



Message  
Jill  
Kennett

News Reports

Speeches & Interviews

Media Releases

Arts & Multicultural

Open for Business

Rural Victoria 2001

Youth Life Force

Agenda 21

Major Events

Achievements

# Response to Charter

Published: Wednesday 13 Oct 1999

## The Coalition's Response to the Independents' Charter

This response of the Coalition Parties to the Independents' Charter is designed as a basis for a long-term agreement with the Independents and is provided as a package to secure stable government in Victoria following the September 1999 State Election.

### Addressing the specific issues raised in the Charter:

#### Auditor-General

The Coalition agrees to:

1.1.(a) immediately restore the role, function and resources of the Auditor-General by repealing the Audit Amendment Act 1997.

1.1.(b) make future appointments to the position of Auditor-General on the recommendation of the joint Parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

#### **SUGGESTED ADDITION TO CHARTER**

1.1.(c) ensure that the Auditor-General will continue to be an officer of the Parliament with his/her budget agreed to by the Parliament.

#### Freedom of Information

We agree that there must be an open and accountable approach to government.

1.2 The Coalition undertakes to give full and proper access to government documents. We will address the Independents' specific points by (i) ensuring the spirit of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act is upheld and (ii) by amending the FOI Act.

1.2.(a) In 1993 Section 28 of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 was amended to expand the Cabinet exemption to include the following documents:

- those prepared for the purpose of briefing a Minister in relation to a matter which will be considered by Cabinet; and
- those which have been considered by the Cabinet and which are related to issues that have been before the Cabinet.

The Coalition agrees to remove the expanded exemptions listed above.

1.2.(b) In regard to the issue of 'commercial in confidence' information, we are happy to consult further with the Independents in the preparation of the new legislation to ensure that the New Zealand Official Information Acts (1982 - 1995) stipulations on 'commercial in confidence' information are included in the new legislation.

In addition, the Coalition is committed to further improving the FOI legislation so that all

winning tenders and contracts for service delivery will be placed on the Government's website, [www.vic.gov.au](http://www.vic.gov.au), within six weeks of them being finalised. As is the case in New Zealand and the United States, there will be limited exemptions, for example, where parts of contracts are templates of other contracts which are still being finalised. In those cases, contracts will be released once the template series of them has been finalised.

1.2.(c) In terms of the costs of accessing documents under FOI, as Table 1 (attached on page 21) demonstrates, Victoria's current costs of accessing documents under FOI are not out of kilter with those of other States or the Commonwealth. We will, however, amend the FOI Act to reduce the external review application fee from \$170 to \$50 - making it comparable to that which applies in NSW.

The Coalition's planned reforms of the FOI legislation on access to service delivery contracts and winning tenders would clearly reduce costs further and remove the necessity, in many cases, for recourse to the current appeals mechanism.

While conscious of the need to protect the safety of public sector employees, the Coalition will review the operation of the provision in the FOI Act which affects the release of the names of public sector employees to FOI applicants.

1.2.(d) The Coalition is aware of the Independents' concerns about the way FOI requests are sometimes managed. In terms of time gaps, we agree that the onus should be moved onto government departments and agencies to respond in a timely and helpful manner rather than delaying responses until the last possible minute. It is particularly improper when no responses are forthcoming at all. We will ensure that FOI requests are responded to promptly and that the responses are helpful in advising the applicant of the best way to proceed to access the information being sought. Action will be taken against public sector employees who breach these requirements.

**The fundamental issue is, as the Charter states, the need to adhere to the spirit and the technicalities of Freedom of Information, to which the Coalition makes a firm commitment to the Independents.**

### **Budget Documents**

1.3. The Coalition agrees to ensure that State Budget documents are properly comparable from one year to the next, by including parallel information in both formats where a formal change is deemed desirable.

This issue has arisen recently with the transition from cash to accrual accounting which necessitated a major shift in the format of Budget documents and it is not possible to make a backdated comparison with the previous system.

From now on, comparable figures will be provided. It should be noted that with the change to accrual accounting the financial statements are now in line with general accounting standards and will provide greater transparency.

Machinery of government changes which occur from time to time will affect the comparability of data relating to departments but this only occurs infrequently. The Coalition undertakes to provide comparable data in the event of such changes.

The Coalition will also request that the Department of Treasury and Finance ensures that the new accrual basis of the Budget is as clearly presented as possible.

### **Freedom of Speech**

1.4.(a) The Coalition agrees to adhere to the ideals of freedom of speech by affirming the principles that debate and dissent are legitimate aspects of a democratic political system.

1.4.(b) Section 95 (1) (a) of the Constitution Act 1975 precludes any public sector employee in the State of Victoria from publicly commenting on the administration of any department of the State of Victoria. This section of the Constitution has been enacted since the first decade of this century.

The Coalition has made no change whatsoever to that provision of the Constitution Act.

The only restriction we have made in terms of the ability of public sector employees to make public comment has been Teaching Service Order no. 140 of 1993 (which prevents teachers making public comment about the Government or the Directorate of School Education except where authorised by the Minister or Director of School Education).

The Coalition agrees to the immediate repeal of Teaching Service Order no. 140.

If the Independents wish to address the terms of Section 95 (1) (a), we would suggest that the issue of public statements by public sector employees could be included in any review of the Constitution.

### **Independence of Director of Public Prosecutions and Police Commissioner**

1.5 We support the Independents' belief in the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Police Commissioner. The Coalition believes this to be provided under the current legislation.

### **Director Of Public Prosecutions**

The DPP is appointed for a term specified in his instrument of appointment. The term is 10 years or longer (not exceeding 20 years). The Director is eligible for re-appointment. The Director may be removed from office by the Governor in Council if each House of Parliament passes a resolution supporting removal. The Coalition considers there is appropriate security of tenure.

### **Prosecutions**

The DPP institutes, prepares and conducts prosecutions for indictable offences and other proceedings. In carrying out these functions the Director is not subject to any direction or advice from government or any other person or agency. In practice, there are no discussions between the Attorney-General and DPP regarding prosecutions or other proceedings.

This contrasts with the Commonwealth position which provides for the Attorney-General to give directions to the DPP both generally and in a particular case (section 8 of the Commonwealth Act). The Victorian DPP, in his 1995/96 Annual Report stated that:-

'the Victorian Legislation recognises the vital constitutional relationship between the Director and the Attorney-General while, at the same time, explicitly preserving the essential independence of the Director in relation to his or her prosecutorial functions.'

### **Director's Committee**

In certain instances the DPP is required to seek the views of the Chief Crown Prosecutor and another Crown prosecutor or counsel prior to making a decision (the Director's Committee). These are defined as special decisions, e.g. where the DPP intends to proceed with charges where a magistrate has ordered the accused to be discharged : to enter a *nolle prosequi*: to proceed with charges where a Crown Prosecutor has declined to make presentment.

It should be noted that the Chief Crown Prosecutor is appointed on the same basis as the DPP and can only be removed in the same way. Crown Prosecutors may be removed by the Governor in Council in circumstances set out in s.34 of the Public Prosecutions Act. The DPP can proceed with a special decision where the other two members disagree but must lay before Parliament his reasons for such a decision. These provisions are intended to maintain independence of the prosecutorial functions while avoiding, as far as possible, the institution of charges in circumstances where there is insufficient evidence to convict by ensuring difficult decisions are discussed by three experienced independent prosecutors. There has not been an occasion since 1994 where both members of the Committee have disagreed with the DPP.

