

THE PURPLE SAGE PROJECT



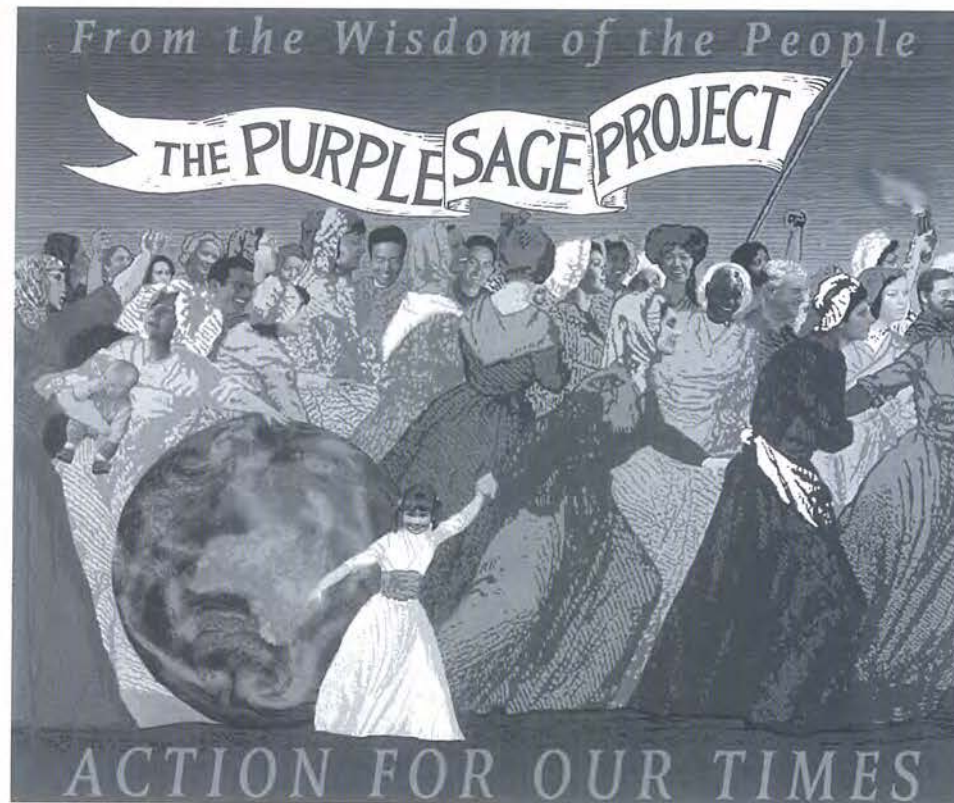


The Purple Sage Project

From the wisdom of the people – action for our times

A partnership project involving the Victorian Women's Trust,
The Stegley Foundation, the Brotherhood of St Laurence,
the People Together Project, the Victorian Local Governance
Association and the YWCA Victoria.





It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way...

Charles Dickens **A Tale of Two Cities** 1859



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The Purple Sage Project was possible only because of many different and complementary contributions from people across Victoria.

Group Leaders and participants in the dialogue played a pivotal role, taking the time and effort to come together and register their thoughts and ideas. Group Leaders also kept in touch with the members of their groups and helped the Project to distribute several pieces of correspondence.

Another 130 people came on board in the 'think tank' sessions, designed to assist us translate people's concerns into a framework for action. These people gave up the equivalent of three full days to assist the Project. While these sessions were demanding and at times frustrating, they were critical to the development of the action themes.

We also thank Andrew Mountford for his energy and skill in helping us to run these sessions.

There were three special writing workshops in which the Management Group and Project staff wrestled with the overall look and content of this public document. We were ably assisted in these sessions and follow up commentary by others, including Graeme and Serena Sweeney, Patricia ni Ivor, Ann Morrow, John Power, Elery Hamilton-Smith, Betty Ashton, Leanne Miller, Gillian Rivers, Don Siemon, Ken Coghill, Brigid Arthur, Carolyn Atkins, Helen Gow, Jean McCaughey, Val Yule, Michaela Kronemann, Vivienne McCutcheon, Connie Benn and Mary Tehan.

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From its inception in July 1998, the Project has demanded an enormous effort from members of the Management Group and the Project staff. The Project staff has managed complex logistics with great poise and their commitment has never wavered.

Pat Milthorpe, Nicky Friedman, Lyn Malone and Janny Ryan were of enormous assistance in cleaning up the draft.

Margaret Wirrpunda, an elder of the Wurrundjeri, put great time and effort taking the Project to Aboriginal communities for discussion and feedback.

The Project benefited from the financial contribution of The Stegley Foundation and the generosity of two marvellous women, Joanna Baevski and another who wishes to remain anonymous. As well, the Victorian Women's Trust provided 'in kind' staff support. Without this combined support, the Project simply would not have been able to run.



THE PURPLE SAGE PROJECT

From the wisdom of the people: action for our times

FOREWORD

The Purple Sage Project began in August 1998.

It represented a new and important partnership among our six organisations. In coming together, we were absolutely committed to the conduct of an independent, non-party political program of discussion and action. This is not to deny our own values and in particular our commitment to a just and democratic society.

We were increasingly uneasy about developments and trends in Victoria at the time – a widening gap between the rich and poor, continued high unemployment, reduced standards of community service, increased strain on local communities (especially in regional Victoria), the loss of public assets, racism and social tension, and a serious erosion of our democratic rights and culture.

We detected among many people across the State a deep frustration and alienation, a sense that our elected representatives were not listening and that people could do little to stop what they saw as a marked decline in community well-being.

We believed it did not have to be this way. We wanted to create an opportunity for people around Victoria to come together; to give voice; to articulate their preferred vision for the future; and to develop the means by which people as citizens could engage constructively on the issues that were worrying them.

People came together in serious dialogue with one another. Over the course of the Project, some 6000 people became involved – in small group meetings, group leader sessions, community agency meetings and think tank sessions.

The depth and detail of people's responses gave us a profound insight into and understanding of a number of important issues. Democracy. Unemployment. Inequality. Job security. A perceived weakening of communities. Education. Reduced services. Environmental degradation. Gambling. Privatisation.

We drafted a public document to capture these considerations as well as a range of actions for people to pick up and generate new energy for civic engagement.

The calling of an early State election changed this document in a number of critical ways. Many of the ideas for action that had been developed were matched in varying degrees by the policy commitments of the major parties. Their commitments for example on regulation of the gambling industry, democratic reform and public education reflected many (though not all) of the actions we had identified.

The September 1999 election outcome does not mean the issues of concern to Purple Sage participants have gone away. Considering the nature and strength of these issues and the actions being proposed it is clear that a great deal needs to be done through effective civic engagement.



As a result of the widespread privatisation program in Victoria, there is now a new environment and new realities. In this changed environment, we need to watch carefully how problems of unemployment, poverty, inequality and declining services are dealt with by government, for-profit organisations and indeed the wider community. We need as well to map what people can do about these issues, for they require more than the attention of just the private and public sectors.

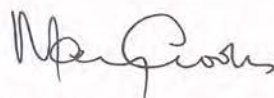
We sought to give the community a voice and identify a way forward on the issues troubling people. This document is for all Purple Sage participants and those who may not have been able to participate but who share the same values and principles for community life.

This is not one person's or one organisation's account of a turbulent era. The document serves first as a public record, informed by the experience of many people across the State.

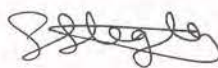
For some readers new to the Project, the anger expressed in the text may at times, be disturbing, and the stance adopted may seem overly critical of developments in Victoria under an economic rationalist umbrella. Our position is that for the document to have integrity, it must reflect the prevailing mood of the many people involved. Among other sentiments, people's anger was palpable.

The document also fleshes out a program of action for greater civic engagement on important issues of the day.

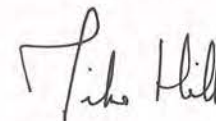
Finally, the public document tries each step of the way to be faithful to the spirit and content of the very first dialogue around Victoria in late 1998. We know it cannot and should not try to be all things to all people. But we rejoice in the knowledge that this public document shows people do have much in common, and that their desire for a fair, prosperous and decent democratic society is strong and enduring.



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Brotherhood of St Laurence



BROTHERHOOD
of St LAURENCE



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Purple Sage story begins in tumultuous times.

For Australian society, the 1980s and 1990s reflect a period of profound economic restructuring. The changes are immense, brought on by the pressures of a global economy, new developments in technology and far reaching changes in the pace and flow of capital markets. The technology of our time means change is swift.

