

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

6th January 2012



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BRIMBANK

BACKYARD BLITZ ON ILLEGAL FIRES

Brimbank Leader—6th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/backyard-blitz-on-illegal-fires-fbready/>

Fire authorities have joined forces in a bid to combat dangerous backyard fires as summer weather reaches boiling point.

The CFA and Metropolitan Fire Brigade have warned that illegal backyard fires would not be tolerated, with temperatures reaching the mid-30s over the past week.

CFA deputy chief officer Alan Ellis warned that residents who lit backyard fires or let off fireworks after New Year's Eve without authorisation would be caught.

"The main thing for us is any illegal fireworks," Mr Ellis said.

"They're a concern not only from a fire point of view, but also from a public safety point of view."

MFB deputy chief officer David Bruce said residents could keep themselves safe by taking simple precautions.

"We're just urging residents to take care, as fires or pyrotechnics can be dangerous," Mr Bruce said.

Several Brimbank suburbs have streets that been identified as MFB high fire-risk zones, including Albion, Ardeer, Cairnlea, Kealba, Keilor, Keilor Downs, Sunshine North and Taylors Lakes.

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PUBLIC WORK AWARDED

Brimbank Leader—5th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/public-work-awarded-fbready/>

Ten Brimbank residents won multiculturalism awards last month for their contributions to Victoria's diverse community.

About 170 recipients took part in the Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence at Government House, hosted by Victorian Governor Alex Chernov.

Victorian Multicultural Commission chairman Chin Tan congratulated recipients and praised their contribution to Victoria's "successful and harmonious multicultural community".

Those who received the Meritorious Service to the Community Awards were: Nedeljko Mijatovic (Deer Park), Tamara Cieciva (Brooklyn) and Milan Ogrizek, Lydia John and Michael Stirkul (St Albans).

Vesna Miocevic, Mary Vella and Anoranzas Multicultural Seniors Group from West Sunshine were also awarded for their involvement in the community.

Joseph Haweil (Keilor Downs) and Norma Serrano (North Sunshine) won the Service Delivery to Multicultural Victoria Award.

FIRMS LAND RAIL LINK CONTRACT

Brimbank Leader—3rd January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/firms-land-rail-link-contract-fbready/>

The contract for the \$885 million Footscray to Deer Park section of Regional Rail Link has been awarded to a consortium.

Thiess, Balfour Beatty, Parson Brinckerhoff and SKM will lay 7.5km of new track.

They will build a new station at West Footscray and upgrade Footscray, Sunshine and Tottenham stations.

Work on the West Footscray station will include a pedestrian overpass and more car parking.

Sunshine and Footscray stations will get new platforms and new station forecourts.

More parking has been slated as part of improvements to be made to Tottenham station.

The consortium will also build new rail bridges, construct road/rail separations at level crossings at Anderson Rd, Sunshine, and improvement works to crossings at Fitzgerald Rd, Ardeer and Mt Derrimut Rd, Deer Park.

Work on the project is expected to begin early this year.

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PARAMEDICS BUSY AS MERCURY SOARS IN MELBOURNE

Brimbank Leader—2nd January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/paramedics-prepare-as-mercury-soars-in-melbourne/>

More than a dozen Victorians have been treated by paramedics for heat exposure today.

As the mercury nudges 40C Ambulance Victoria has issued a warning for people to stay safe.

Paramedic team manager Darren Murphy said a string of hot days always tested resources.

He particularly warned elderly people, children and people with heart conditions to take extra care in the heat.

Ambulance Victoria spokesman Paul Bentley said paramedics were yesterday called to a total of 10 heat exposure cases, and up until 3pm today they had been called to 13 cases of heat exposure.

"Paramedics have been called to dozens more people who collapsed in the heat," Mr Bentley said.

Until 3pm paramedics were called to 34 cases of people who fainted in the Melbourne metropolitan region.

"Paramedics have also been called to two cases of children locked in cars - one at Mornington, the other at Rye," he said.

Over a two hour period on New Year 's Eve (between 10.15pm-12.15am) ambulances were also called to six incidents involving fireworks, at Tarneit, Preston, Frankston North, Rye, Caulfield and Inverloch.

Earlier report 12.44pm: PARAMEDICS are preparing for a busy few days as temperatures soar for a second day.

Paramedics are preparing for a busy few days as temperatures soar for a second day.

After peaking at 36C yesterday, temperatures are expected to hit 40C today and reach 37C tomorrow.

The mercury was already hovering around 36C at noon.

Paramedic team manager Darren Murphy said a string of hot days always pushed resources.

"On a day like today, Ambulance Victoria would attend to a number of cases from headaches to people being unconscious," Mr Murphy said.

"Isolated hot days are okay, but as the days climb on top of each other you have to be mindful of the heat."

Mr Murphy warned of the risks to elderly people, people with heart conditions and young children.

He said people should consume more water (up to 2-3 litres), slather on the sunscreen and stay out of the sun in the middle of the day.

He said people who wanted to exercise should wait until after dark, and drivers should not leave children or pets in cars.

Over the past four days, ambulance officers have attended four callouts for children locked in cars.

"Over the past two months we have attended as many as nine a day," Mr Murphy said.

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“For people who have elderly family members or neighbours, they should check if they are okay.”

Paramedics have today treated two people for heat exposure, including a 15-year-old boy in Brunswick West and a 100-year-old woman in Avondale Heights.

A sticky night is expected with a low of 25C forecast, before the mercury soars to 37C tomorrow.

Temperatures will drop to 25C on Wednesday and stay in the mid to high 20s for the rest of the week.

NEVER TOO OLD TO TAKE THE PLUNGE

Brimbank Leader—2nd January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/never-too-old-to-take-the-plunge/>

For most 83-year-olds, plunging 3000m (10,000ft) from a plane is enough to make them weak at the knees.

But daredevil Kam Burian will make the death-defying dive to raise money for people with intellectual disabilities.

Mr Burian said the tandem parachute jump was an easy feat compared with growing up in the Czech Republic during German occupation, and having three open heart surgeries.

“I risked my life to leave my country and come to Australia in 1949,” Mr Burian said. “My father was forced into a concentration camp and it was extremely traumatic when the Germans marched into Prague.”

He said it was his past that gave him the strength to try the terrifying. It will be his third jump at the Sky Festival at the Melbourne Sky Diving Centre in Lilydale on February 26.

He said a close friend, who died in 2009, had been a keen skydiver and inspired him to take the leap for charity.

“The first time I was excited but was not nervous because I have no fear of heights,” he said.

“You free-fall for about 30 seconds and then float for about six minutes before you touch down.”

Mr Burian has raised more than \$10,000 for Alkira in Box Hill since his first sky dive effort. The organisation cares for more than 160 people with intellectual disabilities.

Mr Burian said his brother-in-law, who had a muscular deficiency, attended the centre for 20 years until he died in 1994.

He is also the foster grandfather for another Alkira client, Nicole.

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HOBSONS BAY

STATION SCULPTURE TRASHED IN DAYS

Hobsons Bay Leader—4th January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/trashed-in-days/>

Vandals have damaged an \$80,000 sculpture created to beautify Laverton Station just days after it was installed.

The 4.5m high green balloon-like sculpture by artist Grant Finck was installed at the station entrance last month, but had already had graffiti scratched into its surface at its unveiling four days later.