The Director would have increased power if the requirement to consult with the Directors Committee were removed. The Coalition sees the requirements to consult as a protection for suspects. It does not appear to have had any adverse consequences.

### **Contempt**

In 1994 the contempt powers of the DPP were changed. At present proceedings may be instituted for contempt by the Courts or by the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General can only institute proceedings on the advice of the Solicitor-General. If the Solicitor-General advises against proceedings, no such proceedings can be initiated. This is to ensure that these powers cannot be used for political purposes. Alternatively, if the Solicitor-General recommends proceedings, the Attorney-General may decide not to proceed. In such cases the Attorney-General must table reasons in Parliament. This has been done on one occasion.

The removal of the DPP's contempt powers was made following the advice of the then DPP for NSW, Mr Reg Blanch, now Chief Judge of the NSW District Court. He advised that the DPP was in a conflict of interest position in deciding whether to institute contempt proceedings in relation to a case he was prosecuting. It is inappropriate for the DPP to be responsible for protecting an accused whose trial may be adversely affected by a contempt when his major function is prosecuting the accused.

This view is consistent with a statement to the following effect which was included in the Annual Reports of the Victorian DPP every year from 1985/86 to 1992/93:

'Whilst it is arguable that proceedings for contempt of court (contempt being constituted by written or oral publications tending to pervert the course of justice or to prejudice the prosecution or defence in a pending trial) may be brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Victorian practice, which I support, is for such proceedings to be instituted by the Attorney-General as first law officer of the State.' (DPP Annual Report 1985/86)

For the above reasons, it is argued that the DPP should not exercise any contempt powers. If the Independents wish to remove the Attorney-General from any involvement in this role, the Coalition would agree to transfer the power completely to the Solicitor-General who is a statutory office-holder. We are happy to consult further with the Independents on this matter should they wish to take it further.

### **Independence of the Police Commissioner**

Under the Police Regulation Act, 1958, the Chief Commissioner has control of the Police Force. Operational issues are solely the preserve of the Commissioner. The Chief Commissioner may be dismissed by the Governor in Council.

The Coalition has made no changes to the legislation concerning the powers and independence of the Chief Commissioner of Police since its election to Government in 1992. For a period, the Commissioner was allowed access to a performance bonus. This has since been rescinded and will not be repeated.

With these comments in mind, the Coalition is willing to consult further with the Independents on this issue to ensure that their concerns are addressed.

### **Inquiry into Ambulance Contracts/Intergraph**

1.6 The contracting out of the non-emergency stretcher transport and dispatch services of the Metropolitan Ambulance Services has been fully investigated by the Auditor-General (in Special Report no. 49, April 1997), been the subject of an exhaustive two year investigation by the Victoria Police and subject to a review by the Director of Public Prosecutions. The DPP advised, on 16 March 1999, that he is of the opinion that the proposed charges would not offer reasonable prospects of conviction.

It is probable, therefore, that an Inquiry, given the several previous investigations, would unearth no new information (on this or related matters) and would cost taxpayers a significant amount of money.

The costs of such an Inquiry (based on the equivalent costs of the Royal Commission

into the Longford incident) could be in the order of \$1.4 million per month.

The Coalition agrees to hold an inquiry of the type which the Independents favour, we will also set mutually agreed terms of reference following wide consultation.

### **Community Consultation**

1.7 The Coalition agrees to consult widely with the community in the development or amendment of legislation.

We will make greater use of formal consultative mechanisms for major proposals such as:

- green papers (discussion papers canvassing the need for legislation and inviting comment by a given date)
- white papers (papers articulating proposed government positions, following the consideration of comments. Such papers can include draft legislation for public comment)

The Coalition has already used this approach. A recent example was the December 1998 discussion paper on the Data Protection Bill, which contained a draft Bill and invited comment.

This task will be facilitated by developments in information technology which reduce the constraint of distance in communications with Government. We agree to introduce mechanisms using information technology to ensure that consultation with the community can occur easily.

## **2. Improving the Democratic Operation of Parliament**

### **The Constitution**

We address the issues which the Independents have raised in Section 2 in the following commitments.

The Coalition will create a **Victorian Constitution Commission** (based on the model and practices of the Australian Constitution Commission).

The new, independent body will be funded annually by the Government and report directly to the State Parliament. It will be funded for two years, plus another two year option, if required.

It will be commissioned to progressively **review the Constitution** of the State of Victoria with a view to reporting during the term of the Parliament. In particular it will be asked to assess and provide options on matters including:

- the length of terms for the Legislative Council;
- the electoral system of the Legislative Council; and
- the rights and obligations of public servants with regard to public comment.

As part of this process the Commission will consult widely, receive submissions and prepare research papers along with draft and final options for Parliament to consider.

Given that the State Election produced no mandate for profound amendments to the State Constitution, this new and public process will create a high level of informed public debate on the merits of proposed Constitutional reforms.

During the Election no Party won a majority of seats and none can therefore claim a mandate for constitutional change. Indeed, as commentators have agreed, constitutional reform was not a major issue during the campaign, with most candidates never campaigning on the topic.

Importantly, the Coalition is of the view that the options for Parliamentary change put forward by the ALP are fundamentally flawed as they would:

- reduce the number of rural M.P's in the Legislative Council, as has occurred under

such systems inter-State;

- secure the one-off election of divisive candidates from groups like One Nation; and
- permanently deliver Victoria into an unstable electoral environment.

We especially note that the Victorian Upper House presently has 44 Councillors. Under the current system, rural and regional Victoria is guaranteed 16 representatives - 2 Councillors each from Gippsland, Sth Eastern, Nth Eastern, Central Highlands, Geelong, Ballarat, Western and Nth Western Provinces. The current arrangements therefore provide significant and fair representation for non-urban Victoria.

In addition, the proposition that the Upper House have an identical length of term to the Lower House is unprecedented in Australia and whilst the Coalition supports this (and the other issues) being assessed by the planned new Victorian Constitution Commission, it believes that the case for such a major change has not been made.

### Parliament

The Coalition will reform the operation of the Parliament and:

- commit to increasing the number of Parliamentary sitting days per year
- ensure sitting days and times allow for fairer and full debate on proposed legislation
- introduce new Sessional orders in the Legislative Assembly to ensure 10 Questions Without Notice are now asked each sitting day, regardless of the time taken
- improve the Sessional Orders so that each Wednesday of each sitting week is dedicated solely to Private Members' Business (between 10.00am and 2.00pm) with non-Government members having the right to move motions or debate Private Members' Bills (for which notice would be given on the Tuesday)
- ensure Petitions can be debated as of right during this time
- guarantee that every third Wednesday that the Legislative Assembly sits is dedicated to Grievances, between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm.
- ensure that the Adjournment debate can, at the discretion of the Speaker, be extended beyond its normal time limit to allow any Member to have the call on any sitting day.

### Committees

Reforms shall also be initiated in Parliament's committee system.

It is proposed that there will be standing Committees that operate on a Joint House basis within key areas of Government operation, upon which we would invite each Independent to serve (on a Committee of their choice):

- Estimates and Public Accounts Committee
- Community Development Committee
- Economic Development Committee
- Conservation and Natural Resources Committee and
- Law Reform Committee

Further it is proposed that there be 3 policy development Committees (each with five members):

- Water and Environment Management Committee
- Drug and Crime Prevention Committee
- Road Safety Committee

All of these Committees would be appointed for 4 years under an amended Parliamentary Committees Act.