FREE MARKET ASSUMPTIONS AND VALUES DOMINATE THE PHILOSOPHICAL CLIMATE

The political climate changes. The era of a free market sweeps in. Some call it 'Thatcherism' in deference to the radical conservative program adopted in England under Margaret Thatcher. In Australia we call it 'economic rationalism'. It emerges at a time when public policy is increasingly determined by government decree rather than resulting from development and negotiation with citizens.

This new philosophy has an unswerving belief in the free market and a minimally regulated private enterprise system as the best way of achieving economic and social objectives. It seeks therefore to remove impediments to the market.

As part of this world view, government must pull back and play a less interventionist role and, as a matter of priority, scale back its social expenditure. It is alleged that government overspends on the support of those services once considered public goods – education, health, environmental quality and social welfare.

A new language confronts ordinary men and women. The term 'downsizing' (or more latterly 'rightsizing') describes job loss without any reference to the human element. Financial and labour markets are 'de-regulated'; 'microeconomic reform' is urged on all fronts; a 'privatisation' agenda is introduced into a country with a long and impressive record of public sector investment and ownership. Public services are to reflect a 'user-pays' principle. All heads of government endorse the Hilmer Report that enshrines competition as a governing principle in all public policy.

Despite two long periods of economic growth and steadily falling inflation, unemployment levels are high, especially in many rural areas. Small business failures reach a new high. Even many larger companies go into bankruptcy or liquidation. Others are victims of corporate mergers. Record numbers of people become long-term unemployed as hundreds of thousands of Australians lose their jobs through retrenchment. The hardest hit are young people and those in mid-career. Suicide among men in these two age groups rises to be the highest in the world. Australia develops one of the widest gaps between rich and poor among OECD countries.

Little protection is offered to those left in the wake of this change. The late 1980s record a deep and severe recession. Nation-wide, the union movement is weakened to the point where a minority of workers are union members. A Federal election in 1993 shows that a government can be returned even though at least one million Australians are out of work. For the political strategists, unemployment as an issue is now neutralised.

The economic rationalist approach currently being taken by our governments and imposed on the whole community fails to respect our environment or those many individuals who contribute to the common good in other than economically measurable ways. ■ Purple Sage participants Ivanhoe





People with jobs are working harder than ever before. Individuals are expected to negotiate contracts with employers.

In the late 1990s the country's tax system is dramatically overhauled. A Goods and Services Tax is ushered in with substantial income tax cuts to middle and upper income earners. Social commentators report on a prevailing community mood. There is, it seems, a heightened sense of anxiety, of disengagement and deep distrust of mainstream politics. The emergence of a new political party, One Nation, seems to have mainstream politicians in a spin as they grapple with its origins, its motivating force and its likely survival.

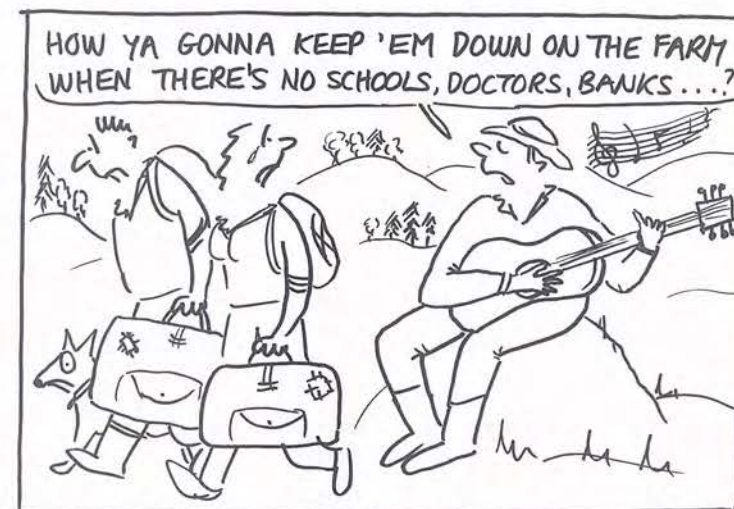


VICTORIA FEELS THE FULL FORCE OF ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

In the late 1980s Victoria's industrial/manufacturing base exposes it more harshly to the full force of economic restructuring and its experience of the recession is worse than in other states.

Funded commitments are systematically reduced throughout the 1980s. Financial institutions, such as Pyramid Building Society and Tricontinental (the merchant banking arm of the State Bank of Victoria), collapse spectacularly and deeply affect consumer confidence. Victoria, a wealthy State with higher levels of debt than most other states, is burdened by high interest rates.

The Premier is replaced. His successor faces the people in 1992. In an atmosphere of deep anxiety and alarm about State finances, Labor is cast as the 'Guilty Party' and suffers a resounding loss at the October election.



The incoming Liberal/National party government emphasises better economic management. In the first few months after the election, the new government symbolically withdraws \$50 000 from the Grey Sisters, a Catholic Order providing respite care to new mothers. The government argues that the State's 'parlous finances' mean Victorians can no longer afford such services.

A VERY DIFFERENT AGENDA IS REVEALED

Victorians find themselves experiencing radical change, unsurpassed by any other Australian state or territory. They witness first hand a massive restructure and outsourcing of community services at State government level; the introduction of a system of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) to local government; the effective abolition of the award system for Victorian workers; a reduction of the public sector by some 50 000 public employees; the sale to private owners of significant public assets including the State's highly profitable electricity industry; the closure of 380 schools; and unprecedented levels of expenditure cuts in areas of education and health.

Rural communities are especially hard hit. Traditional rural industries face decreasing profitability in the face of international competition and decline in commodity prices. A number of rail services are closed; a number of hospitals and regional or district offices of government are shut down as administration is increasingly centralised. The amalgamation of local government authorities and their control by commissioners, appointed to carry out the state agenda of 'downsizing', means that many townships lose their municipal offices and/or depots. Meanwhile, private sector banks and some other businesses withdraw local services. As people have to



Politicians need to do their work properly – country towns and rural areas are severely disadvantaged and cities overburdened. ■ Purple Sage participants Kangaroo Flat



travel further to utilise core community services, their cost of living increases while shopping is carried out in larger centres and the local traders in small townships are forced to close.

There are significant changes in other areas. A new case-mix model for health funding is introduced at the same time as cuts to the health budget. Victoria's three new private prisons are built with no debate as to whether government should, ethically, transfer the responsibility for looking after offending citizens to profit-seeking private companies.

The Formula One Australian Grand Prix is snatched from Adelaide and relocated to one of Melbourne's historic inner city parklands. The normal statutory requirement for an Environment Effects Statement is suspended and people's right to seek redress through the courts for subsequent property damage to their homes is eliminated.

Conductors are removed from Melbourne's trams and replaced by new ticketing machines. Not long after, there is a little heralded report of a sudden rise in the numbers of people hospitalised as a result of tram-related injury.

The State's public transport system which was built up by people's taxes over several generations is sold to private sector businesses, some of whom have unimpressive performance records. This privatisation is announced through the media in 1999 without any public consultation or opportunity for public debate.

The State Parliament sits fewer days. The *Public Sector Management Act 1993* abolishes tenure and puts senior public servants on individual contracts with substantial performance bonuses attached for carrying out government policy. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is redefined, along

with the Equal Opportunity Commission. The Office of the Auditor General is reviewed, under the label of competition policy, and is essentially privatised.

The privatisation of public utilities results in reduced annual public reporting. Government resists all efforts to release details surrounding the processes involved in the winning casino bid by Crown. Dissent is not tolerated. Critics are vilified.

Wearing the title *Schools of the Future* the public school system is recast to reflect a free market model of education. The thinking is that competition among schools will provide much needed stimulus for performance. In all, 8000 teachers are removed from the system. This includes 4000 special needs teachers. Educational resource centres are closed. Schools have their new global budgets and are now expected to raise local funds from wherever they can.

The more recent *Schools of the Third Millennium* provides incentives for schools to go it alone and significantly distinguish themselves from other schools in the state system. Fifty-one schools from over 1600 opt in to these new arrangements.

The gambling industry is dramatically boosted by the construction of Crown Casino and the placement of some 27 000 electronic gaming machines in local venues throughout the State. State government budgets receive an enormous boost from gambling. In just six years, state receipts from gambling more than double. There is more to this than meets the eye. Providing easy local access to gambling produces more problem gamblers. The distribution of machines is skewed towards areas of lower income. The marketing and promotion of gambling is aggressive and unrestrained.

There is a loss of confidence in the future of work. Precarious employment and contract forms of employment equal dreadful social, economic and personal consequences. Where will the future consumers come from if no one knows whether they will have a job? ■ Purple Sage participants Beaumaris



These changes are dramatic in scope and applied with great urgency. They proclaim a new era, language and focus. Concerns for social equity, people's rights, citizen participation and consultation are rudely pushed aside by the relentless search for efficiencies. Competition is sanctified as the key dynamic – a virtue to be recognised everywhere – in the State's schools, hospitals and local government services. Where other states choose to exercise discretion in the application of competition policy, Victoria embraces this policy comprehensively.