The sculpture, titled Reunion, was funded by the Department of Transport in 2009 after Laverton was chosen as one of three metropolitan stations to be enhanced.

Finck said he had been back to Laverton to repair the sculpture twice already and while he knew public art might be damaged, he was still extremely disappointed.

"I was hoping it would have lasted a bit longer before someone had a go at it," Finck said. "It's not just an object, it's my blood, sweat and tears."

Finck said while not all appreciated public art, the project was to show the community their leaders wanted to improve the area, something residents acknowledged while he was repairing the sculpture.

"The overwhelming response from people walking past was how disappointed they were someone had vandalised it," Finck said.

In November, vandals damaged a bronze sculpture of a walking figure at McCormack Park, Laverton, installed as part of Hobsons Bay Council's Linking Laverton initiative and also funded by the Department of Transport.

Council director of planning and environment Peter Gaschk said he believed the incidents to be isolated and that there were no plans to relocate the artwork.

Laverton Sen-Sgt Keith Kissack said a number of youths were seen damaging the sculpture at 12.30am on December 15 and police were investigating.



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HOBSONS BAY LIBRARY LAUNCHES SUMMER PROGRAM

Hobsons Bay Leader—4th January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/hobsons-bay-library-launches-summer-program/>

Library patrons in Hobsons Bay will be able to check out music, competitions, craft and even reptiles with their library books this summer.

Hobsons Bay libraries will hold summer school holiday activities including wildlife and reptile displays, children's writing workshops and craft activities, story times, children's music and dance performances and Chinese New Year celebrations.

Patrons can also take part in The Friends of Williamstown and Newport Libraries Summer Writing Competition and the Summer Reading Club.

Also on offer is a chance for young library users to read away any fines on their library cards.

Until January 31 readers aged up to 18 can take \$1 off their outstanding library fines for each half hour they read at any Hobsons Bay library.

Participants can register at their library branch and continue to read any book, magazine or graphic novel they choose for as long as they'd like to reduce or eliminate their fines.

DINO SHOW AT SCIENCEWORKS

Hobsons Bay Leader—3rd January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/dino-show-at-scienceworks/>

Dinosaurs have taken over Scienceworks this school holidays.

The Scratch The Surface program provides a host of dino-themed activities from now until February 5.

Attractions include live shows, hands-on workshops, puppet-making and fossil examinations.

At the experiment zone children can learn what it would be like to be a palaeontologist, while Dinosaur Detectives is an interactive live 20-minute show.

Frozen Moments allows children to touch actual fossils. All activities are included in the price of admission.

Scienceworks is at 2 Booker St, Spotswood, and opens daily from 10am to 4.30pm.

STORMS RAIN ON DAY AT BAY

Hobsons Bay Leader—3rd January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/storms-rain-on-day-at-bay/>

The Christmas Day storms that battered Melbourne left Hobsons Bay relatively unscathed but tainted water quality at Williamstown beach.

The storms dumped 43.6mm of rain on Laverton by 9am on Boxing Day but SES unit controller Craig MacCallum said they were only called out to five homes with leaking roofs in Newport and Williamstown.

However, the rain affected water quality at Williamstown beach with high levels of bacteria prompting the EPA to recommend swimmers steer clear.

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Tests on December 27 found Williamstown beach had 1500 enterococci bacteria organisms per 100ml, greater than the 400 organisms per 100ml trigger level for poor water quality.

Altona and Werribee South beaches were initially forecast to be poor quality, but were revised to fair after testing. Levels of enterococci bacteria - found in the intestinal tracts of warm-blooded animals - are used to indicate water quality, with elevated levels a sign of possible faecal contamination.

EPA spokesman Simon Frost said storms affected water quality by washing rubbish, cigarette butts and dog droppings into waterways but it was generally a short-term problem.

"After 24-48 hours of fine weather and sunlight the water quality will improve," Mr Frost said.

"Given the hot, dry weather predicted for later in the week and over the weekend, we would expect the water quality to return to normal."

By Friday, December 30 Williamstown had returned to a fair rating and Altona and Werribee South were listed as good.

Mr Frost urged beachgoers to use common sense when deciding where to swim after a storm and check the water quality.

MARIBRYNONG

SWIM LESSONS SPRUIKED IN MARIBYRNONG

Maribyrnong Leader— 4th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/swim-lessons-spruiked-in-maribyrnong/>

Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Nicholas Kotsiras was at the Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre today encouraging families to sign their children up for half price swim lessons as part of the VICSWIM Summers Kidz program.

Mr Kotsiras said the VICSWIM program was tailored to reach out to community members who may not be accessing swimming lessons.

Life Saving Victoria statistics reveal 80 per cent of people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities cannot swim.

"It is important all parents encourage their children to learn how to swim as it may one day save their lives," he said.

The Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre is one of 12 metropolitan, 70 regional and nine open water venues around Victoria taking part in the State Government's \$1.6 million program which will run the half-price learn-to-swim program from January 9-27.

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ROXON RETURNS TO LAW

Maribyrnong Leader—4th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/roxon-returns-to-law-fbready/>

Back in her local electorate of Gellibrand last month, new Attorney-General and federal Labor MP Nicola Roxon said she was excited, honoured and also nervous about her new role.

She is the first woman in the 111-year history of the Australian parliament to hold the position.

“This is a new challenge for me and ... it’s a very exciting challenge,” she said.

Ms Roxon was a lawyer before being elected to parliament.

She also worked for Australia’s first female Justice of the High Court, Mary Gaudron. “I started my working life as a lawyer and it’s wonderful to be returning again to the law,” she said.

“I will be making sure our laws work well and our courts provide access to those who need it and can’t be misused by those who have money at the expense of those who don’t,” she said.

But Ms Roxon said her new role would not take her away from the west. “If anything, this will give me an opportunity to be here even more because a lot of the work of the Attorney-General can be done anywhere,” she said.

“I’m always very committed to the local area and do make that a priority.”

As a federal minister and local MP, Ms Roxon said the local area informed her in her national role.

But, as Attorney-General, she had to look at the whole country’s needs.

“But there’s no way that I will forget the needs of western Melbourne in doing that,” she said.

FLOATING AND FUN AT MARIBYRNONG

Maribyrnong Leader—3rd January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/floating-and-fun-at-maribyrnong/>

Maribyrnong residents are making a splash with the mercury on the rise.

Essendon youngsters Meg, 7, and Ryan, 8, lapped up the fun at Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre before the crowds rushed in.

The centre has a range of water activities until January 21, including the popular pool inflatables.

On Friday, January 13 and 20, the pool will be open from 7.30-9.30pm with the Giant Inflatable and free floating toys. On Saturday, January 14 and 21, the centre will open its doors from 2.30-5.30pm with BifBash and free floating again.

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MELTON

MELTON PIPELINE COMPLETED

Melton Leader—6th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/melton-pipeline-completed/>

Drinking water has been secured for the growing suburbs of Melton South and Toolern, Western Water says.

The authority has finished building a new \$2.4 million, 1.3km-long water main.

As an extension of the Coburns Rd water main, the new main now extends to the southern end of Rees Rd.

Western Water managing director John Wilkinson said with 50,000 people expected to be living in Toolern by 2030, the company was planning ahead.