Moreover, to make meeting times far more convenient for all M.P's, we propose that Parliamentary Committees would sit on Monday afternoons from 2.00 pm, as required.

Finally, it is proposed that the Legislative Council establish three major new Committees to:

- Review all Bills before Parliament
- Review all Regulations before Parliament
- Review all Redundant Acts of Parliament

This permanent new charter is based on the successful model used in the Senate and will devote more time and resources to these key tasks than is possible from the current SARC Committee.

The all-Party Committees (with five Members on each) will each hear public comment on proposed legislation, old and redundant acts and on government regulations (subordinate legislation). They will invite community input on these matters, before reporting back both the evidence and conclusions to each House.

### **The Speaker**

The independent role of the Speaker will be strongly supported.

The Speaker will accord respect to each Member and ensure fair debate and strong adherence to the spirit of the Standing Orders. Ministers will be expected to be responsive to Members' inquiries; Question Time will be run by the Speaker to achieve this end.

As a clear indication of the Speaker's independence, he will not attend any meetings of the Coalition Party Room.

### **Fixed Terms**

The Coalition Government will move, during the Spring Session, to seek Parliamentary approval for an amendment to the State Constitution to extend the fixed term of the Legislative Assembly.

We agree to a fixed term of four years.

The Coalition also offers for your consideration the option of extending the fixed period from three years to three and a half years thus giving greater certainty about the precise dates for State Elections whilst retaining minor flexibility to avoid impractical clashes of public dates.

## **3. Establishing clear plans, strategies and targets to address the urgent needs of Rural Victoria**

3.1 (a) The Coalition re-commits to its focus on generating growth across rural and regional Victoria.

**It is clear that more needs to be done to assist rural and regional centres and we commit to this key task.**

Much has already been achieved over the past seven years to address the disproportionately high unemployment levels which had previously applied across country Victoria. However, while unemployment levels in rural and regional Victoria have been reduced by one third, it is readily acknowledged that further initiatives are needed given the rate at which jobs are being shed from our traditional rural industries as these become more capital intensive due to the demands of the international markets in which they compete.

The Coalition's objective of growth through new jobs in country Victoria recognises a fundamental reality that any job generated is much more secure if built upon a natural advantage within the region, particularly recognising the food industry and tourism. For example, relocating the displaced farm worker to a job involving value adding to a product that was previously exported in its raw state is the rationale which drives the Coalition's target of \$12 billion of food exports pa by 2010.

The Coalition points to the examples in Attachment 2 (page 22) to demonstrate its preparedness to intervene, to encourage the growth of rural and regional employment opportunities.

Investments in rural and regional Victoria facilitated by Business Victoria makeup 33

per cent of the State's total. Of the more than \$7.6 billion worth of new investments between October 1992 and 30 June 1999, \$2.5 billion has been directed towards rural Victoria, with food processing being one of the real winners.

Conscious of the needs of rural and regional centres, the Coalition will also work to assist existing businesses in these areas so they can expand.

### **Sustainable Farming and the Vision for Victoria's Food and Agricultural Sector**

The Coalition has recognised the importance of the food and agriculture sector to the growth of Victoria's rural economy by raising the food export target from \$6 billion pa by 2001, which we are on target to achieve, to \$12 billion pa by 2010.

In response to this challenge the Coalition will commit an initial \$65 million over the next four years under the new Growing Horizons Initiative to teach farmers new technology and build dynamic, innovative primary industries. Growing Horizons is based on a sophisticated analysis of the drivers and impediments to growth in the food and agriculture sector and emphasises the role government can play in accelerating growth through investment in science and technology.

Importantly, the Coalition recognises that accelerated growth of the food and agriculture sector cannot be achieved at the expense of the natural resource base.

This focus on the development of new sustainable and production systems by Growing Horizons will:

- provide farmers with modern technologies to achieve both productivity improvement and sustainability;
- enable farmers to meet customer and market needs, such as food quality and safety, ethics, and (increasingly) the demand for food produced by sustainable production systems;
- maintain and develop the business focus of individual producers.

Farmers will be supported in the adoption of new technologies by an emphasis in Growing Horizons on helping individual farmers develop the capacity to respond to rapid changes in the food and agriculture sector. This work will build on the Coalition's successful existing extension programs such as Target 10 and TopCrop.

### **National Competition Policy**

The National Competition Policy agreement involves all Australian jurisdictions and, while Victoria does not have the right to unilaterally renegotiate its position, the Coalition will act on the concerns of the Independents and other rural MPs. Victoria does stand to receive annual dividends as a direct result of its participation and has committed a share to Local Government.

The Coalition has applied the 'public interest test' to:

- prohibit the sale of liquor by convenience stores:
- retain motor vehicle dealers licenses:
- maintain workers compensation as a public sector responsibility: and
- outsource the IT functions of VicRoads and the PTC to Ballarat.

In each case the decision represents a step back from the purist deregulation model and demonstrates the Coalition's commitment to appropriately manage any trade off between public interest and the National Competition Policy.

We will manage competition policy in the public interest and consult widely on any changes.

### **3.1(b) SUGGESTED ADDITION TO CHARTER**

The Coalition will actively pursue new business and trade opportunities for rural and regional Victoria, which create employment and increase exports. It should offer direct assistance to businesses that will relocate to Victoria and actively facilitate expansion and growth of existing local companies.



3.2.(a) The Coalition accepts its responsibility to provide infrastructure such as roads, rail, water, power and gas in rural and regional Victoria without always having regard to the profit potential or opportunities for cost recovery. We will make this a priority focus of the next term of a Coalition government.

Examples of past and planned works in these areas are included at Attachment 3 (page 26)

3.3.(a) The Coalition accepts and reaffirms its responsibility to provide health, human, education, police, emergency and environment services throughout rural and regional Victoria. Attachment 4 (page 33) provides information about the Coalition's efforts in these areas.

3.3.(b) The Coalition strongly endorses the request for performance levels to be based on the equitable access and distribution of services. This philosophy has been the driver of the Coalition Government's reform process which has seen it take a lead in Australia in the delivery of services based on outputs. However, the Coalition does accept that more work needs to be done on identifying acceptable benchmarks.

An excellent example based on outputs rather than the level of funding provided is the Coalition's commitment to provide World Health Organisation standard drinking water to country communities by 2001.

3.3.(c) The Coalition supports a **review of services which have been contracted out**. The Department of Treasury and Finance is already required to monitor the costs and benefits of outsourcing and to publicly report on its findings.

As we have stated in Section 5, the Coalition believes this review should be conducted by the Auditor-General.

3.4.(a) The Coalition recognises **the special role of local government** as outlined in the Charter.

#### **Local Councils' greater say in planning**

The Coalition reaffirms its commitment to give local government a greater say in planning matters through the development of new municipal planning schemes.

We are committed to ensuring that, other than in exceptional circumstances, a Coalition Government will not intervene in planning decisions.

In the area of appeals to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), the Coalition will set up a process to monitor VCAT's decisions and report results to Councils. We will act to redress any issues arising, in consultation with local Members.

Legislation will also be introduced to require that where an appeal goes to VCAT, and substantial changes to the application are made by the applicant, VCAT will adjourn the appeal and refer the application back to Council for its consideration. This will prevent alternative plans being approved by VCAT without prior consultation.

#### **Employment of Local Government CEOs**

The Coalition will agree to remove the statutory requirement to notify the Minister on the employment of local government Chief Executive Officers.

#### **Choosing levels of tendering out of local services**

The introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was designed to assist Councils to review their services and to demonstrate they are achieving value-for-money for their communities.