It is an agenda that places an increased burden on Victorian women especially. It is women for the most part (as mothers and teachers in primary schools) who have to deal with the practical consequences of school closures and increased class sizes. Women are the nurses having to deal with crowded wards. Women are the ones more likely to be looking after someone who is on early discharge from hospital. They are probably using up their own sick leave to do so. They are the parents working even harder on the kindergarten committee or fundraising group at the local state school. Industrially, they are more likely to be the workers affected by the removal of the system of State Awards.

IN A HOST OF SUBTLE WAYS, SOCIAL AND GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS ARE REDEFINED

A concern for profit and the dollar becomes the absolute bottom line. Cost effectiveness, market forces, self-regulation, choice, performance and benchmarks are the keys to what we are told is now a confident and thriving State. People are consumers rather than citizens or members of society. Consideration of the common good seems to be unnecessary for it disappears from the social and political canvas.

The State government's handling of the Longford gas plant disaster shows how the role of government itself is recast. No state of emergency is declared. Apart from some threats to stop spiralling prices of LP gas, markets are left unregulated. There is no targeted welfare plan to protect vulnerable groups. The government denies any responsibility and rejects calls for compensation. It finally succumbs to political pressure and appoints a Royal Commission.

Through these heady times, the mantra of fiscal necessity and 'no gain without pain' is intoned at every turn of these policy screws, inducing an uneasy community silence.

People suspect that the government's arrogance comes in part from its unchecked political and legislative power. An increased number of seats in its second term reinforce the supremacy. To people's anger and disappointment, the parliamentary opposition seems incapable of challenging the driving ideology and policy agenda. There is no obvious forum through which ordinary men and women around the State can channel their anger. The daily media seem extraordinarily compliant. There is an increasing mood of despair and a feeling that nothing can be done.

Even the way we speak has been misappropriated. Words have been given new meanings e.g. 'efficiency' now means getting people out of the system: it used to mean good service. ■ Purple Sage participants Ivanhoe



From the wisdom of the people

The Purple Sage Project taps into a mood of despair and confusion. After a lengthy period of thinking and careful design, the Project formally begins in July 1998.

The Purple Sage Project provides a rare and sorely needed opportunity for many people to claim a voice; to articulate

what they see as wrong with the state of things; to define an alternative public vision of the future; and to create a range of action that citizens can take to address their issues of concern.

This capacity to give voice, to act on issues of concern, is all the more important for women when it is considered how seriously under represented women are in political and other major decision-making

processes. It is no surprise that so many women embrace the Project, give it their energy and make it work.

The Purple Sage Project seeks to draw on people's own wisdom and experience. Foremost it is about civic engagement

– about developing people's confidence as citizens and building their capacity for taking action.

The accompanying colourful poster depicts women and men moving forward together. 'Sage' is in the title deliberately because it denotes wisdom. The colours adopted for the Project are purple, green and white. These are the colours of the suffragettes, working for change and justice.

PURPLE SAGE: FROM THE WISDOM OF THE PEOPLE – ACTION FOR OUR TIMES

The Project vows to maintain political independence. This is critical to its credibility as a genuine community endeavour. It recognises, however, that those who give voice to concerns and seek to shape things around them invariably engage in democratic politics.

THE PROJECT IS A NEW AND IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIP

The Purple Sage Project is a new experience for the six community organisations who come together as partners – the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Victorian Women's Trust, the People Together Project, The Stegley Foundation, the YWCA Victoria, and the Victorian Local Governance Association. Representatives from each of these organisations form the Project's Management Group.



A Purple Sage dialogue group
Ringwood North area



Our list of concerns...served to illustrate a deeply felt and eloquently expressed sense of being governed by a system, an insensitive machinery, with fast legislation and fake consultation, leaving people feeling intimidated, disempowered and bulldozed over. ■ Purple Sage participants Trentham

The Management Group begins by briefing as many non-government organisations as possible. Eleven of these sessions take us to regional centres and metropolitan venues. Bendigo, Horsham, Mildura, Wangaratta, Geelong, Moe, Dandenong, Frankston, Box Hill, Altona, central city.

People are invited to help us establish the process of dialogue by being Group Leaders. Over 600 women and men respond. We run 23 briefing sessions around the State, mostly in country Victoria. These meetings are of two to three hour's duration and they allow us to explain the Project in detail and ease people into their roles.

As our limited resources did not allow for multiple translations, Group Leaders needed to be able to speak and write English. However, people were free to conduct the group discussion in their preferred language (see Appendix Three).

As a result of the Group Leaders' efforts, thousands of women and men come on board. Over a third of the dialogue sessions are held in regional Victoria. Of the Group Leaders 76 percent are women.

From September 1998 onwards, people around the State take part in an unprecedented exercise in community dialogue, describing their vision and starting to develop a program of action. People come together in groups of up to ten people all around Victoria, from Bairnsdale to Warrnambool, Coburg, Wodonga and Mildura.

They meet on average for three hours in their lounge rooms, kitchens, church halls, their bookclubs and workplaces.

Most have never done anything like this before. They are excited about the process – keen to make the most of the opportunity to participate. Group Leaders are provided with an A4 discussion summary page to report back to the Project



Team on this first dialogue. Most Group Leaders do not comply! Instead they send in written accounts that are extraordinarily detailed and carefully articulated. The Project Team read, digest and cross-reference thousands of pages.

There is an acute sense of people unloading a burden: venting their worries, anger and frustration; registering deeply felt values and community attachments. But they also have the opportunity to describe their preferred vision of the future and they do this with pleasure, clarity and a deep sense of humanity and decency.

People are buoyed by the fact that they have met others, troubled by similar issues. People begin talking and listening to one another. They talk to family members. They talk outside their local primary school, to close friends and workmates, in the queue at the checkout, after the church service on Sundays.

It was heartening to hear our shared concerns. It starts with each of us. We have power as individuals and as a group to make change. We must not give over that power, but use it. ■ Purple Sage participants Forest Hill



Alongside this consultative process, we take additional steps to obtain feedback from Aboriginal communities. A Management Group member and Project worker meet with individual peak organisations. As well, Margaret Wirrpunda takes draft material to Aboriginal communities in metropolitan and country Victoria.

WE MAP PARTICIPANTS' ISSUES, CONCERNS AND VISION

The Project Team sets about processing all of this material from several thousand fellow Victorians.

People are disturbed by what they see as **an erosion of our democratic culture**. They see Ministers tossing out their democratically elected local governments at whim. They are aware of the undue secrecy relating to government financial dealings. They hear too often the claim that commercial confidentiality makes it impossible to reveal details of tenders that might affect the public interest. They appreciate the importance of public institutions such as the Office of the Auditor General and they are unnerved by the way it has been so easily undermined in Victoria.

It is clear people are worrying about **continuing high levels of unemployment, especially youth unemployment and job security**. People point to the bizarre situation where too many have no work while others are working even longer hours. There are many references to people feeling insecure in their jobs.

They see that more and more people are doing it hard. More people in poverty and **economic and social distress**. They feel the gap between the rich and poor is widening. They emphasise the need to tackle inequality rather than live with it. They appreciate that real wealth and economic sustainability require strong and productive industries.

People sense their communities are being weakened. They accept that public services such as education, health and transport from time to time need to adapt and improve their efficiency and responsiveness. But they do not see this as an open invitation to close down local communities by withdrawal of services, or to send school class sizes into an upward spiral. News reports of sick people waiting days on hospital trolleys and stories of single-driver ambulances horrify them.

They are **angry at the loss – to overseas owners – of public assets** – strongly performing public utilities that the Victorian people themselves had built up over generations by their taxes and voluntary effort. They speak of the ways in which ordinary men and women, over decades, helped to create these assets, and they feel that their contribution is totally ignored in calculating their worth – people in power seem to know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

People generally have a good nose for false economies and can already see that many of the so-called savings being effected now will cost the community down the track. They appreciate that there are limits to competition, to the relentless search for efficiencies, and that there are aspects about the breadth and quality of services that are incompatible with the drive for private profit.

Need for social justice – our social fabric is disintegrating, widening gap, it just is not working. Lack of recognition of magnitude of change is equivalent to the agrarian revolution. The government must do something and accept responsibility for easing people through such major changes. The pendulum of belief must have just about reached the turning point from the extremes of individualism and user pays. We are out of balance with politicians running with the individualist philosophy. ■ Purple Sage participants Mt. Waverley







People want **an inclusive society**, not one of winners and losers. A Victoria where everybody matters – where every person counts.