“This pipeline is one of a range of projects under way around Melton to ensure we can cater to the region’s growing population over the next 50 years,” he said.

“When the first residents start moving into Toolern next year, they will be living in one of Australia’s most sustainable suburbs when it comes to water management.”

Mr Wilkinson said every home would have recycled water for outdoor and toilet use.

“This will significantly decrease the amount of drinking water used by Toolern residents, saving up to 2800 million litres of drinking water a year,” he said.

Toolern’s stormwater will also be harvested to be treated and re-used for irrigation. “These measures will create a water neutral suburb, where the amount

of stormwater harvested will roughly equal the amount of drinking water used,” Mr Wilkinson said.

He said the project was completed on time, despite having to tunnel under a railway line and through a busy roundabout without disturbing trains or traffic.

PUBLIC SAFETY FOCUS FOR MELTON CRIME UNIT'S NEW HEAD

Melton Leader—6th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/public-safety-focus-for-melton-crime-units-new-head/>

There is a new crime-solving chief in Melton - and he’s on a mission.

Detective Sen-Sgt Barry Jenks will become Melton’s third criminal investigation unit boss, taking over from Detective Sen-Sgt Paul Cassidy, who retired last month after 13 years as head of Melton CIU.

Transferring from Sunbury, where he oversaw the uniform branch, Sen-Sgt Jenks has been in the force for almost 30 years working for the homicide squad, Sunshine CIU and the detective training school. He has also worked as a police officer in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

“My, or should I say our, aim is to work towards reducing the number of assaults in our area so that residents of Melton, Caroline Springs, Rockbank, Toolern Vale, Hillside and Diggers Rest feel safe - and are safe,” he said.

He also wants to reduce family violence and “volume crime” such as theft from vehicles.

“One of the great challenges for police in this area is rapid population growth and an ever changing cultural demographic,” he said.

“We will work hard to form partnerships with cultural groups who are new to the area.”

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COPS PRAISE MELTON DRIVERS

Melton Leader—6th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/cops-praise-melton-drivers/>

Melton Shire has enjoyed a fatality-free Christmas break to end the year on a positive note.

The fatality-free Christmas comes after seven deaths on Melton Shire roads this year.

There have also been 177 collisions involving injury.

Melton Highway Patrol officer-in-charge Sgt Steve Phillips said Christmas was quiet on the shire's roads, with the vast majority of drivers well behaved.

No vehicles were impounded and no serious accidents were reported.

A booze bus was set up in Melton on Christmas Day, testing 343 drivers for alcohol and drugs.

One woman was caught drink-driving; another was detected for drugs; and a male driver had a vehicle defect notice issued.

However, the booze bus operation was cut short because of the Christmas Day storms.

Sgt Phillips said there were only two reported accidents in the shire from December 23-28.

On Christmas Eve, a vehicle travelling along Blackdog Drive, Brookfield, was sideswiped by a tailgating vehicle, which sped off.

On December 27, a female driver was injured when she crashed into a road sign on Coburns Rd. It is believed a medical condition may have caused the second accident.

Sgt Phillips said the results were generally positive but warned drivers police would still be out in force after the new year.

"While the results were positive compared to other areas of the state, drivers should remain vigilant during the remainder of the school-holiday period," he said.

MELTON BLOWS GROG LIMIT

Melton Leader—5th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/melton-blows-grog-limit/>

Melton residents are at serious risk of becoming binge drinkers, a new report shows.

The Melbourne University and VicHealth study shows Victorian residents with eight or more takeaway alcohol outlets within 1km of home were twice as likely to binge drink.

Melton has 21 takeaway alcohol outlets in the town, more than any other Melbourne suburb outside the CBD.

Researcher Prof Anne Kavanagh surveyed 2334 people from 21 council areas within 20km of the Melbourne CBD.

Prof Kavanagh found that, the more outlets a person had access too, the more likely they were to binge drink.

"Binge drinking can cause injuries, violence and accidents and drinking frequently over a long period is associated with heart disease, a number of cancers and liver disease," she said.

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"By reducing the volume of outlets around Victoria, we could make substantial inroads to reducing accidents and chronic diseases."

Melton Residents' Association president Peter Rowan said binge drinking was a concern in Melton, with more liquor outlets giving young people extra opportunities to drink and only increasing the town's alcohol problem.

"You only have to walk the streets or go to parks and you'll find empty alcohol cans and bottles littering the ground," Mr Rowan said.

But Melton police Insp Mario Fiorentino disagreed that Melton had a problem with too many liquor outlets.

"There is very little evidence from a police perspective based on current crimes statistics that our liquor outlets are operating outside the confines of the law and their licence," he said. "What the customer does with the liquor once they've purchased it is their responsibility."

VicHealth alcohol manager Brian Vandenberg said tightening alcohol licensing was warranted in Victoria. "It's time to give some control back to local communities who feel under siege by alcohol problems in their neighbourhood," he said.

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE FOUND IN MELTON LAKE

Melton Leader—5th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/blue-green-algae-found-in-melton-lake/>

Melbourne Water is advising people to avoid contact with Navan Park Lake in Melton West after the detection of blue-green algae.

Melbourne Water's Acting General Manager of Waterways, Phil Neville, said there were several forms of blue-green algae and the species present in Navan Park Lake could be harmful to animals or humans.

"People should avoid contact with the water and make sure that it does not come into contact with their skin or eyes," Mr Neville said.

"Pet owners are advised to take similar precautions and keep their animals from entering the water or from drinking it."

Mr Neville said people should avoid eating fish from the lake during the outbreak and for three weeks after the bloom has cleared.

"We will be sampling the water regularly and keeping a close watch on the problem," Mr Neville said.

"Signs have been erected around the lake to warn people of the potential hazards."

Melbourne Water is working with Melton Council, the EPA, Department of Health, Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) to manage the algae bloom.

Blue-green algae occurs naturally in waterways and erupts into blooms during hot weather, periods of drought, or where there is an accumulation of nutrients in waterways or water bodies.

FUNDING CUT SETBACK FOR MELTON JOB SEEKERS

Melton Leader—4th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/funding-cut-setback-for-melton-job-seekers/>

Melton Council says job seekers will continue to struggle to find work after funding for the Suburban Jobs Program was slashed.

The federally funded program improves access to employment for residents in the outer suburbs, specifically growth councils.

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As part of the 2011-12 Budget, the Federal Government pledged \$100 million towards the program.

But Melton Council claims more than 50 per cent of those funds have been diverted to other programs, reducing the initial allocation to \$45 million.

The Suburban Jobs Program website confirms funding for the program is now set at \$45 million.

Melton Mayor Justin Mammarella said he was disappointed with the funding cut.

"As a growth area, our shire plays a critical role in accommodating growth in metropolitan areas, but we're not equitably equipped with public transport, social infrastructure, services, and employment opportunities to adequately support this growth," he said.

Cr Mammarella said although the funds were not sufficient to tackle the issue, it was a good start.

"It demonstrated what was possible, and was very much appreciated by growth areas, including our shire," he said.

"We urge the Federal Government to reconsider this funding cut to avoid worsening the gap between metropolitan and growth areas."

The decision comes as Melton's unemployment rate soars.

There were 3715 unemployed people in the municipality in the September 2011 quarter, 214 more than the June quarter.