The Coalition will now move to the next stage in this process, which is to have the Auditor General identify realistic value-for-money benchmarks across the Local Government Sector, with Councils meeting those benchmarks to be automatically removed from the requirement of compulsory competitive tendering. This new process will be legislated for as soon as possible to replace the CCT process, thus allowing greater flexibility for local councils and opportunities for local businesses.

#### **4. Assurances for Independent Members**

4.1 The Coalition Members of Parliament undertake to treat all Members of Parliament, including Independent Members, with courtesy and respect.

4.2 The Coalition agrees to allocate Independent Members of Parliament a higher level of staffing and resources to assist them in dealing with their significantly greater level of responsibility.

Specifically, the Coalition will allocate to the Independents two legislative assistants and one additional secretary in an office at Parliament House to assist them in their increased responsibilities.

We are willing to discuss further with the Independents any other resource needs and the salary details of the above mentioned staff.

4.3 The Coalition agrees to allocate on a full-time basis a senior member of the Premier's staff specifically with the responsibilities of ensuring that the Independents have access to Ministers, key public servants and the Premier.

But the Coalition would also like to emphasise that the Independents would have direct access to the Premier and Ministers for consultation and discussion.

4.4 The Coalition agrees to construct an ongoing consultative mechanism with Independents to inform, discuss and negotiate on any planned legislation which may require their agreement in Parliament, or which they themselves raise.

Moreover, we envisage that the type of relationship we would have with the Independents would be ongoing and consultative. Leaders, Ministers and other Coalition Members will meet with the Independents on a frequent and regular basis about legislation and other issues of interest.

4.5 The Coalition appreciates and accepts the Independents' undertaking to inform government of any intention to vote against planned legislation.

#### **5. Privatisation**

The Coalition proposes that an independent review of privatisation in Victoria be undertaken. We believe there has been a positive impact from privatisation on public sector debt, the State's credit rating and services to Victorians.

However, it is acknowledged that the sale of public assets raises sensitive issues and the Coalition agrees to the undertaking of an independent review and proposes that the Auditor-General conducts the review - the Office of the Auditor-General has already undertaken significant work in this area and the new Auditor-General would be well-placed to provide a fresh approach to the assessment of the privatisation program.

#### **Attachment 1**

The Coalition suggests that the following text, in bold, based on the Greiner Agreement with the NSW Independents in 1991, replace the third and fourth paragraphs of the Independents' preamble (beginning with the word 'However' and ending with the word 'procedure') which is attached at the next page.

**The Independent members agree to vote with the Government on the following matters:**

**(a) motions regarding Bills for Appropriation and Supply**

**(b) all motions of no confidence except where matters of corruption or gross maladministration are involved which reflect upon the conduct of the Government as provided for in (c) below**

**(c) notwithstanding (b) above, the Independent Members reserve the right to move a motion of no confidence in relation to matters of corruption or gross maladministration which reflect upon the conduct of the Government as a whole. No such motion of no confidence will be initiated by the Independent Members without consultation between the signatories to this Agreement in an endeavour to resolve the issues which gave rise to such intention on the part of the Independent Members.**

**The Independent Members agree to attend Parliamentary sittings and be present for all votes and divisions relating to (a) and (b) and not to abstain from voting except where pairs have been granted.**

## **INDEPENDENTS' CHARTER VICTORIA 1999**

Russell Savage MP Mildura  
Susan Davies MP Gippsland West  
Craig Ingram MP Gippsland East

The aim of this Charter is to provide for stable, open and accountable government, which is able to work productively for the people of Victoria.

We Independents are determined to maintain our Independent status. We will not become a formal part of any government.

However we agree that to provide stability we will vote with the government on:

1. Appropriation and supply bills
2. All motions of No Confidence unless there is evidence of fraud, misappropriation of illegal activities.

We will not support any government, and will remove our support from a government which:

- Demonstrates mismanagement or misuse of public finances
- Is shown to be corrupt, which supports any practices which are corrupt of which violates accepted standards of public probity
- Abuses the spirit of democratic parliamentary practices and procedure

We are willing to support a government, which publicly undertakes to:

1. Promote open and accountable government
2. Improve the democratic operation of parliament
3. Establish clear plans, strategies and targets to address the urgent needs of Rural Victoria
4. Offer assurances of increased levels of co-operation with Independent Members and improved codes of conduct between government and all other Members of Parliament.

## **Attachment 2**

**Examples of Investments in Rural and Regional Victoria since 1992**

**1992 ' 93**

Australian Forest Industries P/L  
Bonlac Foods Ltd  
Eaglehawk Enterprise Park  
(Bendigo Enterprise Centre)  
Empire Rubber (Australia) Pty Ltd  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
Snow Brand Tatura Dairies Pty Ltd  
Tatura Milk Industries P/L

**1993 ' 94**

Amcors Limited ' Containers  
Packaging Division  
Australian Defence Apparel Pty Ltd  
Benalla Spinners Pty Ltd  
Bendigo Bank Ltd  
Campbell Soup Asia Pacific  
Godfrey Hirst Aust P/L  
Hoechst  
Keech Castings Australia Pty Ltd  
Marsed Pty Ltd (Clarke's Pies)  
McCain Foods (Aust) Pty Ltd  
Mt Beauty Timber Pty Ltd  
National Sports and Aviation Centre  
Nestle Confectionery  
Peneta P/L  
Peninsula Searoad Transport  
Pyramid Hill Pet Food Co Pty Ltd  
Southcorp Wines Pty Ltd  
Steggles Ltd  
S.C.S. Plastics Pty Ltd  
Unifoods  
Wilson Transformer Co Pty Ltd

**1994 ' 95**

Aerospace Foundation of Australia Ltd  
ASTA Components  
Austanners Wet Blue P/L  
Australian Leather Holdings Ltd  
Benalla Enterprise Park  
Bendix Mintex Pty Ltd  
Brambles Australia Ltd  
Compak (Vic) Pty Ltd  
Dominance Industries Pty Ltd  
Empire Rubber (Australia) Pty Ltd  
Fleury Michon Chilled Products Factory  
Gatic Holdings Pty Ltd  
Ito En Australia Pty Ltd  
Laminex Industries ' BTR Nylex  
Marsed Pty Ltd (Clarke's Pies)  
Midfield Meats  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
Prince Engineering  
Riverland Oilseed Processors Pty Ltd  
Rocklea Spinning Mills Pty Ltd  
Smith Family (The)  
SPC Ltd  
Sunwood Timber P/L  
Tatura Milk Industries P/L  
Technology Centre (PTC/Vic)  
The Uncle Tobys Company Pty Ltd  
Thomas P Clark (Aust) Pty Ltd  
Transtate Limited  
Uncle Bens of Australia  
Woolworths Ltd

**1995 ' 96**

Ausvac Pty Ltd  
Bendigo Brick Pty Ltd  
Bonlac Foods Ltd  
Bunge Meat Industries Ltd  
Doosan Farm Products  
Frewstal Pty Ltd  
Godfrey Hirst Aust Pty Ltd (incorporating Riverside Textiles)  
Grampian Wool Industries P/L  
Hakubaku Australia Pty Ltd  
Kraft Foods Ltd  
Laminex Industries  
Libra Holdings Pty Ltd  
McMan Ostrich Ltd  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
Plastek Poly Pty Ltd  
Pyramid Hill Processing Pty Ltd  
Pyramid Hill Salt Pty Ltd  
Ridley Corporation  
The Uncle Tobys Company Pty Ltd  
Thompsons Kelly & Lewis Pty Ltd

