



THE HON DAVID KOCH MLC
Member for Western Province
Spokesman for Racing
46 Brown Street, Hamilton
Ph: 03 55723377
Fax: 03 55724945
Email: david.koch@parliament.vic.gov.au

Western Province Half Yearly Newsletter - December 2003

Dear Liberal Party Members

As 2003 draws to a close, it is timely that I take this opportunity to share with you some of the many issues that have affected those in the Western Province community in recent months and to thank all members for their ongoing support and commitment, for which I am sincerely grateful.

I have met with many constituents who expressed their concerns with several pieces of legislation introduced into Parliament. The Bracks Government has enraged both rural and metropolitan Victorians with the passing of the Child Employment legislation. This Bill limits the opportunity for our younger people (those under 15 years) to gain first hand work experience and guidance from family members, friends and acquaintances without police checks. This particular legislation leaves many people speechless. The opposition was able to gain some small amendments to the extended family clause, but the legislation remains poorly drafted, unacceptable in spirit and will be difficult to enforce.

The new Native Vegetation Legislation demonstrates a total lack of knowledge or acceptance in limiting land managers' ability to remove rabbit burrows and fox holes near living or dead native vegetation. To now impose inspections and securing of permits from the Department of Sustainability and Environment on farmers to undertake this work is short sighted. Compliance in most cases simply will not take place, and again, this is most impractical legislation.

Changes incorporated into the Multi Purpose Taxi Legislation again demonstrate the narrow-mindedness of the Bracks Government in not recognising the ongoing needs of the disabled, aged and infirmed in communities, especially those in regional Victoria, where public transport does not exist. To cap support funding at \$550 per year per person demonstrates just how out of touch this Government is. Again we find the innocent party, the passenger, becoming the victim.

Recently passed Animal Welfare Legislation reflects the opportunity afforded to minority groups over humane management practices. This legislation offers wide powers to the Minister for Agriculture, away from proper Parliamentary process. There are many proven farming practices that have benefited the industry and are recognised as crucial for good animal husbandry, such as cattle dehorning, sheep mulesing and tail docking of sheep and dairy cattle. These practices may now be threatened by the stroke of a pen from the Minister under these sweeping new changes incorporated in this legislation.

Of serious concern is the new Fisheries Legislation that purports to set out a scheme of arrangements in relation to improved compliance and enforcement matters for the fishing industry. It has allowed the Government to introduce legislative change to squash the democratic rights of citizens by implementing retrospective measures that will strike out the rights of individual citizens who currently have an action before the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Other issues raised with me, include:

- ongoing financial strain facing local government due to further cost shifting from the Bracks Government, especially in relation to library and health service delivery;
- a 1.5% across the board productivity deductions in the health sector from operational budgets in anticipation of productivity gains; and
- a further \$10,000 workcover premium support at secondary colleges at the expense of curriculum opportunities.

Concerns were also expressed about the inequity of the rainwater conservation rebate where only those connected to reticulated water authorities are eligible for rebates under the Water Smart Gardens and Home Rebate Scheme. The abolition of the fox bounty scheme, changes to firearms ownership and more recently, the community backlash surrounding the Bracks Government approach to the announcement of a proposed toxic waste facility in country Victoria, are issues that are still generating genuine concern.

Following the community outcry concerning the public perception that speed cameras were being used for revenue raising by the Bracks Government, speeding fines imposed on motorists booked on 16 October 2003 along Port Fairy Road were withdrawn due to the lack of policy procedures being in place. In this case, some 55 licence holders were threatened with license cancellation and a further 77 facing heavy penalties. This demonstrates that the argument supporting road safety has moved heavily towards that of revenue collection.

My own portfolio responsibility in racing provides many opportunities for the Opposition to support the interests of racing participants both regionally and in the metropolitan area. My time in recent months has been dedicated to assisting country racing maintain some ownership and autonomy of club management. As a result, I raised in Parliament the concerns of race horse owners and trainers about Racing

Victoria Limited's proposed changes under its Operational Destiny proposal and its training facilities review in country Victoria. It was pleasing to see that common sense eventually prevailed with RVL relenting and that all training centres are to remain financially supported for at least another three years. This will benefit many communities in regional Victoria.

Similar concerns of club autonomy and management are emerging within greyhound racing ranks, where supporters have expressed dismay at how the 'administrative tail' of Greyhound Racing Victoria is now 'wagging the dog'. I will again bring to the attention of GRV concerns of industry supporters in order to gain greater opportunity for owners and trainers.

Revenue from the Tabcorp joint venture to the racing industry saw dramatic financial decreases due to earlier introduced smoking bans. To accommodate these shortfalls, by majority in regional Victoria, peak bodies of all three codes are using the management of occupational, health and safety as a barge pole to threaten the viability of some racing centres. I have consistently challenged the industry in that if O,H & S compliance is not affordable, then the legislation needs reviewing. The racing industry makes too big a contribution to the Victorian economy to be thrown into turmoil.

Apart from race days, during August, September and October I also visited many racing clubs throughout Victoria to discuss issues affecting country racing.

In closing, I am thankful to Robert Doyle for giving all MLAs and MLCs a portfolio role. I know my colleagues have appreciated this also and hopefully this will give the Opposition the opportunity to put policies in place that more reflect the aspirations of Victorians prior to the next election.

Jenny, Ian and I wish you all a happy Christmas, festive season and a prosperous 2004.

D. F. Koch