The shire's unemployment rate rose 0.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent in that period - the second consecutive quarterly rise.

The unemployment rate was well ahead of Melbourne, up 0.1 per cent to 4.9 per cent.

DISQUIET OVER MELTON LIBRARY LOCATION

Melton Leader—4th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/disquiet-over-melton-library-location/>

A Melton ratepayer has criticised the location of the town's new \$19 million library.

While welcoming the decision to build a new library, Martin Newell said using the same location as the old McKenzie St library was ill-considered.

"A feature of the plan is a giant north-facing window that will trap heat in summer and lose heat in winter," he said. "Another feature is that the main view will be of the public toilets and the Dumpmaster at IGA."

Mr Newell suggested that the new library should have faced east over the park opposite the Civic Centre.

Melton councillor Sophie Ramsey said public consultation should have played a greater part in the scheme.

"When we first contemplated a new library we wanted public consultation to find a suitable location," she said.

Cr Ramsey said councillors suggested two other sites - land next to the youth facility on Barries Rd and the police paddock across from the Civic Centre.

"These were both ideal sites, both were being serviced by public transport, and both are greenfield sites and not encumbered by neighbours," she said.

Cr Ramsey said the present site had a number of restrictions which played a part in the design of the new library.

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"We were told by the council more than two years ago that public consultation was not warranted for the project and that the new library would be build on the current site," she said.

Cr Ramsey said that, while she was happy with some parts of the new library, its location was of concern.

"It's going to be environmentally sustainable, world class, and an icon for the township of Melton," she said.

"But there should have been public consultation to exhaust all options so we could find the best outcome."

BEATING THE BULGE IN MELTON

Melton Leader—4th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/beating-the-bulge-in-melton/>

Personal trainer Sarah Pfeiffer has her sights set on tackling childhood obesity in Melton.

The fully qualified part-time trainer and supermarket worker will launch a boot camp for kids aged four to 12 later this month to help beat the bulge.

"Working in a supermarket, I see our shopping habits and kids really don't have a choice in what they eat, they eat what they are given," she said.

"I want to get kids back outside and off their butts and show them being healthy and active is not hard, but can be fun as well."

Session will be made up of team games, circuits, balance games, throwing, catching and a lot of fun.

Starting on Tuesday, January 24 at Hannah Watts Park, the boot camp will run for five weeks at a cost of \$60 for one weekly session or \$100 for two sessions a week.

For more information, phone Ms Pfeiffer on 0426 870 158 or email sarahpfeiffer333@hotmail.com.

MOORABOOL'S SUMMER'S HOT SPOTS SET TO SHINE

Melton Leader—4th January 2011

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/moorabools-summers-hot-spots-set-to-shine/>

Rangers around Moorabool say they expect to welcome thousands of visitors to parks this summer.

Parks Victoria regional manager Kate Millar said parks in the region were looking fantastic after a winter of higher than average rainfall.

"Parks are great destinations for people looking to get out and get healthy over summer," Ms Millar said.

"Visitors can explore many great places such as Macedon Regional Park, Lerderderg State Park and the Brisbane Ranges National Park to see nature at its best.

"There are many great parks nearby offering camping, fishing, dog walking, bike riding, bushwalking, rock climbing, abseiling and wildlife watching."

Ms Millar said the Parks Victoria website offered a wealth of information for visitors to research their trip and check the latest conditions before they went.

"We encourage people to plan their trip to ensure a safe and enjoyable holiday," she said.

"Some areas in flood-affected parks are still closed for repairs, including sections of the Anakie Gorge Walk and Burchell Trail in the Brisbane Ranges.

"There are also great places for day visits across the state and Parks Victoria's new website allows people to put in their address and find the parks around them."

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Tips to help enjoy your visit: choose your walks and activities to match your abilities, stamina and fitness. Check weather forecasts and warnings with the Bureau of Meteorology. Check the latest conditions before you leave on the Parks Victoria website. Be sun smart. Pack plenty of water and protective clothing to shield you from the rays. IN an emergency, dial 000 to access police and emergency services.

For a list of licensed tour operators and to check the latest conditions visit parks.vic.gov.au or phone 131 963.

COME CLEAN ON FLUORIDE, WESTERN WATER URGED

Melton Leader—3rd January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/come-clean-on-fluoride-western-water-urged/>

Western Water has defended the absence of fluoride in Melton and Moorabool's drinking water for the past seven months.

Early last year, Western Water said it decided to progressively switch its drinking water supply in these areas from Melbourne to Merrimu Reservoir. Customers were informed about the change in February, but were not told about the absence of fluoride.

Western Water managing director John Wilkinson said the lack of fluoride arose because the Merrimu water filtration did not meet stringent new Department of Health guidelines.

Work started in November to upgrade the fluoridation facilities and Melton and Moorabool customers are expected to get fluoridated water within the next two months, he said.

Mr Wilkinson said the absence of fluoride for the past seven months would have minimal health effects.

"Fluoride is retained in teeth and bones and stored by the body, so a relatively short period of time without fluoride in the drinking water would have minimal impact, as long as people are practising good dental health," Mr Wilkinson said.

"Western Water strongly supports fluoridation of our drinking water supplies and at no time have we considered ceasing fluoridation of water supplied to our customers."

Moorabool Mayor Pat Griffin said he was disappointed that the shire was not told about the absence of fluoride.

"It's taken seven months before we found it and I think it does warrant an investigation," Cr Griffin said.

"If people had known about the removal of fluoride, they could have investigated other options."

Djerriwarrh Health Services chief executive Bruce Marshall said drinking water containing fluoride helped oral health.

"Fluoride in the water is especially beneficial," Mr Marshall said.

Melton state Labor MP Don Nardella said fluoridation was "absolutely essential" and clients should have been informed earlier.

The Department of Human Services said water fluoridation helped protect teeth against decay for people of all ages.

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MOONEE VALLEY

NIDDRIE: HOPING FOR TRADE

Moonee Valley Leader— 6th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/niddrie-hoping-for-trade-1/>

Local traders are hoping for an increase in consumer spending in 2012, after a quieter than usual Christmas sales period.

Niddrie Traders Association spokeswoman Noella Jacobs said sales were lower over Christmas, but she was hoping shoppers would become more confident to spend money in the New Year.

“Trade was definitely down in some of the areas, I wouldn’t say all areas, but definitely some areas,” Ms Jacobs said.

“Shoppers are still spending but their purchases aren’t as much as they used to be. The shopping basket is not as big.”

Ms Jacobs said they hoped shoppers would think more positively about the local economy and make the most out of interest rates being down.

Moonee Ponds Chamber of Commerce president Olga Kenny said retailers had a hard 2011, but local trade finished on a positive note.

“December started slowly but the last two weeks of December trading picked up,” she said.

Figures are not released for Essendon’s Direct Factory Outlet until mid-January but duty manager Joe D’Agostino said the centre was “flat out” on Boxing Day.

“Everyone just came down. It’s like a grand final here,” he said. “I think people are spending more wisely.”

Mr D’Agostino said fashion stores such as Polo Ralph Lauren, Oroton and G-Star Raw attracted the biggest queues.

At Westfield Airport West, Bevilles Jeweller assistant manager Carly Mehfeld said that while it seemed quieter than usual, the store was kept busy before Christmas.