**1996 ' 97**

A F Gason Pty Ltd  
Amcor-Australian Paper  
Ardmona Foods Ltd  
Austral Softwood Processors Pty Ltd  
Austrimi Seafoods  
Boyntons Wines Pty Ltd  
Cedenco Australia/Cerebos  
Consumers Cooperative Kobe (Kobe Office)  
Dept Social Security  
F L Green Distribution Pty Ltd  
Filligree Textiles Pty Ltd  
Huyck Australia Pty Ltd  
Insulpak Pty Ltd  
J H Ralph & Sons  
King Valley River Vineyard  
Mildura Co-operative Fruit Co Ltd  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
National Foods Limited  
Nestle Confectionery  
Nethersole Orchards Pty Ltd  
Phantom Entertainment  
Pilkington Glass Limited  
Ricegrowers Co-operative Ltd  
Southcorp Wines Pty Ltd  
Teangi Stock Feeds Pty Ltd  
The Warrnambool Cheese & Butter Factory Co Ltd  
Trevaskis Engineering Pty Ltd

**1997 ' 98**

Amcor-Australian Paper  
Aquaculture Service P/L  
Bluegum Technology  
Bonlac Foods Ltd  
C & M Brick Pty Ltd  
Chateau Remy Pty Ltd  
Effem Foods Pty Ltd  
Geelong Wool Combing Ltd  
Miranda Wines Pty Ltd  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
Qantas Airways Ltd  
Shorko Australia Pty Ltd

Sino Australia Chulei Breeding & Training  
Tatura Milk Industries P/L  
Victorian Alps Wine Co Pty Ltd

### **1998 ' 99**

ADI

Aust-Grain Exports Pty Ltd  
Australia Daying Food Products Pty Ltd  
Austrim Textiles Pty Ltd  
Bonlac Foods Ltd  
Boomaroo Nurseries Pty Ltd  
Chertsey Fifty Nine Pty Ltd  
East Victoria Plantation Forest Company of Australia Pty Ltd (EPFL)  
Effem Foods Pty Ltd  
Godfrey Hirst Aust Pty Ltd  
Golvad Pty Ltd  
McCain Foods (Aust) Pty Ltd  
Midfield Meats  
Milnes Pty Ltd  
Murray Goulburn Co-operative Company Ltd  
National Logistics Co-ordinators  
Norwellan Textiles Pty Ltd  
Postel Australia Pty Ltd  
Qantas Airways Ltd  
Rositas Australia Pty Ltd  
Simplot Australia Pty Ltd  
South Gippsland Stockfeeds  
Warren, KB & CA

### **Attachment 3**

#### **Infrastructure in Rural and Regional Victoria**

##### **Roads**

The Coalition is committed to spending in excess of \$4.5 billion on new and upgraded road projects over the next ten years. Some of these projects will require and be provided with further funding as they will extend to 2015. Over one third of this allocation will be on projects in rural and regional Victoria.

When the Better Roads Levy was introduced, the Coalition recognised rural Victoria's right to share in its benefits by dedicating 33 per cent of the fund to country roads. The Coalition did this without the requirement for any cost/benefit analysis to justify this expenditure on rural and regional roads rather than on roads in metropolitan areas.

Future roads projects under the Coalition would include:

##### **Midland Highway**

Duplication Geelong to Ballarat \$260 million  
Overtaking lanes, shoulder  
sealing and realignment Ballarat to Bendigo \$20 million

##### **Geelong Road**

Additional lane each way Melbourne to Geelong \$118 million

##### **Princes Highway West**

Duplication Geelong to Colac \$175 million

##### **South Gippsland Highway**

Upgrading the Highway including: \$240 million

- Duplication Berwick ' Cranbourne Road
- Restoration and replacement of historic Swing Bridge at Longford
- Road realignment in the Grassy Spur area
- Realignment, new overtaking lanes and shoulder sealing from Lang Lang to Loch
- \$10 million per year on general highway improvements

### **Bass Highway**

Upgrading the Highway including: \$74 million

- continued duplication of the Bass Highway to 'M' road standard between the South Gippsland Highway, near Lang Lang and Anderson;
- upgrade the Phillip Island Road to 'A' road standard with sealed shoulders and overtaking lanes;
- develop the Bass Highway between Anderson and Leongatha to 'B' road standard, over 15 years; and
- undertake key curve alignments on the Phillip Island Road.

### **Princes Highway East**

- Hallam Bypass \$175 million
- Pakenham Bypass \$90 million (joint Federal-State)
- Duplication Traralgon to Sale \$140 million
- Replace North Arm Bridge \$5 million
- Bruthen Nowa Nowa Alternative Route \$10 million
- Overtaking lanes, shoulder sealing & realignment Sale to NSW border \$50 million

### **Northern Highway**

Upgrading the Highway including: \$15.5 million

- Duplication between the Hume Freeway and Kilmore
- Construction of the Kilmore Bypass
- Construction of the Pyalong Bypass

### **Sunraysia Highway**

Upgrading the Highway \$13.5 million

### **National Roads Network**

The Coalition will also seek additional Commonwealth funding for:

- Duplication of the Calder Highway to Bendigo by 2005 (\$366 million shared between State and Commonwealth Governments);
- Upgrade of the Western Highway Ballarat to South Australian border (\$25 million);
- Duplication of the Goulburn Valley Highway between Seymour and Shepparton (\$176 million); and
- Further upgrades of the Goulburn Valley Highway, north of Shepparton (\$70 million)

### **Local Roads**

Local Government is responsible for management of unclassified (local) roads and

bridges. In addition to Council rate revenue, funding is provided via untied road grants from the Federal Government.

The Victorian Grants Commission distributes Commonwealth general purpose funding to municipal councils. The general purpose funding comprises two components ' Financial Assistance Grants and Local Roads Funds. Local roads funding amounts to approximately \$80 million per annum.

While funding for local road works are recognised nationally as being the responsibility of the Federal Government and local shires, the Coalition created a category for 'State Impacted Rural Local Roads' within the Better Roads Victoria Fund. This category is available to fund the reconstruction and upgrading of local roads where the nature and volume of traffic has been significantly affected by State Government initiatives (eg changes in grain transport routes). Priority is given to projects of regional importance.

Further, in 1997/98, the Coalition announced 'timber roads' funding within the State Impacted Rural Local Roads category. The fund provides for reconstruction and catch-up works for local timber roads affected by log cartage from State Government owned land. Local Government provides \$1 for every \$6 provided by the State Government.

The Coalition has undertaken to provide \$6 million a year to assist Councils in the upgrading of bridges on the local road network. Funding would be provided by the Government and Local councils on a shared dollar for dollar basis

### **Excise and Federal Government Road Funding**

The Federal Government collects approximately \$12 billion in revenue from excise on petroleum products of which only \$1.6 billion is returned in road funding. In 1999/2000 Victoria will receive only \$267 million or 16.6% of the national total. This is despite Victoria contributing 25% of revenue and accounting for 25% of national road travel.

The Coalition will continue to lobby the Federal Government for a fairer distribution of Federal funds. In effect, Victorians are subsidising road construction in other states, particularly Queensland, by \$130 million every year.