People are not won over by the argument that an **expanded gambling industry** comes without costs. They know how families suffer and they understand how household income spent on the pokies is money not spent elsewhere.

They rate **environmental care and protection** as a high priority. They do not want increased energy consumption just to satisfy the profit margins of an international company. They do not see massive road projects as the way to deal with urban air pollution and traffic congestion. They value parklands and wilderness as breathing spaces in busy lives, rather than as areas to be annexed for commercial gain.

People are **respectful of differences in culture**. They see diversity as enriching and something to celebrate. They yearn for **genuine reconciliation** between Indigenous and other Australians.

The Purple Sage Project enables people to reflect on and express **their vision of society**. Across the state-wide dialogue, people consistently identify values of justice, co-operation, compassion, care, safety, inclusiveness, equality, tolerance, responsibility, multiracial and multicultural understanding, peace, and happiness.

There is a deep seated understanding of the different and complementary ways we create social cohesion; a working knowledge about how communities grow and maintain their strength; a realisation that people are social beings with an urge to belong and relate to others. The ethos is mutual support. Trust. Respect.

There is a 'no nonsense' understanding of the roles and responsibilities of government in a democracy. Even in changing times there are constants. Stewardship of public assets. Accountability. Transparency. Consultation. Ethical conduct. Governing for all. Protecting the vulnerable.

Likewise there is a clear sense of the role and responsibilities of businesses and their shareholders. Acceptance of the profit motive does not rule out other important responsibilities. Social Responsibility. Environmental care. Safety. Workplace justice.

TRANSLATING CONCERNS INTO ACTION

In March 1999, Purple Sage staff attend the biennial Conference of the Victorian Council of Social Service. It happens that one of the keynote addresses is given by the Premier, Jeff Kennett. He puts forward a view of a buoyant society with only some lingering social problems – suicide in rural areas, young people and drugs, and the rising incidence of depression among adults.

The Purple Sage Project Director commends the Premier for this attention but cautions him that there are some other equally pressing issues requiring government attention. She presents the issues identified through Purple Sage state-wide dialogue – unemployment, inequality, job insecurity, reduced service quality, gambling and the erosion of democratic culture. Instead of listening and acknowledging the views of several thousand fellow citizens, the Premier offers only personal abuse of the Project Director.

This is a highly symbolic incident. It is a cameo of the manner in which the serious concerns of many Victorians are dealt with contemptuously by the government. Media reporting of this incident is extensive. Much positive feedback and encouragement flows into the Purple Sage office.

Throughout May and June 1999, the Purple Sage groups reconvene around the State. This time they deliberate on the kinds of action that might grow from the first dialogue. They focus in particular on a set of starting points for engagement, such as a state-wide community campaign to keep water in public ownership. The groups overwhelmingly endorse these proposed directions.

By August 1999, the Purple Sage Management Group and Project Team have almost completed the first draft of the public document to close off this first phase and herald a new stage of community action.

An early State election is called for 18 September and a minimal campaign period of three weeks begins. Three days after the election date is announced, in response to requests from many Purple Sage participants, Group Leaders receive a bulletin and a set of non-partisan questions to be put to all presenting candidates, addressing the issues which have emerged through the previous state-wide dialogue. Group Leaders are urged to meet with all candidates in all electorates. This is the first organised 'action' flowing from the Purple Sage Project.

As campaign material is released by the mainstream parties, it becomes clear that many of their policies pick up on issues contained in the Project draft document, in particular those dealing with democratic reforms, service delivery, public education and gambling.

The decision is made to suspend work on the Project's public document until the election is over.

I know of no safe repository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think they are not enlightened enough to exercise their control, the remedy is not to take from them, but to inform their discretion.

To remain democratic, a society must find ways to put specialised knowledge into the service of public choice, and keep it from becoming the power basis for an elite.

Thomas Jefferson 1820

Government displays a dominance and an arrogance towards community opinion and needs.

■ Purple Sage participants Mornington



Victoria 2000: *new environment, new realities*

The election result surprises almost everyone although it takes a month for the final picture to become clear. Government is to change. Independents are to play a key role in determining the State's political future.

The government, expected by many to cruise to a further term in office, finds itself losing regional seats to the Labor

Opposition and Independent candidates. Some of the swings are remarkable, in seats that appeared to be taken for granted by the conservative parties. The two sitting Independents are returned with increased margins while a third wins the seat of East Gippsland.

This focus on these three Independents overlooks the fact that other independent candidates (e.g. in the electorates of Swan Hill and Portland) attract

strong support, and candidates from minor parties increase their percentage of the state-wide vote.

In the four weeks between the election and a supplementary election for Frankston East (due to the death of the sitting member) the three elected Independent members develop an Independents' Charter. In proposing action that restores and strengthens democratic governance, the Charter resembles some of the deeply held concerns of Purple Sage participants and no doubt many other people around the State.

Political commentators are perplexed by these results. One early conclusion is that this is a protest vote gone badly wrong. Regional Victoria becomes the focus as analysts search for the reasons why 'the bush' reacted so harshly against the government. But the mood of voters in regional Victoria is only part of the explanation. It goes much further than simply the idiosyncratic behaviour of a Premier.

REJECTING THE FREE MARKET MENTALITY

There is widespread volatility in the Victorian electorate. The ferment has in fact, been building for some years, as the policies impacts and anti-democratic action registers in a



There is a downgrading of health services, gas, electricity and railroads – this is the infrastructure which is the support of community. With the selling off of utilities such as gas, our major concern now is for upkeep and safety...private is best is not always true. ■ Purple Sage participants Surrey Hills



negative way with increasing numbers of people across the State. There is more to this, however, than mere expression of concern about rail closures or waiting times on hospital trolleys. There are important values at stake to do with people and communities, government's stewardship of their community assets, the quality of service and care, fairness, and democratic culture.

People understand that while markets offer important opportunities and choices – when they are unchecked – they destroy communities, diminish service quality and override considerations of fairness and democratic rights.

The majority of voters signal the need for a redirection in public policy and governance. By any measure, it is an election with a difference. This election is a circuit breaker. It is not the customary ascendancy of one style of party politics over another that people have experienced on several occasions in their voting life. It is not a case of an opposition party winning office decisively and in its own right.

While people may have reservations about the incoming minority government, they sense that a choice must now be made. The unfettered application of free market ideology has to be interrupted. The serious decline in democratic standards has to be halted.

RADICALLY ALTERED TERRAIN

As with all revolutions, there is an aftermath.

In the space of only a few years, Victoria has experienced a quantum shift in the distribution of economic and political power from the public to the private sector. A reform program of this type and magnitude has not been witnessed elsewhere

in Australia. The shakedown from such radical change is far from over.

As Victorians prepare to move into the new millennium, citizens, the State government and the business sector must now negotiate a markedly different terrain.

People are looking for a sense of possibility. People associate the public discourse today with acrimony, divisiveness, and gridlock; most do not want any part of that. This issue offers an opportunity to move out of that paradigm by uncovering people's latent sense that a better way is possible. When they hear each other describe common concerns about misplaced values, children, and the environment, and have a chance to explain their longing for a more balanced life, a spark appears – people begin to imagine the possibility of change.

**Extracted and adapted from Yearning for Balance Centre
for a New American Dream 1995**

The State's electricity and gas systems, health and transport services have been sold to corporate, for-profit enterprises. This new locus of economic power blurs commonly held expectations of government responsibilities. Values of the marketplace have changed key social relations, with citizens defined primarily as individual consumers.

What worried all of the participants of this group was that privatisation was most often by stealth and crept up bit by bit and that the outcome meant a larger gap between the haves and have nots. ■ Purple Sage participants Kew



There are new risk factors in the revenue base of the State Budget including an already heavy reliance on regressive gambling taxes; unknown financial liabilities arising from government's contractual commitments with the private sector; and the closure of important revenue streams associated with previously publicly owned utilities.

Cherished values of democracy, justice, environmental responsibility, public interest and the common good, and the role of government in directly providing core services in health and education have been overridden, at times brutally.

Structures that ensured the values of an interactive, equitable and caring society have been diminished. These values will not simply spring back into place. Their re-emergence requires concerted affirmation; it requires engagement through a renewed active partnership between those governed and those governing; it requires structures that support and maintain a democratic community.

The policy consequences of economic rationalism create significant new challenges. How do we achieve social equity and protect the public interest in an almost wholly privatised environment? What is required for the reinvigoration of communities across the State? After an unnerving assault on democratic values, how do we now guarantee the safety and integrity of our democratic institutions?