“It was pretty busy at the start of December. Boxing Day was pretty good as well,” she said

Highpoint Shopping Centre had 1.3 million customers from the start of December until Boxing Day.

STRATHMORE KIDS POOL THEIR TALENT IN FLIPPABALL

Moonee Valley Leader— 5th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/strathmore-kids-pool-their-talent-in-flippaball-1/>

Strathmore students are making waves this summer as they dive into the world of water polo.

About 70 students from Strathmore and Strathmore North primary schools have already been taking part in water polo activities at Oak Park Activity Centre during December.

The FlippaBall program is a joint initiative from YMCA Healthy Kids, Australian Sports Commission, Essendon Water Polo and Water Polo Victoria.

The after-school sessions are expected to expand to include other local schools in 2012.

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Australian Sports Commission regional co-ordinator Caron Williams said the aim was to offer another way of getting children, aged 6 to 12, in the pool.

The sessions are aimed at children aged six to 12.

CHURCHES CALL FOR TAX OVERHAUL

Moonee Valley Leader— 4th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/churches-call-for-tax-overhaul-1/>

Churches across the western suburbs have called on the Federal Government to do more to crack down on global tax evasion.

Representatives from the Uniting Churches presented petitions from 180 members to Maribyrnong federal Labor MP Bill Shorten's electorate office last month.

The signatories came from members of Essendon Uniting Church, St Albans Uniting Church and Sunshine Uniting Church and Holy Apostles Anglican Parish Braybrook.

Essendon's St John's Uniting Church Reverend Mark Dunn said they wanted to advocate a message based on justice.

"I fully believe that our democracy runs on the basis that we all pay our fair share," he said.

"It continues to disappoint and frustrate me that it seems clear (that) people are out there who are able to manipulate the system.

"This is a plea to government to say 'let's do more'."

Uniting Church of Australia director Mark Zirnsak said there was a need for more transparency to prevent corporations from dodging taxes by making profits in countries considered to be "tax havens".

He said these companies made massive amounts of profit and contributed to corruption and crime in developing countries.

Mr Zirnsak said the Australian Government should work on a multi-national level and have easier ways of tracking money movements.

"It is (about) having agreements in place and authorities will know where money is going," Mr Zirnsak said.

The petitions will be passed on to Mark Arbib, who has become the new Assistant Treasurer.

ROAD CLOSURE DELAYS IN FLEMINGTON

Moonee Valley Leader— 2nd January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/road-closure-delays-in-flemington/>

Traffic delays in the Flemington area will take hold this week when part of Mt Alexander Rd is closed for tram track separation.

Drivers and public transport users can expect disruptions when the road is closed between Victoria and Church streets for nine days from Friday.

The work, which started in October, is part of an \$8.7 million project aimed at reducing tram travel times.

Flemington Association president Kathryn Miller said pedestrians and tram commuters had already experienced minor delays.

She questioned what had been done to lessen the impact. Residents expected the situation to get worse when the road was closed.

"What we've been asking consistently is for evidence that the road diversions are going to work," she said.

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Ms Miller said residents were concerned city-bound drivers would cut through residential streets, because it was more convenient than turning at Ormond or Maribyrnong roads.

"It's such a big diversion that we don't see why people would take that route," Ms Miller said.

"It's going to be the residents of Flemington Hill who are going to be severely impacted."

VicRoads spokesman Damian Booth said traffic controllers would divert city-bound drivers onto Ormond Rd and north-bound drivers onto Racecourse Rd.

"Pedestrian access will be maintained and businesses along Mt Alexander Rd will be open for business as usual," Mr Booth said.

CityLink has also started 24-hour roadworks on the Tullamarine Freeway, outbound between Mt Alexander and Pascoe Vale roads. The work will finish on Sunday.

Mr Booth said access to CityLink from Flemington Rd would be open only to north-bound drivers while Mt Alexander Rd was closed.

Yarra Trams will replace trams on route 59 with buses between the Melrose St/Flemington Rd stop and the Essendon tram depot until January 14.

The transport project is expected to finish in April and will also include a new tram stop at Flemington Community Centre, new tracks and improved signals and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

HAIL HITS HARD IN MOONEE VALLEY

Moonee Valley Leader – 2nd January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/hail-hits-hardin-moonee-valley/>

Houses were flooded and roofs destroyed in the Christmas Day storm that wreaked havoc across Melbourne.

Essendon's State Emergency Service fielded 135 calls for help after hail and heavy rain swept across the state on Christmas Day.

Homes in Melbourne's northern suburbs were among those hit the hardest.

Essendon unit controller Sandra Faoro said most of the calls involved hailstone damage to skylights or roofs and flooding.

Some residents also experienced collapsed ceilings and broken tiles because of the heavy downpour.

Two units were dispatched around Moonee Valley and the volunteers had attended all requests by last Wednesday night.

"We had quite a few people who gave up their Christmas night and the next day and day after (to volunteer)," Ms Faoro said.

Airport West was the hardest hit with 25 calls for assistance, followed by 23 calls each from Essendon, Strathmore and Niddrie.

Ms Faoro said it was important for people to check and clear their gutters and drains, because blockages could cause a backflow of water into ceiling spaces.

The SES received more than 4000 calls from across the state on Christmas Day.

Mayor Jim Cusack said local roads were damaged and five manhole covers needed to be replaced.

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"There has also been a significant amount of silt and debris washed into drainage systems, as well as fallen tree branches obstructing roads and pathways," Cr Cusack said.

It will cost about \$30,000 to repair and clean drainage systems.

The Avondale Heights Library and Learning Centre had some minor roof tile damage and flooding in the computer room.

North Melbourne's Lost Dogs Home was inundated with 124 lost animals from the northern and western suburbs ending up at the shelter after the storm.

Operations general manager Sue Conroy urged people to check the shelter after only half the pets had been reunited with their owners by the middle of last week.

"Don't sit at home waiting for a phone call, actively seek out your dogs or cats," Ms Conroy said.

VANDALS ATTACK AVONDALE HEIGHTS AND EAST KEILOR

Moonee Valley Leader— 2nd January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/vandals-attack-homes-1/>

Vandals have attacked homes and cars in Avondale Heights and East Keilor during the Christmas period.

Up to 25 incidents have been reported to Moonee Valley police since December 20, mainly involving damage done at night in residential streets.

The crimes include houses and cars being egged and graffitied; vehicles being jumped on; rocks being thrown through car windows; tyres being punctured and slashed and side windows and windscreen wipers broken off.

Moonee Valley CIU Senior Constable Rachel Withers said police believed the incidents were connected.

"It's absolute vandalism for the sake of vandalism, which is disappointing," Sen-Constable Withers said.

"People are trying to enjoy their Christmas holidays and there's a lot of property damage."

Sen-Constable Withers said the crimes were not theft-related and police believed multiple offenders are involved.

She said they suspected youths were behind the spree, after five young people were seen jumping on a vehicle.

All of the incidents have occurred overnight, several between 1am and 3.30am.

Sen-Constable Withers has urged residents who have had similar incidents happen to report them, even if they are minor.

"If they could report it, it would give us a clear picture of where these offenders have been," she said.

FREE HOLIDAY FUN IN MOONEE VALLEY

Moonee Valley Leader— 2nd January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/i-spy-something-that-sounds-like-free-holiday-fun-1/>

Young explorers can become junior park rangers this summer.

