Most of the sites are at major Melbourne intersections and will combine speed and red light cameras. These include St Kilda Rd, Kingsway, Nicholson and Princess Streets, and City Rd - Montague St.

The list also reveals that Warrnambool is about to get its first camera. Cameras on the list have been

installed and are working, but are not being used to issue fines. This explains why some speeding motorists can see a camera flash but never receive a penalty. A spokesman for Police Minister **Peter Ryan** told the *Herald Sun*: 'As a first measure, the Coalition has committed to publishing the location of mobile speed cameras in Victoria.' While in opposition, the Liberals criticised Victoria's low tolerance levels, which gave little leeway to motorists who inadvertently drive slightly over the limit. Premier Baillieu promised to locate the new cameras 'where they are needed, not just for revenue'.

Fine fight

Leading Senior Constable **Trevor Bergman** has succeeded in his 8 year battle to have his \$250 traffic camera penalty overturned. The decision has exposed a loop hole in the traffic laws and calls into question the way speed zones are sign posted at hundreds of junctions.

Petrol Price Rise

The *Herald Sun* ran a front page story before Christmas pointing out a price spike of 18c to \$1.45 in the lead up to the holiday. Commsec economist **Savanth Sebastianan** said the wholesale price of petrol had not been this high for two years.

Electric feel

This year Ford will release an all electric version of the Ford Focus which was demonstrated at the Consumer Electronics show in Las Vegas. It is the automaker's first zero emissions car. The company said it was an improvement on rival models.

Road out

Stretches of the great Ocean Road were closed for days at a time in mid-January as a result of landslips and boulders on the iconic route, caused by the high rainfall experienced across the state. A VicRoads spokeswoman said the scenic Highway was closed between Lorne and Skenes Creek.

Great ocean rebuild

In *The Age*, general manager of the Victorian Tourism Industry Council **Todd Blake** called for the State Government to spend \$500 million on the Great Ocean Road. He said that fortifying the road's rock cliffs was vital, as climate change forecasts predicted more severe weather would lash the southern coast more often, leading to more frequent road closures. During January's storms, heavy rain caused a dozen major land slips along the iconic road, and Blake claimed each of these cost between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to clear. Roads Minister **Terry Mulder**'s office responded by pointing out that many roads across the state needed funding following this summer's floods, and that such a large project would have to wait.

AIR

No free parking

The ACCC has determined that Sydney and Melbourne airports are possibly extracting monopoly rents in their car parks. The price of short term parking at

Melbourne has gone up 50 per cent in just five years. All major media outlets have been reporting on the issue, revealing emotive anecdotes on the state of airport parking. In a further blow to airport commuters, VicRoads is set to erect wire barriers along the Tullamarine Freeway that will prevent drivers from waiting at the side of the road to collect people from the terminal. The newspapers seem to have picked up the scent of a good conspiracy, pointing out that the 'Smart Bus' route 901 to the airport, which was added by the state government in September last year, has recently been forced to drop passengers at the distant outer extremities of terminal four. This forces passengers to drag their luggage a great distance to reach their check in area.

Airport spokeswoman **Carly Dixon** spoke to *The Age* and claimed that it was the state government who ordered that the bus stop be moved, and that 'We made no request to move the bus service down to terminal four.' However, a senior transport source contacted by *The Age* insisted that the airport had requested the move.

An inconvenient security

Electronic tickets and automatic baggage check-ins could be banned and non-passengers barred from entering terminals under an airport security crackdown. Federal Parliamentary Committee Chairman Senator **Steve Hutchins** said there was concern over the growth of e-ticketing and the lack of scrutiny once tickets were issued. 'We were surprised at the rapid development of this innovation in air travel and the misuse of it by organised crime figures,' Senator Hutchins said. On the issue of introducing a national ID card, Senator Hutchins said it was important to know the identity of each passenger – which currently was largely not happening: 'There will be no national identity system without the full support of the Coalition, and on every occasion when that has been presented to them they have refused to cooperate.'

PORTS

Port for Hastings back on the agenda

Transforming the Port of Hastings into Victoria's newest container port within a decade is the priority of Victoria's Ports Minister, **Denis Napthine**. Dr Napthine said Australia's busiest port, Port Melbourne and Melbourne's congested streets would struggle to cope with the quadrupling of shipping containers expected to be processed through Melbourne in the next four decades. Three reports will be commissioned in early 2011 to assess the economic, environmental, and social impact of transforming Hastings to a container port. Dr Napthine said a container port at Hastings within 8-10 years was not only possible 'but necessary'. The cost of redeveloping Hastings could run into the billions of dollars when the expense of new transport links is added.