Following the final election result we again take up the writing of the Purple Sage public document. In sorting out the type and direction of future action, it is clear to the Project Team that there are three tasks involved:

- **review the earlier draft strategies to identify those now to be addressed by the incoming government;**
- **highlight the gaps that remain, as yet unacknowledged by mainstream parties; and**
- **articulate the actions that people generally might consider in contending with the future in a dramatically changed environment.**



Action for our times

When we processed people's responses in the two stages of Purple Sage dialogue, we were struck by the degree to which people were speaking about values illustrated for example by the important role played by volunteers on the local hospital auxiliary, or the significance of friendly,



human contact as the meals-on-wheels service was delivered to older people living alone.

Long held, legitimate values were suddenly being contested. Yet there was a faith and a confidence that certain values and principles delivered better outcomes. People spoke of their communities being

weakened, yet in the same breath they emphasised how much people could achieve together. They spoke with disappointment about the behaviour of commercial banks

while reminding us that banks owed their success to customers and the broader community.

In the second round of dialogue, carried out in May and June 1999, we asked participants, among other things, to reflect on three matters – the role of government; the responsibilities of business; and the responsibilities of citizens, one to the other. The responses were impressive for their clarity and relevance.

We have consciously set out to express these values in the words used by the participants as they have threaded their way through the two periods of dialogue. The following statement of Guiding Values and Principles is our attempt to take the deliberations of several thousand men and women across the State, and make explicit the underpinning values and principles. We sense that many others would have little trouble subscribing to them as well.

A prosperous and fair democratic community does not just materialise. It is what we fashion, making choices all the way. This is a fundamental civic exercise which government, business, and citizens constantly negotiate. It is not a luxury touch, only for the good times. It is how we can best meet serious challenges and tough times.

It is our belief that the following values and guiding principles form the basis to this successful civic exercise.

Policies which treat everyone as individuals who can purchase whatever they need materially, socially or spiritually is leading to wider divisions within society and creating increased feelings of isolation and alienation. ■ Purple Sage participants Ferntree Gully



GUIDING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

- ✦ The dignity and worth of every person is respected.
- ✦ Each person has the right to food and shelter, access to a clean and healthy natural environment, care in sickness, defence at law, dignity in work and the pleasures and opportunities that education provides.
- ✦ People are social beings who desire to connect and be part of the families, groups and communities that offer human contact and mutual support. This is the essence of humanity, the human condition.
- ✦ Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are this country's first occupants. They have been dispossessed of their lands and treated unjustly. Reconciliation progresses when we recognise Indigenous people's cultural affinity with the land; acknowledge and redress past and present injustices; and celebrate the contribution of Indigenous people to Australia's rich heritage and diverse cultural traditions.
- ✦ We have in common a responsibility to pay tax. Taxes, fairly determined, are the means by which we meet every person's basic needs and contribute to the development of society. In doing so, we all have access to services and amenities.
- ✦ The shared business of citizens, in all their diversity, is to debate with tolerance, directly and through elected representatives, the best means to shape events together in ways that meet every person's basic needs and sustain the land and sea. This is part of the common good.
- ✦ Our place in a democratic society means much more than casting a vote once every three or four years. It is about belonging. It is not about being pushed to the margins. It means having real opportunities for participation - in community organisations, unions, business associations, in clubs and so on.
- ✦ By participating, we seek to influence the decision-making processes that affect our lives: questions of amenity in our local community; the provision of services such as power supply, libraries, education, health care; the chance to influence directions we should take as a society; the priorities we want to see pursued by our elected representatives.
- ✦ All citizens in a democracy have certain rights and responsibilities. When one individual or group attacks or fails to recognise the rights of others, the rights of all are diminished.
- ✦ A market economy offers important opportunities and choices but it operates best within a framework of values that includes fairness and justice. They allow us to work together to achieve common ends.
- ✦ Government has a critical role in promoting fairness, social cohesion and a democratic culture necessary to lasting economic performance, and in guiding a society to be prosperous and just.

As Victorians, we only have a history of 200 years until we acknowledge and incorporate our indigenous history and reconcile our cultural heritage. Then we can grow up! ■ Purple Sage participants Castlemaine





Hazel Hawke and Lowitja O'Donoghue
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*If Australians are to live together and share
the country, there is the need for a 'miracle of
ears'! We need people to listen and actually
hear what is being said.*

Ethel Munn Gungarri Elder





- ✦ The responsibility of government in a democracy is to provide wise stewardship of public assets and resources; maintain open and transparent administration; foster an ethos of social care and support for those who are vulnerable; and respect and enhance our democratic institutions
- ✦ In a democracy a strong public sector balances market forces. Cooperation among people brings enormous social and economic benefits. If the rules of the competitive unchecked, marketplace govern the community, they will destroy it.
- ✦ Business needs to be driven by the spirit of enterprise and not greed. Profit matters because it enables wealth creation. Wealth creation, without equitable distribution, has limited social value.
- ✦ Business people have a responsibility which extends beyond their shareholders to the wider society that gave them the opportunity to realise their ideas.
- ✦ Business has a clear environmental responsibility. It is possible for business to show the leadership required in instituting sustainable environmental practices, including environmental auditing and performance improvement.
- ✦ Communities develop and maintain physical assets such as local schools, town halls, libraries and parklands. Community assets contribute to feelings of security, shared well being, orientation and belonging. As well as financial value, these assets hold enormous historical, cultural, emotional and spiritual value.
- ✦ Government assists in the creation, maintenance and stewardship of these assets. Sale or acquisition of such assets should occur only after public inquiry, consultation and agreed fair terms of trade, and recompense to the sponsoring communities.
- ✦ Leadership is a privilege. Good leadership is a blend of vision and decisiveness, together with the responsible use of power and authority, a willingness to listen and canvass broad opinion, and a capacity to build trust and tolerance among people.
- ✦ We should strive to ensure that young people of the next generation, have full access to society's resources, opportunities and support networks in their preparation for adult life.
- ✦ Each of us has a responsibility to leave society in better shape than we found it.

*Communities are not strong because they are rich.
Rather they are rich because they are strong.*

UK Commission of Social Justice 1994

The story is often told of an Oxford College, built about 400 years ago with enormous oak beams supporting the dining hall roof. As anyone knows who lives in an old house, oak beams and death watch beetle are inseparable.

Well, not so long ago an inspection of the College property revealed roof trusses as embroidered with holes as a colander. Like most Oxford institutions the College owned tracts of land here and there, and when a search of the market for suitable seasoned oak proved fruitless, the college's land agent was summoned.

Asked whether there were any trees of appropriate dimensions on the estates, the agent gave a knowing smile and murmured that he thought they would never ask.

Apparently, when the College was established its founders, armed with experience of hardwood and its attendant beetles, planted a grove of oaks for the very purpose of replacing the hall timbers when the need arose. Over centuries generations of foresters had tended and guarded the trees for exclusive use eventually as "spares" and now they were fine specimens of mature English oak.

THAT is stewardship.

**A.M.Clevely, Gardening Column,
This England, Autumn 1985**

The best entrepreneurs understand that the money they make carries with it a sense of social responsibility. Responsibility to the society which gives them the opportunity and the freedom to pursue their vision. That responsibility means not only that they have to plough back some of the wealth into their own enterprise and create new wealth, it means that they have to care enough about their cities and their communities to recycle some of the wealth back into the areas of need.

**Mr. Richard Pratt AC
Address to the 75th Annual Meeting of
the Melbourne Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund 1998**



Civic engagement: *the scope for action*

One of the central themes of the Purple Sage Project is the relationship between a market economy and democracy, and between strategies for economic liberalisation and democratisation.

In a series of public lectures for the Victorian Women's Trust given in July 1999 at Ballarat, Melbourne and Frankston, New Zealander Marilyn Waring helped to shed light on this burning question.

Marilyn pointed out that historically there have been no political democracies which were not also market economies, but there are certainly market economies without democracy. The market can have negative as well as positive consequences for democracy, and the relationship is much more ambivalent than has ever been assumed or stated clearly.

She identified the positive side. The market sets limits to the power of the state by decentralising economic decisions and by dispersing opportunity, information and resources. It prevents people from being beholden. It encourages the principle of free movement and exchange among citizens. In treating the consumer as sovereign, it reinforces the idea that individuals are the best judges of their own interests.

However, the market also has negative consequences. As Marilyn Waring saw it, by locating economic decisions in the private sphere, major issues affecting the well being of society and the public interest were thus beyond the reach of political control – let alone democratic control. The market alone can produce social inequalities and allows the subordination of politics to the interests of the economically privileged and powerful. For the economically disadvantaged, the experience of unemployment, insecurity, poor housing and health contradict the dignity conferred by international human rights organisations and by democratic citizenship.

Because the logic of the market elevates individual choice above the collective choices of democratic politics, and in so far as it penetrates the public sphere, it corrodes the distinctive ethos of public service on which effective government depends.