Moonee Valley Council invites youngsters to join their free program, which promotes the importance of conservation.

A special kit is available to get children started. It includes binoculars, a magnifying glass and a checklist to find animals.

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Mayor Jim Cusack said the program would be a fun way for children to learn about local flora and fauna and spot native species such as ducks, water hens, cockatoos and rainbow lorikeets.

“The Junior Ranger program not only encourages children to get outdoors and enjoy themselves, but also tells them about plants and animals in Moonee Valley,” he said.

Kits are available at Oliver’s Garden Cafe, Queens Park, and Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds.

WYNDHAM

WERRIBEE POOL READY TO CELEBRATE

Wyndham Leader– 4th January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/splash-out-in-werribee/>

Splash out on some holiday fun at Werribee Outdoor Olympic Pool, which is celebrating 50 years.

From 10am to 4pm on Monday, January 9, the pool hosts an open day with free entry and activities such as face painting, pool inflatables and aqua balls as well as DJ Lazza and water safety education.

The pool is at Chirnside Park, Watton St, Werribee.

ZOO OPENS GATES ON SUMMER SAFARI

Wyndham Leader– 3rd January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/zoo-opens-gates-on-summer-safari/>

Check out the nocturnal habits of animals at Werribee Open Range Zoo this summer with extended opening hours until January 29.

Open Range, Open Late allows more families a chance to explore the zoo, with gates open until 7pm.

A range of children’s activities run from 4pm, including dancing, drum workshops and games.

The popular safari tours will also continue late, departing until 6pm daily for a spectacular lower savannah sunset experience.

The zoo is located on K Rd, Werribee South, off the Princes Freeway.

Tickets are \$25.40 for adults, with children under 16 free throughout the holidays.

WYNDHAM POOL FUNDS GETS KICK ALONG

Wyndham Leader– 3rd January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/wyndham-pool-funds-gets-kick-along/>

Plans for a \$61 million recreation and community hub in Hoppers Crossing have received a New Year boost.

The State Government announced it would contribute \$2.6 million towards the renovation of the Wyndham Aquatic Centre on Derrimut Rd. Wyndham Council plans for the aquatic centre include new water slides, a warm-water pool, a spa with ramped area, sauna and steam room, a gym, a bigger creche, children’s party rooms and a kiosk.

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The existing 50m pool will also be refurbished and a bigger learn-to-swim pool built, plus new family change rooms and new reception and administration areas. The entire project will involve the relocation of the library from Werribee Plaza to the Derrimut Rd site, the extension and renovation of the events centre and a new public piazza.

The centre has more than 540,000 visitors a year.

Cr Bob Fairclough said the funding was a good start for the project.

The council has also contacted the Regional Development Australia Fund, which, if successful, could fund up to a third of the total cost of the project.

Cr Fairclough said there would be no timeline on the upgrades until funding had been assured.

Cr Fairclough said last year the project needed at least \$20 million in state and federal funding.

ACROSS THE REGION

PLEA TO BACK AUSSIE PRODUCTS AS HEINZ STAFF SQUEEZED OUT OF THEIR JOBS

The Herald Sun—6th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/plea-to-back-aussie-products-as-shattered-heinz-staff-squeezed-out-of-their-jobs/story-fn7x8me2-1226237706610>

Gutted Heinz factory workers are going down fighting despite the latest killer blow to Australian manufacturing.

Most of the 146 workers turfed out of the international food giant's plant in Girgarre, northern Victoria, are determined to stay in the Goulburn Valley region.

A spirited community coalition, backed by a wealthy West Australian businessman, wants to buy back the abandoned factory and salvage some lost jobs.

The Heinz tomato sauce production line will stop rolling today after 22 years as operations shift to a larger New Zealand site to cut overheads.

Aussies will in future squirt meat pies, chips and steaks with Heinz sauce containing paste made mainly from Portuguese and Californian tomatoes.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union organiser Jason Hefford said the closure was another wake-up call for consumers.

"Unless we fight we are buggered. We need to look at labels carefully, even if it costs a bit more," he said.

Retrenched Jamie Robinson fears he will have to shift interstate to find a suitable job. He said the closure was devastating.

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"A lot of people have put up brick walls. Inside they are feeling a lot more hurt than they want to show on the outside."

Mr Robinson emblazoned his ute with the phrase "Outta Time" soon after the closure was announced in late May last year.

Goulburn Valley Food Co-operative chairman Les Cameron refused to write off hope of a revival, with the committee preparing to submit a second proposal to buy the Heinz plant. It wants to supply purely Australian-grown tomato paste and other products, and run a training centre.

Heinz Australia spokeswoman Jessica Ramsden said the Girgarre plant was small by global standards, and was one of five factories to close under a global productivity plan.

While she could not categorically rule out potentially sourcing ingredients from other countries including China, she denied this was the reason for moving production to New Zealand.

"It wasn't about wages or the Australian dollar or the carbon tax. The investment required to keep competitive was not feasible," Ms Ramsden said.

Employees had received outplacement support such as counselling and retraining, 10 staff had been awarded \$10,000 scholarships to pursue careers in new areas and 10ha of land would be donated for Girgarre community housing, a farmers' market expansion and annual music muster.

Worker Chris Lloyd said the shutdown was a far cry from the vision of an original site manager, who had named a road beside the factory Heinz Progress St.

"It's been a happy family there," Mr Lloyd said.

"I don't like to dwell on it or I get a bit teary."

Mr Hefford said many of the retrenched Heinz staff faced uncertain futures and the prospect of less secure positions with alternative employers.

"We are hopeful they will get work, but a lot will be in precarious situations," he said.

METRO ON TRACK TO BEAT THE HEAT

The Age—6th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/metro-on-track-to-beat-the-heat-20120105-1pmwi.html>

Metro is counting on cruising through the rest of summer without any heat-related train cancellations after fixing the air-conditioning on half its fleet.

The state government has spent \$18.7 million retrofitting its ageing fleet of Comeng trains so that they continue to run in temperatures up to 45 degrees. Previously the air-conditioning units on these trains failed at 36 degrees, which has caused mass cancellations on hot days. Metro contributed \$1.2 million to the upgrade of all 93 Comeng trains, which was completed in November and follows previous works on the train tracks to stop them buckling in the heat.

Melbourne's train network failed to cope with the hot summer of 2009, when almost 4000 metropolitan trains were cancelled due to heat in January and February.

The trains passed their first big test of the summer during Monday's 40-degree heat, when just one train was pulled from service because of malfunctioning air-conditioning.

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OUR HOSPITAL WAITING LIST PAIN WILL ONLY GET WORSE

The Herald Sun—6th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/hospital-waiting-list-pain-to-get-worse/story-fn7x8me2-1226237797257>

Hospital waiting lists will soar this year with the number of operations slashed by thousands and more than 4800 Victorians joining already blown-out queues.

More than 2100 sick children are among those who will be forced to wait.

The number of elective surgeries being carried out has been slashed under the funding agreements brokered between Health Minister David Davis and the state's hospitals.

Almost 9500 fewer operations are planned for 2011-12 compared to last year despite a growing and ageing population.