### **Rail / Coach**

The Coalition has undertaken significant rail and coach infrastructure improvements throughout the State. Examples include:

- The successful introduction of Sprinter train services at a cost of \$60 million to Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong, Traralgon and Seymour.
- A \$5.6 million upgrade for country rail stations, with improvements to platforms, lighting, signage, public address systems and car parking spaces. Significant renovations have taken place at Warragul, Melton, Geelong, South Geelong, Bendigo, Woodend, Craigieburn, Seymour, Wallan, Benalla, Wodonga and Morwell.
- Upgrade of the Geelong to Warrambool rail line, at a cost of \$10 million, to enable passenger trains to increase their speed to 115 kmh an hour.
- Investment of \$20 million to standardise the rail line from Portland to Maroona (in the Western District), plus the grain lines to Hopetoun and Yaapeet to enable grain access to the Port of Portland. Grain from northern Victoria can also be transported to Portland with the \$5 million dual-gauging of the track between Dunolly and Maryborough and the standardising through to Ararat.
- \$15 million upgrade of the line rail line between Pura Pura and Maroona, to enable faster passenger services.

The Coalition has secured a significant commitment for further improvements to rail/coach infrastructure in rural Victoria. As part of the franchise of V/Line Passenger to National Express, the Coalition secured a commitment by National Express to invest \$165 million improving rail infrastructure ' of which \$7 million will be spent on upgrading stations and rolling stock. The remaining \$158 million will be spent on purchasing 58 new high-speed train units. National Express has also announced it is undertaking a strategic review of rail services, including extending the rail services to Bairnsdale and Ararat.



Infrastructure at modal interchanges will be improved as part of the Coalition's \$10 million commitment to bus waiting facilities in places such as Bendigo, Swan Hill, Sale, Bacchus Marsh, Geelong, Craigieburn and Leongatha. School bus safety will also be improved with \$10 million committed to an integrated package of education programs and physical works which include better bus bay provision, road works, and safer and weather proofed waiting areas. Physical works at rural bus interchanges include Traralgon Secondary College, Yarrowonga Secondary College, and facilities in Colac, Ballarat and Geelong.

## **Water**

Country Victorians are now enjoying lower prices and higher water quality from the largest ever injection of funding into Victorian water infrastructure.

By 2002, the Coalition will have spent \$1.2 billion improving water and sewerage infrastructure in rural and regional Victoria.

This is the largest infrastructure project in the history of Victoria.

In 1992, only 27% of rural people had World Health Organisation standard water. The Coalition's aim is for 100% by the end of next year.

In 1992, only 33% of rural people had wastewater discharge facilities that met EPA guidelines. Our aim is for 100% by 2001.

The result of this infrastructure development is that it opens up great opportunities for industry investment - particularly in the food processing industry. If a township can't provide quality water and can't provide EPA standard wastewater treatment, then it doesn't attract new industries. The best way to ensure a bright future for rural communities is to have the best possible infrastructure available. It is also important to recognise the potential for job creation from this initiative.

Examples of expenditure include:

- Omeo sewerage plant \$3.0 million
- Paynesville sewerage plant \$1.1 million
- Lakes Entrance effluent disposal works \$6.0 million
- Metung sewerage plant \$2.6 million
- Koorlong sewerage treatment facility \$12.8 million
- Mildura Alum sludge plant \$1.8 million
- Merbein wastewater disposal project \$0.9 million
- Wonthaggi ' Inverloch trunk system upgrade \$2.8 million
- Meeniyan water filtration plant \$0.6 million
- Lance Creek water treatment plant \$5.8 million
- Mortlake sewerage treatment plant \$6.1 million - which will see treated waste water used for irrigation purposes.

## **Power and Gas**

The Coalition has a strong commitment to improving electricity infrastructure in rural and regional areas, as evidenced by the commitment made in our Rural and Regional Policy to "identify statewide practical and effective electricity solutions as part of the Coalition's commitment to remove impediments to economic growth in rural and regional Victoria."

The catalyst for this commitment is the expanding food production occurring in rural Victoria as a consequence of the restored confidence brought about by the economic reforms of the Coalition Government. This is particularly highlighted in the South West where single wire earth return (SWER) lines are impacting on the growth of the dairy industry.

To that end, the Coalition will examine options to work with the private sector to facilitate improved electricity infrastructure in rural and regional areas.

In addition, the Office of the Regulator-General has an ongoing role in monitoring service standards and reliability right across Victoria.

Under the Coalition, access to natural gas by rural communities has been significantly expanded since 1992, with a range of new locations being connected to gas for the first time. These include:

- Portland
- Koroit
- Cobden
- Yarragon
- Strathfieldsaye
- Hamilton
- Healesville
- Central Murray Valley (ie from Chiltern to Cobram, including Rutherglen, Yarrawonga, and Numurkah)
- Wimmera (Horsham, Ararat, Stawell)
- Mildura

Several other communities for which approvals have been given include East Gippsland (Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Paynesville and Orbost), Cardinia Shire (Bunyip, Nar Nar Goon, Garfield, Tynong) and Colac.

While the Coalition has received no formal request from Local Councils for the connection of Wonthaggi, Leongatha and Korumburra to reticulated gas, the Coalition will examine any proposal put forward by local communities or gas distribution companies for gas connection to these centres.

#### **Attachment 4**

#### **Government Services being provided to Rural and Regional Victoria**

##### **Health**

##### **Capital Works**

The 1999/2000 Budget proves the Coalition is committed to rural and regional Victoria with it receiving 36 per cent of the allocated health capital works projects (against 28% of Victoria's population). In 1998/99, the percentage of capital works spent in rural areas was 31 per cent.

The Coalition is committed to the following capital works for 1999/2000 which include:

- \$15 million to further implement the **Fire Risk Management Strategy** for all Human Services facilities.
- \$15.4 million for **Wangaratta Base Hospital**, including major renovations to the theatre.
- \$4.8 million for new facilities at the **Wimmera Health Care Group**, including improvements to community health facilities and psychiatric care.
- \$3.4 million for the redevelopment of acute, aged care and community health facilities at **Korumburra**.
- \$18.6 million for the redevelopment of aged care residential facilities in **Heywood, Warracknabeal, Maldon, Swan Hill, Daylesford, Yea and Korumburra**.
- \$5.5 million for a new **Community Health Centre in Belmont**, plus the addition of dental chairs to the Newcomb site.
- \$1 million to upgrade the **Maryborough Multipurpose Service Facility**.
- \$4.1 million to **Myrtleford** to complete its redevelopment, including acute and aged care beds.
- \$6 million for redevelopment works at **Lorne Community Hospital**.
- \$2.7 million for **Ballarat Health Services** to complete the acute redevelopment at

Ballarat Base Hospital.

- \$2 million for the redevelopment of **West Wimmera at Jeparit**, comprising some acute services, aged care services, community care and a medical clinic.
- \$4.5 million acute redevelopment at **Wonthaggi Hospital**.

**Other redevelopments proposed beyond 1999/2000 (includes Aged Care, Community and Mental health)**

- Alpine Multi Purpose Service - Bright
- Bairnsdale - develop Community Care Unit
- Ballarat - Radiotherapy Bunker
- Barwon Health - Grace McKellar Centre
- Beechworth Hospital
- Bendigo - Radiotherapy Bunker
- Casterton Memorial Hospital
- Colac Hospital
- East Grampians Health Services - Ararat and Stawell
- Echuca Regional Health
- Latrobe Regional Hospital - Radiotherapy Bunker
- Northern District (Kerang) Community Health Service
- Warragul - develop Community Care Unit
- West Wimmera Health Service - Nhill and Rainbow
- Wyndham Integrated Health Service
- Neo-natal services statewide redevelopment
- Ambulance Training Centre at Frankston
- Cranbourne - a new Integrated Care Centre
- Geelong Community Health Centre
- Kyneton District Health Service
- Lilydale Community Health Centre
- Sunbury - development of Integrated Care Centre
- West Wimmera Health Service redevelopment at Jeparit
- Wonthaggi Hospital - aged care redevelopment

**New Hospitals**

The Latrobe Regional Hospital in the Latrobe Valley has been opened and a new hospital for Mildura is under construction. Funding for a new hospital at Lorne has been approved.