New docks owner

Australia's biggest container port in Melbourne has new owners after debt troubled Middle East

conglomerate, DP World, sold a 75 per cent stake in its local stevedoring assets for \$1.15 billion. The sale also includes DP's port facilities in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Fremantle, which ship 50 per cent of the nation's ocean cargoes. DP World, majority owned by the Dubai government, entered the Australian market after taking over P&O's global operations in March 2006. The collapse of the Dubai property market in late 2007 suddenly put DP's parent company, Dubai World, under severe financial pressure.

20 years on

About 60 Patrick stevedores in Geelong walked off the job for two days as the wharfies' union ramped up its push for wage increases and job reclassification, demands the company reckons will render its bulk freight business essentially unprofitable. According to *The Australian*, it was the third strike at Patrick ports on either side of the continent in the past two weeks, as the Maritime Union of Australia moved to ratchet up pressure on Patrick's listed owner, Asciano, to indulge a 40 point log of claims.

Hard to port

The Federal Government has unveiled plans to implement a national port strategy to clear bottlenecks and ensure open development doesn't affect its ability to expand facilities and cater to an expected tripling in demand at major wharves.

JOB

CenITex. Good job

The Victorian government agency which provides computer services to about eight Victorian government departments and agencies is looking for a CEO to replace **Peter Blades**, who gave notice mid-November, 'to drive the vision to provide integrated and reliable ICT infrastructure and desktop shared services to the whole of Victorian government. Integral to this is efficient delivery and exceptional customer service providing value-add to over 35,000 customers across the client base'.

Congratulations

Professor Ian Young has been appointed vice-chancellor at the Australian National University, to replace **Ian Chubb**. He is currently vice-chancellor at Swinburne University. He is a civil and oceanographic

engineer, having graduated from James Cook University.

Mark Stone was appointed chief executive of Tourism Victoria in October, after many years as CEO of Parks Victoria. Stone is also a member of the Tourism Australia board.

The Victorian Department of Health, is open for applications for part time board chair and director positions of public health services, Ambulance Victoria, and rural public hospitals.

COMMUNITY

GP calling it quits – at 91

The *Herald Sun* has a story on **Dr Alan Rosenhain** who has spent the past 13 years driving up to four hours a day, three days a week, to this Sunbury Practice. He said the secret to being a good GP was the ability to listen. Dr Rosenhain, who began studying medicine in 1937, said he had seen enormous changes over the years. His long career also included a three-year stint in New Guinea with the Army during the Second World War. After leaving the Army, he went into general practice in 1947 conducting up to 30 home visits each morning.

Melways mApp

Merv Godfrey, who trained as a survey draughtsman with the Victorian Lands Department and later as an RAAF radio operator during World War II, painstakingly hand-created the first Melway - Melbourne's first full-colour street directory - in his Mount Waverley garage in 1966. Forty five years on, Melway has survived the advent of the Internet, personal navigation devices and Google maps, and has now entered the iPhone age with a new digital application. Godfrey, now 86, was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia in 2006, and only retired from his full-time job a year ago.

Single Suburbs

The *Herald Sun* reports that Greater Dandenong in Victoria, Mount Isa and Cloncurry recorded the biggest numbers of single men. They made up to 64 per cent of people looking for love. The Docklands and St Kilda had the most singles in Victoria. And Queenslanders across the board are largely unhitched, with the

results showing both sexes 16 per cent more likely to be looking for love than those in other parts of the country.

Anti-Lycra Brigade

Secondary school teacher **Sue Tyrie** believes that if she cannot sing while she cycles to and from work, she is riding too fast. It's a philosophy led by a growing tribe of slow-cycling enthusiasts in Melbourne. They are the anti-Lycra brigade; cyclists who ride for the sheer enjoyment of it.

Door-to-door ban

The *Herald Sun* reported that door-to-door sales people are to be barred from interrupting family dinners under tough new legislation. The national consumer laws ban doorknockers from visiting households after 6pm on weekdays from January 1. New research shows 86 per cent of households find salespeople intrusive, aggressive or pushy.