Among the worst hit will be patients at the Royal Children's Hospital, where the waiting lists for surgery will more than double despite the opening of the new \$1 billion centre - rising from 1700 last year to 3850 by mid-2012.

Concerned doctors warned the waiting list blowouts and surgery cutbacks would leave patients suffering from pain and disability waiting for essential surgery.

"Hospitals should be performing more elective surgery - not less," Australian Medical Association Victoria President Dr Harry Hemley said.

The AMA warned that waiting lists could also increase even further than the targets, as happened last financial year in many Victorian hospitals.

Dr Hemley welcomed a long overdue increase in funding to the state's hospitals, but urged the Government to reveal where and when its promised 100 beds will be delivered.

"There simply aren't enough beds in Victoria's health system to treat those in need," he said.

The Statement of Priorities - which outlines the funding and performance targets negotiated between individual health services and the State Government - was quietly put up on the Department of Health website without any fanfare over the Christmas-New Year break.

It shows Melbourne hospital waiting lists topping 37,475 this year, with the number of elective surgeries performed dropping from 128,592 last year to 120,801 in 2011-12.

It is a similar story in regional Victoria, where waiting lists will climb by more than 1200 to 7015, and the number of elective surgeries undertaken has been slashed from 23,859 operations to 22,215.

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews said hospitals had been forced to cut the number of surgeries in the face of funding shortfalls forced by Premier Ted Baillieu.

"Mr Baillieu is happy to walk around taking credit for the new children's hospital Labor built, but when it comes to doing the hard work of delivering better care for our kids he is nowhere to be seen," he said.

"When hospitals cut elective surgery, you know the health system is critically underfunded.

"It confirms what health professionals have been saying - Victoria's hospital system has never been as bad as this. And it will only get worse if Mr Baillieu has his way in the nurses' dispute and cuts a further \$100 million from the health budget each year."

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Mr Davis' spokesman said the Government was investing a record amount in health, but would not comment directly on the Statement of Priorities.

"The Baillieu Government was investing a record \$13 billion in health services this year through the 2011 State Budget, an increase of \$725 million from Labor's last budget," he said.

OPPOSITION ATTACKS NUMBER OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES

The Herald Sun—6th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/opposition-attacks-number-of-federal-government-inquiries/story-fn7x8me2-1226237697581>

The Federal Government is suffering "paralysis by analysis" after ordering more than 250 reviews, discussion papers, inquiries and advisory boards in two years, the Opposition says.

Everything from the Fair Work Act to the Australian Independent Screen Production Sector has been subject to a review or an inquiry.

AusAID and cyber crime are subject to more than one review, there have been two media inquiries and a much-touted review of school funding arrangements was handed to the Government last month and is due for release soon.

New Workplace Relations Minister Bill Shorten tops the list of ministers who have announced reviews, inquiries, discussion papers and advisory boards with 18 investigations in two years.

Mr Shorten's matters for examination include a Fair Work Act review, advisory bodies for the retail sector and a national injury insurance scheme.

He has also looked at what other economies are doing on climate change, disaster insurance policies, regulation of airport services and a consultation paper on reducing red tape.

"To paraphrase Steven Spielberg - when you listen you learn, you absorb ideas, and you become better at your job than when you are just trying to be listened to all the time," Mr Shorten said.

"That is why I have spent plenty of time listening to people with a disability and their families, listening to victims of scallywag financial planners, to baby boomers who want secure retirement savings and to families who have been confused by flood insurance policies."

The Coalition's waste watch committee spokesman Jamie Briggs said the Government was spinning its wheels with reviews and inquiries.

"If we thought the number of reviews under Kevin Rudd was bad, we now know it's a lot worse under Julia Gillard and would be even worse under a prime minister Bill Shorten," he said.

"Whilst there are at times valid reasons for inquiries and reviews, the fact the Government have launched so many is demonstrative proof of the Government's dysfunction.

"This Government, captive of the Greens, finds it easier to announce reviews rather than undertake action."

Mr Shorten said all his examinations were essential. A spokesman for Ms Gillard also defended the number of reviews and inquiries.

"The Government makes no apologies for seeking stakeholder, expert and community input on these matters," Mr Shorten said.

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50 DETAINEE COMPLAINTS BUT JUST ONE REPRIMAND AT MARIBYRNONG

The Herald Sun—6th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/detainee-complaints-but-just-one-reprimand-at-maribyrnong/story-fn7x8me2-1226237748291>

Only one staff member at Melbourne's Maribyrnong Detention Centre has been disciplined in 15 months, despite almost 50 complaints against staff.

Centre operator Serco Australia said many allegations had been found to be unsubstantiated.

The Herald Sun this week revealed complaints of abuse and mistreatment by staff accounted for nearly a quarter of the 187 grievances lodged at the centre in the 15 months to March 25 last year.

Few details of complaints against staff were provided in documents released under Freedom of Information. But they included complaints of bullying, threats, intimidation, discrimination, racism and abuse.

One detainee claimed he was subjected to a "kind of torture" when he was not allowed out of a car for a cigarette, coffee or food break on a three-hour city tour.

He said he suffered a painful back and backside and a headache.

"My back got sore and I lost feeling (in) my ass (sic) my head started paining," he said.

In another case, a member of the public complained of "inappropriate behaviour" by a Serco escort taking a detainee to hospital.

A Serco spokesman said it took its duty of care very seriously and complaints were properly investigated.

"Where appropriate, action is taken, and the complainant is advised formally of the outcome in each case.

"Complaints can often be resolved quickly (and) in many cases allegations are investigated and found not to be substantiated," he said.

"However, we do not tolerate misconduct and where it is found to have occurred, we will take appropriate action."

Other common complaints included delayed or inadequate medical treatment; lack of internet access; and poor quality or inadequate food.

Others said some ethnic groups were discriminated against and given less food.

Complaints against fellow detainees related to fights, racism, threats, screaming at night, and "inappropriate" touching.

Other gripes included overcrowding; lack of privacy; poor maintenance, hygiene and cleaning; lack of cash to buy from the centre's shop; missing and broken equipment; and problems concerning visits.

Last month Serco, along with the immigration department and International Health and Medical Services, were told they had a "greater than normal duty of care" for detainees after being strongly criticised by a NSW coroner over three suicides at Sydney's Villawood detention centre

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VICTORIA'S NEW ESTATES WIN IN NBN ROLLOUT

The Age—5th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/it-pro/government-it/victorias-new-estates-win-in-nbn-rollout-20120104-1pl69.html>

More housing estates in Victoria will be fitted with high speed broadband this year than in any other state, according to a rollout schedule recently released by NBN Co.

At least 49 new estates across Victoria's metropolitan and regional areas will be fitted with fibre-optic cable, compared with 42 estates in New South Wales and 20 in Queensland.

Government-owned NBN Co will install fibre in these estates - known as "Greenfields" - free of charge and much earlier than in planned rollout sites such as South Morang, Bacchus Marsh and Tullamarine.

This means thousands of households will be using NBN Co's fibre within months, some as early as February, with 4636 premises in Greenfield estates to be connected this year. These houses will not have access to any other fixed telecommunications. Locations include The Chase in Alfredton, Highlands in Craigieburn, Ambrosia Estate in Cranbourne West and Mernda Villages in Mernda.

