

# David Koch

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### MEDIA RELEASE

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#### **Libraries struggle to meet growing demand**

Falling state government funding for regional and local libraries means they are struggling to meet the growing demand for services says David Koch, Member for Western Victoria.

Speaking in Parliament this week, David Koch said that the recent Auditor-General's report on local government shows that all 12 remaining regional library corporations are struggling to make ends meet and that the financial sustainability of five of them is at serious risk because they do not have enough government funding.

"Public libraries are struggling to survive due to the Brumby Government's cost shifting its share of funding, forcing councils to pour in more and more ratepayers' funds to keep libraries open."

He said council contributions range from 62 per cent to 80 per cent, while government grants range from about 30 per cent down to just 18 per cent.

"The Brumby Government would do better if it adopted the Liberal Party policy taken to the 2006 election of increasing library funding to an average of \$9 per head of population. This would restore state government funding to a level of about 40 per cent instead of the average 25 per cent the government now begrudgingly allocates to councils.

"This is another example of this Government's ongoing cost shifting and the further erosion of country rate bases. Public library costs far exceed growth in state government grants as demands for more information technology grow. Local governments urgently need a substantial increase in guaranteed grants so that regional library service demands can be met.

"The funding formula adopted by the Living Libraries program for country libraries is forcing library operating costs back onto ratepayers while library collections become obsolete and staff morale plummets as library managers try to keep up with public demand on a shoestring", he said.

The Auditor-General also reported that half of all regional library corporations are unable to spend sufficient money on maintaining and keeping book stocks up-to-date.

"Many collections are old and desperately need renewal, and libraries are not adequately funded to invest in the recommended eight-year replacement cycle.

"Operating costs are going through the roof while contributions from the state government are falling as the Brumby Government spends at least \$150 million annually on self-promotion.

"The Brumby Government crows about its support for regional Victorians and the growth in industry and jobs, but is not prepared to adequately fund library services so that they can meet the demands of growing populations in many local government areas.

"I have asked the Minister for Local Government, Richard Wynne to genuinely review the current funding arrangements and to increase recurrent library funding so that local governments can meet the growing demand of ratepayers for their library services", said David Koch.

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