The market is in tension with democracy, but democratic governments are not entirely powerless in the face of these effects. It is at this point, however, that the most serious problem for democracy is evident. That is the discrepancy between the level at which political decision-making takes place, and the global range of the economic institutions and forces which determine the parameters of such decisions.

Economic rationalism has taken over leaving no room for the civil society to function.

■ Purple Sage participants Melbourne Group Ross House



Citizens constantly ask if democratic control of local government can be at all meaningful, when so much that matters to the welfare of the citizens escapes the control of government. The implication is that it's all too big for us to do anything about the multinationals, war, poverty and waste. Marilyn reacted to such an assertion emphatically:

I totally disagree. I refuse to be disempowered – I refuse to relinquish my rights as a citizen. In western history despots, tyrants, kings, the church, armies have disenfranchised the people. Multinationals and economic fundamentalists will be the next.

Marilyn reminded us that accountability to cross-cultural forums of public opinion, and major efforts at representation of the population must be our answer. There are good grounds to believe that the consolidation of democracy at the local (government) level is the first major response to the internationalisation of the market certainly. It has always been the vehicle by which the citizens exerted their rights over their destiny.

Marilyn is right. We should not relinquish our power. Indeed, it is timely to remind ourselves that our power as citizens can be played out at a number of levels:

EXERCISING OUR POWER

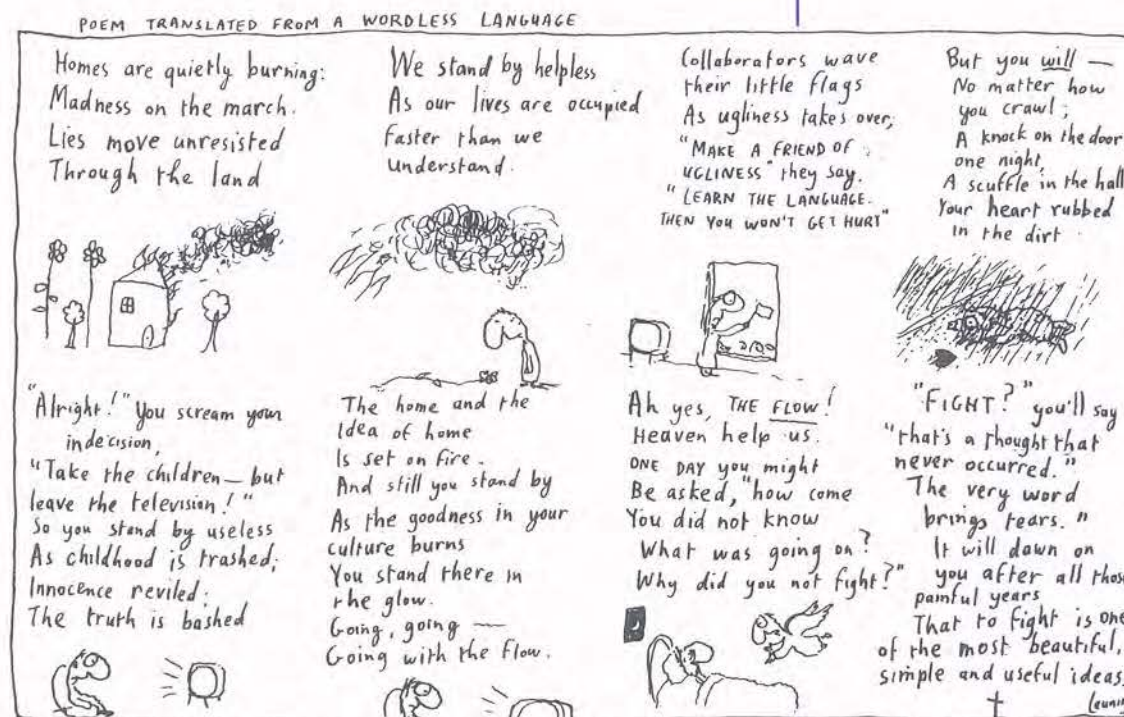
THE POWER OF ONE We can exercise power as individuals, as a parent, a person in small business, a paid employee, a teacher. This might simply mean volunteering one's point of view or experience to family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, influencing people in positions of authority, or reaching a wider audience using the media or public speaking.

THE POWER OF TEN We can join with others in small clusters, groups of like-minded people, parish committees, fellow shift workers, or ethical shareholders. In such groups members focus their collective efforts on agreed goals. The group can

lobby on issues, inform the broader community, and challenge the accepted understanding on a particular issue.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES We can be part of a broader base of power, of disability organisations, unions, business groups, associations of ethical shareholders, or geographical communities. This means becoming involved in community networks and sometimes volunteering considerable time to meetings, deputations, phone calls and correspondence.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE SCOPE FOR ACTION



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THE POWER OF CITIZENS When we elect people to represent us, we are effectively giving them our power as citizens to use responsibly on our behalf in parliaments, statutory offices, and other institutions of governance. These institutions are there to be accessed and to respond to enquiries, suggestions and requests we make as citizens.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE SCOPE FOR ACTION

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us....And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Nelson Mandela

Excerpt from his inauguration speech in Pretoria 1994

With this four-tiered framework in mind, we have developed the idea of a 'watching brief' that ordinary women and men can carry out.

The watching brief is not meant only for State level elections or to be applied only to the current government in Victoria. As a matter of principle, it shows how we can play our part in restoring a basic accountability in the relationship between voters and all elected representatives.

The watching brief features in each of the following sections as one of the key strategies to address the major issues identified throughout the Purple Sage dialogue.



THE WATCHING BRIEF

Most people see an election as an opportunity for holding their government to account. While this is an important opportunity, it is not the only one. Between elections, we can and should monitor the implementation of a government's policy commitments in what we might call a watching brief.

Throughout the process of Purple Sage dialogue, people expressed a deep disaffection for mainstream politics. There was a sense that many politicians are remote from people, more likely to breach rather than build people's trust and put their allegiance to party ahead of their constituency. Yet we know that a fundamental responsibility in a democracy is that of elected representatives having to serve the people. So, what is happening?

Ideally, the relationship between elected representatives and the people is reciprocal. The representative's role is to serve the people, and the people's role is to assist in identifying needs in the community, to track issues and policy commitments and convey their satisfaction or dissatisfaction about policy and political decisions. This relationship should be respectful and honest. In the absence of these features, the voter becomes suspicious and distrustful and the representative becomes remote and even cynical.

People face a choice. Democracy suffers when there are deep levels of disaffection with politicians and political processes. This malaise will not be remedied by bad-mouthing politicians. A respectful and honest relationship between our elected representatives and ourselves will only exist when both parties are prepared to make this come about.

In the absence of closer monitoring and legitimate pressure applied by the people, representatives and parties presenting for election can simply swing into 'public relations' mode without the broader community ever knowing whether previous commitments have been honoured.

BASIC STEPS

Keeping check requires knowledge of the relevant policies and a preparedness to follow the progress of their implementation.

The first step is to obtain copies of policies of interest. These can be obtained from the headquarters of political parties.

The next step is to read these carefully, and accurately pinpoint the key commitments.

The stage is then set for people to keep a watching brief between elections on the translation of these commitments into action.



This tracking exercise should lead to a more informed dialogue between people and their elected representatives. If there is good cause for dropping or modifying a policy commitment, it should be explained carefully.

The watching brief signals to elected representatives that keeping faith with electors is a serious business and not to be taken lightly.

Once you have an account of particular policies you can seek further information from your local MPs. Remember they are your representatives.

Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of the current government policies as well as the policies of other political parties. If an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.

Remember the adversarial culture of mainstream politics may work against this strategy by distorting the information you seek, so it is important to cross reference this information. One useful way is to keep in touch with those organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government's delivery of policy commitments.

GUIDEPOSTS TO ACTION

The first stage of the Purple Sage Project focused upon meeting and exchanging information and ideas with many people in Victoria. There is, however, no reason why the civic engagement process that follows must remain restricted to matters and issues within Victoria alone.

We would like to see the role of the individual in Australian public life being extended beyond the act of vote casting in federal, state and municipal elections, with Australians to be regarded as citizens, with citizen rights.

■ Purple Sage participants Ringwood North

Our proposed four levels of citizen power can have application in many areas of democratic politics, in all other states and territories of Australia, in people's dealings with their national government, and with business.

Furthermore, the use of a watching brief may be applied by citizens towards local government, all state and territory governments and the commonwealth government.

TALK AND ACTION, WORD AND DEED

From the very beginning, the Purple Sage Project identified the importance of eventually linking the dialogue to a proposed set of practical and achievable strategies. This linking was considered essential because so many people had expressed the feeling that they could do nothing to influence the course of events.