Doorknockers are banned completely on Sundays, but are still able to visit homes from 9am-5pm on Saturdays. Rules for telemarketers will remain the same - they are able to call from 9am-8pm on weekdays, and 9am-5pm on Saturdays. They can't call on public holidays. Households can join the Do Not Call register to block telemarketers.

No vacancy

The *Herald Sun* reported that an unexpected influx of strays has flooded the Lost Dogs' Home leaving little room for the scores of dogs that are rounded up by ambulance crews over New Year's Eve, or handed in by the public the day after the fireworks. So far it has been a bad summer for our canines, with rolling thunder, lightning, rain, hail and howling wind, driving dogs to despair. Leading animal behaviorist **Robert Holmes** has warned that New Years celebrations could drive many dogs to a 'deadly reaction to escape the bedlam'.

Transparent glass volumes

Australia's peak body for measurement has proposed that wine glasses in pubs and clubs should show their volume in millilitres, with a marked line on every glass. The National Measurement Institute want to help patrons work out how many standard drinks they are consuming and is seeking public comment on its proposal to regulate wine servings.

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Royal Twins

Princess Mary has given birth to twins, a boy and a girl. The names of the new Danish royals will not be known until their mother announces them at their christening which is expected in March.

Young power couple?

The *Herald Sun* ran a story speculating that Australia's youngest-ever Federal MP, 20 year old **Wyatt Roy**, and round-the-world sailor and Young Australian of the Year **Jessica Watson**, 17, had formed a close relationship, and were possibly romantically involved.

Parliament to pub

Victorian Premier Baillieu participated in this year's Pier to Pub at Lorne, completing the 1200m swim in 18 minutes 29 seconds.

I am Australian

Former Victorian Premier **Jeff Kennett** has proposed ditching our national anthem for a song that touches our souls, suggesting 'I am Australian' by **Bruce Woodley**. He said that many Australians did not relate to 'Advance Australia Fair' which replaced 'God Save the Queen' in 1984.

Vale

James Dibble, the ABC's first news reader. Dibble presented ABC TV's first news bulletin on November 5, 1956, and went on to present the TV news in Sydney for 27 years. His last news bulletin was on June 10, 1983. **Gus Mercurio**, actor, boxer, chiropractor, aged 87. **Professor Keith David Cole**, aged 81. **Harry James Wright**, Australian Army Training Team Vietnam 1970-1971, aged 86. **Muriel Grace Crabtree**, lecturer of bio-chemistry at the University of Melbourne and heavily involved in University College, an artist who swam regularly up to her 100th birthday, aged 102. **Douglas Malcolm Sheen**, teacher, scholar, craftsman, gardener, survived by wife of 38 years – Mary.

Margaret Florence Darling, AM, Navy Signals Intelligence, community worker, just months before her death British PM **David Cameron** sent a letter of commendation and a medal for her work with the Bletchley Park unit, aged 87. **Caroline Walford**, recent president of the Lyceum Club. **Bill Robertson**, MC. **Helen Margaret McKendrick** AM, humanitarian, helped raise millions for the Ryder-Cheshire

Foundation Homes overseas and in Australia, aged 90. **'Judy' Beverley Vickerly Major** OAM, aged 92. **John Bennett**, Australia's first professor of computer science, aged 89. **Bishop Joseph Gretch**, of the Sandhurst diocese in northern Victoria, aged 62 of a recurring blood disorder. He was ordained in 1975 and appointed a bishop in 1998 making him one of the youngest bishops in the Catholic Church.

Maurice Rioli, football legend died of a suspected heart attack, will be given a state funeral, aged 53. **Jack Marchesin**, died in the arms of his father on December 23 after his bike collided with a prime mover near Ivanhoe railway station. The Kew High school student had been out riding with his dad, aged 13. **Ralph McLean**, former mayor of the now defunct Fitzroy Council in 1984, also a broadcaster and producer of the channel 31 program Yartz, aged 53. **Alonzo Pearse 'Lon' Wymond** OAM, led the volunteers who took Puffing Billy from a non-operational railway facing permanent closure to a much loved international tourist attraction. An RAAF pilot during WWII, he was shot down during a night bombing raid on the Japanese stronghold of Rabul, aged 91.

John Edward Begley (SJ). **Jack Cain**, RAAF 12678. **Fr Peter Tsang**, Chaplain of the Melbourne Chinese Community based at Our Lady's Wattle Park for many years. **Donald Russell Currie**, industrial chemist with Imperial Chemical Industries, director of industrial development for the South Australian Government, aged 95. **Lt. Col. John Raymond Grant** RAAMC, aged 89.