**Rural Ambulance**

Over the next term, the Coalition will form a detailed strategy to enhance rural ambulance services integrating road, fixed-wing and rotary air ambulance services, particularly to support the Coalition's commitment to the development of centres of excellence for the treatment of trauma (expected to save an additional 60 lives each year).

The Coalition's contribution to Rural Ambulance Victoria has increased from \$18 million in 1993/94 to \$33 million today. Rural Ambulance Victoria is transporting 13% more patients than in 1993/94 and there has been an 8% increase in the rural ambulance workforce. The Coalition will continue its commitment to better ambulance services for rural Victorians through the new Rural Ambulance Service, based in Ballarat.

The Coalition has consolidated emergency care services at rural base hospitals. These will be supplemented by a significant investment in additional ambulances and a statewide helicopter ambulance service. Over the next four years, 160 ambulances will

be replaced with new vehicles for rural Victoria.

## **Cancer Treatment**

The Coalition has finalised arrangements with the Commonwealth and radiotherapists for the establishment of three single machine cancer radiotherapy service units in rural Victoria at Ballarat, Bendigo, and the LaTrobe Valley at Morwell. This will be the first of its kind in Australia (because Victoria has led the push) and is a significant boost for rural Victorians who will have vastly improved access to cancer therapy services. Radiotherapy services have recently commenced at Murray Valley Private Hospital in Wodonga, and the Department of Human Services is involved in negotiations with the provider to secure services for public patients.

## **Rural Doctors**

The shortage of rural medical practitioners is a recognised national issue with Federal, State/Territory and key medical stakeholders involved to address the issue. As this is one of the Coalition's highest priorities, we have worked closely with the Commonwealth to develop innovative plans for assisting overseas trained doctors to practice in rural areas. Under the new scheme, Overseas Trained Doctors (OTD) who commit to a rural area of need for a period of six years and who qualify for Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners will become eligible for a Medicare Provider Number. Victoria has advertised internationally (targeting the UK, Ireland, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Canada, New Zealand and OTD in other States) to attract doctors to rural Victoria. The Victorian Government has led the way in developing innovative plans for getting overseas trained doctors into rural areas and has been faster and more successful than any other State, receiving more than 800 applications which will be examined with a view to placing 100 General Practitioners by the end of the year.

In a move to assist rural Victorians access health services, the Department of Human Services approved over 160 temporary resident visas for medical practitioners mostly going to rural Victoria in the period January 1998 to January 1999. In addition to this, there are a significant number of medical practitioners who have entered the country under the "occupational trainee" scheme and are filling both research and service positions in public hospitals.

## **Bush Nursing Hospitals**

The Coalition will continue its unprecedented step to fund upgrades for Bush Nursing Hospitals. The Coalition has taken this step to ensure that this vital part of Victoria's rural health system remains viable. The Coalition will inject \$6 million over the next term to enable these facilities, often in remote areas, to continue to provide appropriate and necessary services.

## **Medical Technology - Helping Patients Get Treatment in Rural Hospitals**

Information technology has overcome many of the disadvantages rural communities previously encountered in gaining access to modern health services. With advances in technology, such as telemedicine, a patient in Mildura for example can benefit from a consultation between their physician and specialists at the Royal Melbourne hospital, eliminating the need for travel. Technology also allows patients to be diagnosed and treated without leaving their local centre through the transfer of electronic imaging.

## **Dental**

We will reduce dental disease among rural Victorian children so they enjoy the best dental health in Australia. This will be achieved by a significant injection of funds which will be targeted to reduce dental decay among pre-school and school aged children including the expansion of the number of public dental chairs in rural Victoria. By 2004, the number of adult dental treatment chairs in rural Victoria will have increased to 74 (from 50 in 1992), representing 35% of the total Victoria-wide.

## **Case-Mix Funding for Rural Hospitals**

The casemix price for rural and regional hospitals is deliberately inflated above the price for a similar procedure in metropolitan hospitals, to maintain and increase the viability of rural hospitals. This is a long-standing measure which is now complemented by other measures to achieve this end. These additional measures are reflective of the Coalition's recognition that efficiencies which metropolitan health care networks can achieve may not be available to rural, stand-alone hospitals.

In this financial year, the Coalition introduced a specific grant to counteract any negative financial impact experienced by rural and regional hospitals caused by a change in the mix of cases treated. For instance, many of the smaller hospitals are now performing fewer of the more complex cases as a result of decreasing patient demand. The Coalition recognises that a small change in the mix of cases can have a large impact on the financial viability of smaller country hospitals. Therefore, in the past year where this impact has been negative, a specific conversion grant has been given to counteract this impact.

Furthermore, this financial year has seen for the first time significant additional funding for country hospitals to reduce their waiting lists.

The Coalition has also commissioned Professor Stephen Duckett to provide an independent report on the amount and distribution of outpatient funding for hospitals in rural Victoria. This report is due to be completed within the next two months. This report may highlight other areas for consideration in determining funding and demonstrates the Coalition's ongoing commitment to ensuring rural and regional hospitals are able to continue to provide high level, appropriate health services to rural Victorians.

### **1% Productivity Savings in Health**

The Coalition has maintained the previous Labor Government's 1.5% productivity saving per annum imposed across most areas of government. Hospitals have been given an 'internal' buffer which reduces the saving down to about 1%.

The money 'saved' across government is redistributed to priority portfolios with health being the major beneficiary. Monies coming to health from the productivity savings have outstripped its own 1.5% savings, together with the additional growth funds allocated

The Coalition does not intend to match the ALP's commitment to impose a further 1% 'efficiency dividend' on supplies and consumables in addition to the 1.5% productivity saving described above.

### **Youth & Community Services**

The Coalition is committed to providing equitable access to services based on need, recognising this can be more difficult for people in rural locations.

To assist in overcoming access difficulties for country people, the Coalition has adopted a range of measures including:

- per capita grants for rural preschools being significantly higher than for metropolitan preschools. The standard grant is \$949 per child, the rural grant is \$1,188 and the small rural grant is \$1,782. Rural and standard grants have increased by 18.5 per cent over the last five years, enabling a record high number of children from around Victoria (93 per cent of all four year olds) to attend kindergarten.
- the funding of two pilots - one rural and one metro - to develop effective ways of assisting parent-based kindergarten committees of management.
- established as part of the Coalition's Suicide Prevention Strategy, the School Focused Youth Service. It is based around school clusters which are smaller in rural areas to ensure superior access in localities where social isolation can put young people at risk of self-harm.
- funding for child protection and foster care services based on a formula loaded in favour of rural Victoria.
- the Coalition's parenting support strategy - the most comprehensive in Australia - which includes nine Regional Parenting Services located throughout the State and Parentline which enables access to advice and support from anywhere in the state 24 hours a day.

The Coalition is committed to expanding the use of innovative information delivery to help overcome the barriers of distance which perpetuate disadvantage. It has established *Disability Information Victoria*, comprising an Internet information clearing house and a telephone-based help service for people with disabilities, their families and carers statewide.