By August 1999 we had mapped out a range of strategies and a set of priorities for the next stage of Purple Sage. These were all strongly endorsed during the second stage of dialogue in May/June.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE SCOPE FOR ACTION



This level of overall support has further strengthened our commitment to showing how we can, and must, step up our levels of civic engagement on the serious issues of the day.

As already noted the calling of an early election for September changed things considerably. Among other things, it affirmed people's ability to assert their democratic power at the ballot box. From our point of view, several of our key action areas for the future were 'matched' by responses from the major parties and the three Independents who were to hold the balance of power in the Victorian Parliament.

We have used the election as a point of reference for Victoria.

It should now be possible to analyse and compare what was happening in Victoria throughout most of the 1990s with the reforms and political responses of the present government on issues that are at the heart of the workings of a fair and just society. Victoria in 1999 is a vastly changed environment. While the change is not as visible as cranes on building sites, it is momentous.

In this document we have tried to depict some of the important dimensions of this change and to tease out some of the implications for civic activism.

We do not pretend that the action outlined in the following sections is the most comprehensive or definitive that has ever been put forward. It is a starting point for contending with the changed environment in which we now find ourselves. Instead of allowing despair and despondency to continue, the aim is to generate a new energy and enthusiasm for civic engagement.



We don't assume that people will embrace them all. We also recognise that people are engaged, day after day, in activities and programs that are geared to changing things for the better. This is the reason we have included in the text several stories that are testimony to the good work people do in and across their communities.

These riders aside, the proposed action serves two purposes. First, it shows that it is possible to detail sets of strategies that address the serious issues of the day. Second, it shows specific, broader strategies that grow out of the Purple Sage Project and which will be followed through after the publication and the distribution of this document.

Our hope is that readers, including Purple Sage participants and others, will see from our smorgasbord of action to be taken that there is no end to what people as citizens in a democracy can do to influence and change things.

The following part of the document splits into five sections. Each of these focuses on key issues that arose through the Purple Sage dialogue. Each begins with a background comment to help explain what is going on. The agenda for action is presented.

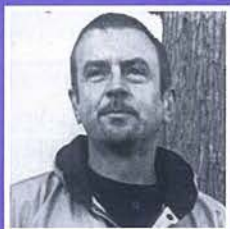
The initial opportunity here for Purple Sage participants and others who are interested will be to scrutinise carefully the State government's response to the issues of concern to people – the watching brief.

In addition to this, there are many opportunities for people to generate this new energy for civic engagement. In each section various activities are proposed as starting points.

We are excited by the Purple Sage process. It is so simple that anyone can take part. It is democracy in action. Hopefully it will continue beyond the parameters it has set for itself. ■ Purple Sage participants Forest Hill

Democracy in Victoria – who cares?

BACKGROUND



- ▶ Building a democratic state
- ▶ Shattering the democratic tradition

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



- ▶ The watching brief
- ▶ The public's right to know
 - The Office of the Auditor-General
 - Freedom of Information
- ▶ Local government
- ▶ Petitions
- ▶ Screening candidates for public office
- ▶ Beyond the ballot box: Educating about democracy
- ▶ Democracy and business

DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?

While many ordinary women and men around the State were pushed to the margins, mounting evidence suggested the existence of an inner circle of unelected and unaccountable men wielding enormous power and influence over the directions of the State, and furthermore were profiting from this exclusive relationship. Talkback radio replaced consultation. While there were concerned and committed journalists, by and large the media, at management level, were seduced and intimidated.

*Nothing strengthens
authority so much as silence*

Charles de Gaulle

The corrosion of democratic culture occurred in the same manner that a slow drip of water corrodes. Week by week, month by month, antic after antic, the ethical bar, so critical to the overall health of a democracy, was lowered.

While the Opposition commenced a campaign to restore democracy, within its own ranks there was troubling evidence of anti democratic behaviour. Parliamentary leaders intervened in the preselection of candidates; the worst excesses of factionalism were condoned by party machines; 'branch stacking' remained unchallenged; and rank and file party members were contemptuously marginalised.

During the September 1999 election campaign, a public gag on government sitting members precluded them from debating opposition candidates. On election eve, the Attorney-General took out a Supreme Court injunction to prevent the public release of papers relating to the Intergraph ambulance affair.

The September election outcome proved extraordinary by any democratic measure. Government changed as a Geelong seat was won from the Liberals by a mere 18 votes. A supplementary election a month afterwards (due to the death of the sitting member for Frankston East) delivered a substantial swing against the sitting government. A young woman who had campaigned steadily for eighteen months on

local issues won the seat of Gisborne against the Premier's anointed heir apparent.

Three elected Independent members of the State parliament were to hold the balance of power. Instead of each separately making material demands for their own electorates, they worked together to draw up an Independents' Charter with which to negotiate with the major parties and to deliberately lock the new government into a program of democratic restoration for all of Victoria.

*You may deceive all the people part of the time,
and part of the people all the time, but not all the
people all of the time.*

Abraham Lincoln

A Charter about democratic governance! Almost overnight, the abuse of democratic principles and institutions looks like being arrested. The sense of relief was palpable. Democracy in Victoria – Do People Care? Yes.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

Democracy is passed on from one generation to the next. It is not static. It evolves – and all of us have a responsibility to see that this evolution makes our democratic society an even better one.

Time and time again during the Purple Sage dialogue people expressed concern about the state of democracy in Victoria, about the lack of accountability, checks and balances. They were concerned about attacks on democratic institutions and the lack of consultation on significant issues and major proposals for change.



Clearly Purple Sage participants were not alone in giving voice to these concerns. In the September 1999 election campaign, matters relating to the restoration of democratic values became a central theme.

The Coalition released no public policy document on democracy.

The Labor Opposition released a policy that focused on integrity in public life and the restoration of democratic rights. In essence pledges were made to restore the independence of democratic institutions such as the Auditor General, to make government more transparent, to improve the operations of the Victorian Parliament and to secure people's rights to speak publicly.

The Independents' Charter focused mainly on restoring democracy in Victoria. It emphasised open and accountable government, the need for independent democratic institutions, improvements to the operation of Parliament, Upper House reform, a review of the constitution and a code of behaviour for parliamentarians.

With the incoming minority Labor Government and its stated support of the Independent Charter, there is now in Victoria a clear, unambiguous program to achieve democratic reform. The implementation of this program should go a long way towards redressing the decline in democratic culture that had occurred in Victoria.

However, the health of a democracy is not guaranteed simply by the actions of elected representatives within the parliament. There is both the need and scope for civic engagement in safeguarding and extending democratic rights and practice.



THE WATCHING BRIEF

Remember the watching brief is the first step.

The Victorian government's key undertakings on democracy are set out below. Watch for evidence that they are being translated into action. Is there a stage when you feel you can, with confidence, place a tick in the action box?

Amend the Victorian constitution to properly recognise local government and safeguard its democratic process. ☐

Limit the suspension and dismissal of councils and councillors to cases of corruption or other serious failure. ☐

Clearly define and protect local government planning powers, and allow fewer areas for unilateral Ministerial intervention. ☐

Establish an independent local government commission to support local government. ☐

Repeal the Public Sector Management Act and re-establish the independence of the Victorian Public Service. ☐

Repeal the recent changes to the Freedom of Information Act and extend the coverage of this Act to all State government agencies and bodies. ☐

Introduce a clear Code of Conduct for all members of the Victorian Parliament. The code is to cover the working duties, disclosure of financial interests, conflict of interest, commercial use and disclosure of confidential information and use of public resources by each member. ☐

Reform of the proceedings of the Parliament including more days of sitting, longer question time periods, more family-friendly hours, better public access and more time for private members bills and other debates. ☐

DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?

1



DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?

Enshrine the independence of the Auditor-General in the Victorian Constitution as well as other key statutory office holders. ☐

Introduce new whistleblower legislation. ☐

End the use of 'commercial in confidence' clauses as a means of hiding government contracts from the public. ☐

Establish a Reference Group of prominent Victorians to develop new approaches to managing government in the 21st century. ☐

Once you have an account of these policies you can:

▶ Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of current government policies on democracy as well as the policies of other political parties. Remember, if an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.

▶ You can keep in touch with organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government's delivery of policy commitments on democracy. In this instance, you can start with:

LIBERTY VICTORIA

Tel. 03 9670 6422

Fax. 03 9670 6433

Level 4, 360 Little Bourke Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000

VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION (VLGA)

Tel. 03 9654 0333

Fax. 03 9654 0555

Level 1, Ross House

247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Victoria 3000

COMMUNICATIONS LAW CENTRE

Tel. 03 9248 1274

Fax. 03 9248 1277

Level 13, 300 Flinders Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000

Apart from the watching brief, there is scope for other action.