Maurice Monk, a 1950's founder of the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport, the peak motor racing administrative body, and a keen amateur competitor. **Edward Warren Owen Perry** MBE, aged 101, historian, archivist at the Australian War Memorial, and author of several books. **Dorothy Merle Cole**, doctor and significant social advocate, aged 91.

Denis Beverley Brownbill. **Heather Gross**. **Audrey Mavis Hampshire**. **Mary Kathleen Hauser**. **Norman William Leahy**. **Patricia Margaret Roirdan (Herman)**. **Geoffrey Wyndham Richardson**. **Gillies Norman Howard**. **Joseph Angelo Grech**, Bishop of Sandhurst. **Judith Marianne Davey**. **Margaret Littledale Tutton**,

Xavier Social Justice Network. **Rev. David Ryrrie**. **Simon Bernard**, employee at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. **Dr. Margaret Sabine**, former Associate Professor of Veterinary Virology at the University of Sydney, aged 82. **David Andrew Sidebottom**, killed in an accident while riding a bicycle on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Leon Massoni, a legendary host long associated with renowned restaurants such as the Café Florentino, Café Balzac, Tolarno Bistro and Massoni, aged 85. **Richard Paul Harbig**, aged 77. **Margaret Klen**, former headmistress of Penleigh Presbyterian Ladies College from 1969 to 1976. **Barbara Gay**. **Dr H Vincent Nursey**. **Bishop John Warwick Wilson**, Bishop of the Southern Region. **Peter Edward Andy**, recording executive for EMI, aged 83. **Phillip Gregory Molyneux** AM. **Harvey William James**, Guitarist, aged 58. **Geoffrey William Ainsworth**, former Captain of the Geelong Football Club and Geelong lawyer. **David C. Christensen**, treasurer of the Victorian Racing Club Committee until 2003. **Dr. John O'Brian**.

Joseph Anthony Peter Welch, died after two weeks in intensive care in Bangkok following a drowning accident in Koh Pangyang, aged 19. **Archibald John McKellar**, businessman. **Professor Roger Wales**, former LaTrobe University Dean. **Dr. Robert Marshall**. **Angus Logan Haygarth**. **John Dohrmann**.

An unknown 41-year-old Mount Isa woman died after her vehicle was swept into a river at Floraville, 70 kilometres east of Burktown during heavy flooding in the area. There have been more than 35 such flood related deaths in Queensland and Victoria since the end of November, including an 11 year old Victorian boy who disappeared in a swollen river.

In February 2011, **Flight Lieutenant Henry 'Lacy' Smith's** entombed body was recovered after his Spitfire disappeared into the River Orne, France on June 11, 1944, to be buried at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Ranville, in Normandy. His plane will come to Melbourne's Point Cook RAAF Museum.

Elizabeth Beresford, London, children's author and creator of 'the Wombles' was made an MBE in



The Governor's Speech, December 2010.

1998 remarking 'The Queen is a mad Womble fan.' The Wombles books, popular in the 1970's, were inspired by her daughter during a walk on Wimbledon Common, aged 84.

Dennis Dutton, American philosopher and critic, aged 66, in New Zealand battling prostate cancer, PhD from the University of California, moved to the University of Canterbury in 1984 and soon launched the renowned Arts & Letters Daily website. **Richard Charles Albert Holbrooke**, aged 69, U.S. diplomat. **Carlos Andres Perez**, former Venezuelan President, aged 88. **Blake Edwards**, U.S. filmmaker, most notably the director of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The Pink Panther*, aged 88. **Barry Zorthian**, U.S. spokesman in Saigon during the Vietnam War, aged 90.

Dick King-Smith, British children's author who's works included the 1983 book *The Sheep-Pig* which spawned the iconic 1995 Australian film *Babe*, aged 88. **Robert Sargent Shriver**, U.S. politician and public servant who started the Peace Corps and worked with presidents **John Kennedy** and **Lyndon Johnson**, aged 95. **John Barry**, five-time Oscar winning composer for scores including *Born Free*, *Out of Africa*, *Dances with Wolves*, and the enduring music from the James Bond films, died of a heart attack in New York, aged 77.



The Honourable Matthew Guy, MLC, Minister for Planning, and part of a busy team.

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