A spokesman for development company Stockland confirmed "NBN has laid and is in the process of commissioning fibre cabling at Mernda and Highlands estate [in Craigieburn]".

Regional towns are also listed, including Whenby Grange in Wodonga, The Boulevard in Shepparton, and Yorkdale in Ballarat suburb Delacombe.

When NBN Co published its initial greenfield construction plan in October last year there were 20 Victorian housing estates with 1780 premises. But the number

increased to 49 estates with 4636 premises by the time a revised list came out on December 12.

While this means NBN Co's rollout locations are driven by developers rather than pure engineering needs, it is faster and cheaper to roll out fibre in unoccupied estates than to install copper wires that would be replaced within years.

\$36BN NBN 'A MONUMENTAL RIP-OFF'

The Age—4th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/36bn-nbn-a-monumental-ripoff-20120103-1pjl4.html>

The Gillard government's \$36 billion national broadband network project is one of the "great, all-time white elephants" and a massive waste of public funds, according to Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

Mr Abbott was responding to revelations that only 4000 households nationwide had been connected to the network so far, with just 2315 premises of that number using the NBN's fibre optic cables for communications - numbers which were grossly down on NBN Co's earlier projection of 35,000 connections for 2011.

But the government-owned company has hit back at criticisms of the connection figures, with an NBN Co spokesman telling *The Age* yesterday arguments about low sign-up numbers were "academic" and the company was not "fazed" by Mr Abbott's comments.

Tony Abbott called the NBN one of the 'great all-time white elephants.'

Tony Abbott called the NBN one of the 'great all-time white elephants.' Photo: Domino Postiglione

"When the old copper wires are decommissioned, every home and business in the country will receive phone and internet services over the NBN," the spokesman said.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

6th January 2012



"What 2011 was about was putting the building blocks in place: building test sites, signing up construction companies and finalising the deal with Telstra for access to their infrastructure rather than having to spend taxpayers' dollars replicating it." The spokesman said NBN fibre optic cables were now laid and connected to an area covering 18,200 homes and businesses and a second, larger rollout had been deliberately delayed to allow the Telstra deal to be bedded down.

In his first public comments of the new year, Mr Abbott said the project was massively behind schedule and currently each connection worked out at about \$250,000 per residence when configured into the project's total cost.

"There are about 2500 fibre subscribers and about 1500 wireless subscribers and it just confirms that this is going to be one of the all-time great white elephants," Mr Abbott said. "There are about 1000 people working for the NBN. That's one employee for every four subscribers and the average wage of the NBN is \$155,000. Now, this is the best remunerated company in Australia and one person earning \$155,000 a year for every four subscribers and the billions of dollars that they have spent so far on the rollout, works out at \$250,000 per connection. So by any means this is a monumental rip-off."

Mr Abbott indicated he would pull the plug on the NBN if the Coalition won government in 2013.

"What we won't do is throw good money after bad when it comes to the NBN," he said.

But the NBN Co spokesman said yesterday it was pleased with the project's progress and said there would be a massive spike in connections through 2012 as more retail service providers began offering broadband plans and Australians began migrating to the network from existing services.

The spokesman said NBN Co was waiting on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to approve the deal which will allow Telstra to access its underground infrastructure to lay more fibre.

EARTH TILTS AT PLANETARIUM

The Age— 4th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/movies/earth-tilts-at-planetarium-20120103-1pjqq.html>

The 16-metre domed screen of the Melbourne Planetarium is the home of Tilt, a new film for kids that explores the effect of Earth's tilt on the seasons.

The film is among the first to use 3D character animation for the "full-dome" screen, and was produced in-house over the past two years.

Tilt screens daily at 2pm, with general entry to Scienceworks museum included.

131102, museumvictoria.com.au/planetarium

NO JOB SECURITY FOR NEW TEACHERS

The Age— 4th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/no-job-security-for-new-teachers-20120103-1pjpy.html>

More than half of new teachers in Victorian government schools are employed on short-term contracts, resulting in job insecurity, the loss of potential holiday pay and an inability for some to take out car and home loans.

A survey of more than 1000 teachers in their first five years found 58 per cent were on fixed-term contracts, mostly for 12 months or less.

Of those on contracts, 70 per cent said having to reapply for positions had a negative effect on their teaching. Lack of tenure was the third most important issue they faced.

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The survey, conducted by the Australian Education Union late last year, found more than 50 per cent of new teachers intended to leave the public system within 10 years. A third of these saw themselves working in another industry.

"I'm disappointed in the system ... I can't commit to a car loan, never mind a mortgage, as I don't know if I will have a job in January," one respondent said.

"Right now, I think working a secure job for minimum wage is more preferable to working in education and going from contract to contract with periods of unemployment in between contracts."

About 8000 teachers in Victorian government schools - or 18 per cent of the total number - are on fixed-term contracts.

The high rate of contract teaching persists despite an acknowledgement last year by state Teaching Minister Peter Hall that employment uncertainty made life difficult personally and financially.

"I think 18 per cent is high and I will be certainly looking at ways to reduce that," Mr Hall told The Age last January. He also said the Education Department should offer financial support to schools that experienced unexpected declines in enrolments, to encourage the hiring of permanent staff.

But Australian Education Union Victorian president Mary Bluett said nothing had happened. "It is disappointing 12 months later to be in a position where so many thousands of new teachers are on contracts," Ms Bluett said.

She said the problem was not confined to new teachers, with some teachers who were eligible for long service leave still on fixed-term contracts.

Of the 73 vacancies for teachers currently advertised on the Education Department's website Recruitment Online, just three are for ongoing positions, and 34 are listed as fixed term because of a "potential excess" of teachers.

Fixed-term contracts can be used to replace teachers on maternity or long service leave, to replace teachers who are seconded to other roles or to fill positions in schools with declining enrolments.

Schools must pay teachers out of their own budgets, which discourages some schools from advertising for permanent positions because they will be paying for surplus staff if student enrolments decline.

The union says about 4000 fixed-term contract jobs are posted each year on Recruitment Online due to a potential excess of teachers.

However, the union believes the number of teachers defined as "in excess" in schools is only in the hundreds.

The union points to Education Department statistics released last July that show the number of students enrolled in Victorian government schools rose by 3134 in the past four years.

Ms Bluett said the union monitored job vacancies on Recruitment Online and asked the Education Department to audit schools that posted a high number of advertisements for fixed-term contracts. "Potential excess [of teachers] is a reason that ... is overused," Ms Bluett said.

" [Principals] are at best being over-cautious and at worst are using that just to get someone on contract for a bit of try before you buy."

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The union is negotiating for teachers to be made permanent after three years of employment under a new enterprise agreement. The previous deal expired on December 31.

A spokeswoman for Mr Hall said that as matters affecting fixed-term teachers were part of the current negotiations, it would be inappropriate to comment. "As part of the negotiations for a new industrial agreement between the Victorian government, employee bargaining representatives and the unions that represent teachers and principals, confidentiality protocols which include good faith

bargaining have been agreed which preclude the public discussion of issues which are the subject of negotiation," the spokeswoman said.

Under the Kennett government, the proportion of state school teachers on contracts rose from 7.9 per cent in June 1996 to 19.6 per cent just before the 1999 election, when Labor won power. The figure was as high as 19.4 per cent in June 2008 under Labor and has been about 18 per cent since June 2009.

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