

David Koch

Member for Western Victoria Opposition Whip (Council)

46 Brown Street, Hamilton 3300
Tel: 5572 3377 · Fax: 5572 4945

MEDIA RELEASE

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Securing the long term future of Stawell's Gift

While recent reports about future funding for the Stawell Gift have generated some alarm in the community, David Koch, Member for Western Victoria has called on the State Government to not only maintain its funding support but also give consideration to listing the Stawell Gift on Tourism Victoria's Hallmark events program.

David Koch told Parliament this week that in 2007, over 10,000 visitors saw more than 1,300 elite national and international athletes compete at Stawell. With an estimated \$5 million injected into the local economy over the Easter weekend and a further 1.2 million people watching the carnival on TV, the Stawell Gift is a major sporting event for Victoria.

"The Stawell Athletic Club's dedicated committee of 24 works tirelessly throughout the year to ensure this world class event lives up to its reputation of being the premier foot race in Australia. The groundsmen and women put in a fantastic effort to prepare Central Park. All this work is undertaken by a team of volunteers who are justifiably proudly of showcasing their community to the world.

"The Gift has been run for 126 years and it has grown from strength to strength with many national and international visitors returning year after year to watch competitors fight for the privilege of running in the Gift.

"But like any major event, it costs money to run and it is always a challenge to raise the \$500,000 it takes to organise and run the richest foot race in the world, especially when you consider that this event is hosted by a community of little more than 6,000 permanent residents.

"Currently, major sponsorship is provided by Australia Post with additional sponsorship from local businesses, individuals, the Northern Grampians Shire and State Government funding of \$120,000 provided under the Make it Happen in Provincial Victoria program through Regional Development Victoria. This funding will cease in 2008.

"I believe rightly that the Stawell Gift is seen as having the calibre and status along with national and international recognition qualifying it for consideration as a Tourism Victoria Hallmark event.

"I urge the Minister for Sport and Recreation, James Merlino, to reassure the Stawell community that the Government will not leave the Stawell Athletic Club high and dry when current state funding ceases and that the Government will look favourably on the Club's proposal to list the Stawell Gift as part of Tourism Victoria's Hallmark events program", said David Koch.

Media inquiries: David Koch 0418 723 031