To further assist people with a disability and their families, particularly ageing parents caring for a disabled son or daughter, the Coalition will create 500 new community-based accommodation places over the next four years (400 more than promised by Labor). The Coalition will also expand the 1996 Carers Initiative by providing \$28 million a year statewide to help the families who care for a frail, elderly, chronically ill or disabled relative.

### **Education and Training**

The Coalition places significant emphasis on the economic imperative and social value education plays in a community. As such, we believe that regional Victorians are entitled to access top quality education and facilities equal to that of their metropolitan counterparts.

Our commitment to education and training in regional Victoria is demonstrated by:

- all Victorian Government schools regardless of location having access to the World Wide Web, email, video conferencing, data transfer and a wide range of online curriculum material. Many rural schools benefit from the use of teleconferencing facilities for teacher professional development and for face-to-face teaching of subjects that would otherwise not be available in distant locations.

To further assist rural and regional students access the spectrum of subject choices, the Coalition will establish a new *Distance Education Centre* to cater for students who currently study by correspondence. It will enable students in regional and rural areas to study subjects that are not offered by their own school. It will cost \$3.8 million to establish and \$300,000 a year thereafter to run.

- schools receiving grants for maintenance projects receive an additional 10% if they are in receipt of the Rurality and Isolation Funding to compensate for additional costs associated with their location.
- the recent Budget allocation of \$104 million over four years for the roll out of new Information Technology support which will mean funding for the creation of 90 specialist technician positions and 110 routine/operational level technicians in country Victoria.
- \$350 million being spent in country Victorian schools on capital works and maintenance since 1992.
- the Coalition's commitment to allocate an extra \$500,000 a year to teachers in isolated locations to provide access to professional development activities equivalent to that of their metropolitan counterparts.
- the Victorian TAFE system being independently recognised as the best in Australia. A study by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Report on Government Services both confirm that Victoria's TAFEs have the:
  - highest participation rate in the country at 12.4% - the national average was 10%; and
  - the highest proportion of rural, regional and remote students in the country. Victoria's rural and regional participation rate is 12.2% compared to the national average of 8.3%. Our remote participation rate is 23.8% compared to the national average of 8.1%.
  - Spending of \$90 million since 1992 on new buildings for regional TAFEs. A total of \$4 million has been provided to regional TAFEs in the past two years for upgraded communications and technology infrastructure, which helps reduce costs associated with isolation and distance.
  - Growth in commencing apprenticeships/traineeships in regional Victoria. Growth in 1998 compared with 1997 has been very strong.

- Warragul area - 125% (282 to 636)
- Barwon region (Geelong) - 85% (917 to 1693)
- Western District (Warrnambool, Portland) - 41.5% (566 to 801)
- Loddon (Bendigo) - 41% (1291 to 1818)

- Gippsland (Morwell, Moe, Traralgon) - 35.5% (808 1095).
- Ovens Murray (Wodonga, Wangaratta) - 32% (559 to 739)
- Wimmera (Horsham) - 23% (399 to 492)
- Goulburn (Shepparton) - 17% (1221 to 1432)
- East Gippsland (Bairnsdale, Sale) - 16.5% (534 to 622)

● For mature age learners and older people, lifelong education options have been enhanced with 10 Learning Networks established across Victoria. Learning Networks link TAFE Institutes with community houses, industry, libraries and the home using the latest technologies of the TAFE Virtual Campus, allowing students to study in their own time and place. The Coalition will increase the number of Learning Networks to 15.

## **The Environment**

Making Victoria the cleanest, greenest State in the world by preserving and enhancing our natural assets is a central aim of the Coalition. Examples which demonstrate our commitment across a range of environmental areas include:

- establishment of NRE Information Centres at Ballarat, Bendigo and Hamilton. These centres are supported by upgraded service facilities at Benalla, Echuca, Leongatha, Swan Hill and Wodonga providing the full range of NRE Information services and access to online services;
- To assist with the delivery of services equitably across metropolitan and regional Victoria, electronic communications is now being used extensively. Printed material is now available online as is a growing number of specialist online services such as Land Channel which provides Internet access to a range of land data. In addition, state and local government property information is being brought together into one authoritative digital map base with all regional municipalities expected to be signed up in 1999/2000. Electronic communications is also assisting regional Victoria access the Integrated Fire Information System which will facilitate improved decision making by fire and resource managers;
- The highly successful \$10 million Rabbit Buster Initiative has seen rabbit control works carried out on 3 million hectares of private land and 500,000 hectares of public land resulting in a 30% reduction in rabbit numbers across Victoria. The campaign to eradicate rabbits will be stepped up with a Coalition commitment of a further \$10 million over 3 years to create rabbit free zones and further reductions in rabbit numbers statewide;
- A combination of extension and enforcement activities on priority weeds was undertaken through the \$12 million Weeds Initiative which will be extended by the Coalition;
- The Coalition is committed to addressing priority land and water management issues identified in each of Victoria's 10 Regional Catchment Management Strategies;
- The Coalition provided nearly \$8 million for CMAs in 1998/99 to undertake works identified in their Waterway Management Strategies and catchment based nutrient management/water quality plans. The Coalition is also benchmarking the health of our waterways to assist waterway managers in assigning priority for works to enhance the condition of our rivers;
- Following the devastation of the Gippsland region, rehabilitation works on a scale greater than ever before in Victoria were undertaken. These included protection of major public assets, strategic river restoration works and urgent land protection works to prevent further erosion and degradation of the Gippsland Lakes. The Coalition provided \$62 million to the East Gippsland Flood Recovery Program;
- A special \$8 million program over 4 years has been announced by the Coalition for improvements to many crown land reserves, principally in rural and regional areas. This is the first such program in 100 years and will be implemented in partnership with Local Government. This will improve facilities and local environs, help local communities to attract tourists and generate employment opportunities in regional Victoria;
- The Coalition has undertaken a range of projects to improve facilities in Victoria's parks. Future projects include the 110km Great Ocean Walk; upgrade of facilities at Grampians National Parks including walking tracks, lookout points, camping and picnic facilities; and \$900,000 to rural national parks, including for improved walking and cross country skiing tracks in the Alpine National Park;
- The Coalition will upgrade more than 50 regional botanic gardens around the state by providing \$20 million over the next 10 years to match contributions by local councils;
- Through the Coast to Coast Initiative, the Coalition is protecting the coastal

environment while providing appropriate infrastructure to support tourism, fishing, recreation boating and shipping. Coastal action planning processes will continue to be implemented by the Regional Coastal Boards and provide advice to Government ensuring local people are increasingly involved in decision making processes.

- The West Victorian and Gippsland Coastal Board action plans will share in \$3.3 million over the next 3 years for improvements to foreshore areas at key destinations and improvement of water quality of the Gippsland Lakes.

### **Department of Justice (Police and Emergency Services)**

Police numbers in rural and regional Victoria have increased by 14% since 1992. The Coalition has maintained all one-man stations and since 1992 has built 35 new police stations including at Lakes Entrance, Murrayville, Werrimull, Wonthaggi and Loch. In addition, the Coalition has committed to increasing police numbers by 400. These new recruits are currently undertaking training.

The Coalition has already committed to boosting the 'Support for Emergency Readiness' program. This will see improved CFA access to firefighting aircraft, enhanced fire fighting training and necessary protective clothing upgrades to reduce the loss of life and damage to property associated with major fire incidents.

**Authorised by J.G. Kennett, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne, 3002**