At the beginning of the Purple Sage Project, many people expressed despair at not being able to do anything about the issues that were worrying them. As the Project unfolded and people started to reflect more deliberately on the scope for action, many good ideas emerged.

What follows here is a condensed outline of further actions we could think about from now on. They are not the only ones. They may trigger new ideas.

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

We have a right to know and to influence what is being done in our name and with our taxes. The safeguards on democracy act as our window into the world of the political decision-makers, our representatives who sit in Parliaments and the public servants who make decisions behind the scenes.

The Office of the Auditor-General and Freedom of Information Legislation (FOI) are two vitally important mechanisms protecting the public's right to know.

It is vital that we make the most of these institutions that exist to safeguard our democracy, use them appropriately and protect them from attempts to restrict their operation.

THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL

The Auditor-General has the power to look into and report to Parliament on the adequacy of financial and resource management by Victorian public sector organisations. This Office is to regain its previous powers. The functions of such an office can be enhanced by the way people as citizens use it.



MONBULK - AN EXERCISE IN EMPOWERMENT

Many Purple Sage participants are astonished to discover just how easy it sometimes is to make a difference.

A Purple Sage group in Monbulk is typical of the robust hills communities east of Melbourne, where many residents are active in a range of groups. The community had recently won a battle with a large supermarket group which wanted to fell the last stand of remnant forest in the village. They were feeling strong.

The group's second round of Purple Sage dialogue focussed mainly on local actions, but they weren't sure what to do with their results. Then they realised that the Shire of Yarra Ranges was holding community forums the next weekend as part of council's development of a twenty year community plan. They hastily arranged to make a presentation, one of more than twenty made that weekend.

Council found the Purple Sage submission so compelling that they invited further input. They saw the presentation as being about really important issues, with an unusual focus on practical action which could be implemented immediately. Moreover recommendations went beyond the narrow focus of many other submissions and expressed a broader vision for the community. Now the group has agreed to participate in additional council workshops, and expects to be further involved in long-term planning for their shire.

In addition people from other groups at the forums have contacted the Purple Sage presenter seeking more information. Many have been intrigued at the concept of going beyond sectional interest to consider the broader view. There is a ripple effect as the Purple Sage viewpoint is taken back to other local groups.

Within the group participation has been a 'strengthening, uniting experience, and has given people courage that they count'. Even vigorous community groups find themselves amazed at just how empowering the ideals of Purple Sage have been!



DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?

- ▶ Any individual or small group of people can write directly to the Auditor General suggesting an issue to be investigated.
For example:

Through compulsory competitive tendering processes, many tasks formerly undertaken by government have now been taken over by for-profit organisations. At this stage, no independent monitoring mechanism is in place to assess whether this change in practice is delivering a better quality and more efficient level of service.

- ▶ Ask the Auditor General to investigate the performance of contractors who have won tenders to provide services previously provided by government.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The legislation gives every person the right, subject to exemptions, to obtain access to documents of Ministers and of government departments and most public bodies. A simple letter identifying the documents requested is enough to start the process.

Remember that statutory bodies such as the State Electricity Commission of Victoria were required by legislation to publish detailed Annual Reports and sets of financial accounts. In the new highly privatised environment, we face the prospect of significantly reduced access to information about the performance of the businesses that have taken over these public assets and services.

People need to be aware of the ways in which FOI legislation can be used.

- ▶ The next phase of the Purple Sage Project will bring together an easy-to-follow guide for the layperson to use both to access personal information, and to access information about the workings of government.
- ▶ We need to defend the laws against governments that find it annoying to have to release information. We can be vigilant and watch out for reforms that will increase secrecy and decrease the scope of FOI laws and protest loudly, by writing to the press, lobbying our MPs and generally making it clear that we object to this limitation on our rights.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government is the first level of democracy, the level where you as a citizen can flex your democratic muscles. Your municipal council deals with matters that reflect and serve community needs, matters you can easily come to grips with. Through the *Code of Good Governance*, local government in Victoria is developing sound democratic practices to foster community participation and councillor accountability that could become a model for government at state and federal levels.

You can become involved in your local government in the following sorts of ways:

- ▶ Go to a meeting of your local council. An advertisement in your local paper will tell you the date, time and place of Ordinary (public) Council Meetings that are held at least once a month.



We are experiencing a dismantling of all watchdogs – legislation to shut up / muzzle all dissent – criticism. Integrity and independence of the public service is being corrupted. ■ Purple Sage participants Sebastopol

- ▶ Find out whether your local government is a signatory to the Code of Good Governance. You can obtain a copy of the code from the Victorian Local Governance Association.
- ▶ If your local government is a signatory, how can you help it to implement the code as fully as possible? If it's not a signatory, work with (or start) a citizens' group to encourage your council to adopt the Code.
- ▶ If your council is one of the 58 local governments going to election in March 2000, consider standing yourself as a candidate or offer your support to a candidate whose ideas you share.
- ▶ Support the Women in Local Government Project that aims to get 200 women on to local councils by the year 2000.
- ▶ Go to your council office or Town Hall and obtain a copy of your Council or Corporate Plan. Once you have read it through, ring your ward councillor and talk about one area that is important to you, such as the environment, roads and bridges, or heritage buildings.
- ▶ Contact your local MPs, both state and federal, to ask them what they are doing to see that the role of local government is enshrined in the State and Federal Constitutions.

PETITIONS

The petition is one of the oldest of all parliamentary documents. It dates back to the reign of King Edward I in 13th century England.

The House of Commons resolved in 1669 that: 'It is an inherent right of every commoner in England to prepare and present petitions to the House in the case of grievance and of the House of Commons to receive them.'

In the early history of the Westminster system, the petition served as a trigger for the parliament to act and to address important issues either by the creation of new laws or by statute. Today, a petition may be just a small part of a broad public campaign that may involve activists, community groups, business organisations, churches, political party factions and media analysts and commentators.

The gap between the citizens who have prepared the petition and the parliament can be wide indeed!

The form, presentation and response to petitions are governed by the Standing Orders of the Parliament. Only a sitting MP can present a petition, which has to be prepared according to a prescribed format. With regard to any response to a petition, the *Fact Sheet – Procedural Terms and Practices, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Victoria* states:

'When a petition is being presented to the House, the Clerk makes the announcement by indicating to the Member who lodged it, the identity of the petitioners, the subject-matter of the petition and the number of signatures. These details are printed in Hansard. A copy of every petition (not all the signatories) received by the House is referred to the relevant Minister for information' (emphasis ours).

Thus the current Standing Orders do not require a government to respond in any meaningful way at all to petitions that are being presented to the parliament.



DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?



We need to make parliamentary processes relating to petitions much more effective, allowing citizens to have direct input into the democratic process.

- ▶ **The next stage of Purple Sage will seek appropriate legal advice about developing a proposal that would lead to an amendment to the Standing Orders of the Victorian parliament to require a government to act on all petitions, rather than simply having them noted by a Minister.**

The extent of action would depend upon the number of signatories to the petition. For example petitions of a few thousand signatories could lead to a Minister providing a written response to the next session of parliament. A petition of considerably greater number (e.g. ten percent of voters) could have the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly request the Premier and relevant Ministers to convene a Citizens' Public Forum.

The critical point is that petitioning, as a direct statement of public sentiment, deserves a higher order response than merely being noted for information.

In any organisation, individuals should assume some responsibility for the degree of democracy that is achieved, not dismiss all problems as 'society's fault' and postpone democracy to some better, future world. One of the arts of democracy is working out the extent to which we are responsible, but without presuming we have ultimate and complete control.

Anne Phillips 1991 *Engendering Democracy*
Polity Press Cambridge p. 146

SCREENING CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

When we vote, we entrust our power to politicians. We have the right to know the social and community values of candidates who seek our votes. This right extends whenever someone is being elected to represent us: to local government, to the RSL, or to the school council.

During the September 1999 State election, the Purple Sage Project produced a kit which Group Leaders and participants could use to interview presenting candidates on the issues that had been identified through the state-wide dialogue.

Although the short time frame made it difficult for most to carry out this task, some groups did it with great success. The kit is attached as an Appendix to this public document. While the issues may be different, the kit provides some practical leads as to how such a strategy can be used in future situations.

- ▶ **Start to see it as a right and normal process for voters to ask politicians to meet with the people in their electorates on a regular basis – to provide forums for listening to constituents and giving feedback about steps taken to address constituents' needs.**
- ▶ **Start to see it as a right and normal process to ask all presenting candidates in elections for their views on the issues important to you. It is perfectly legitimate to then make these responses known to a wider audience, using for example print or electronic media. Look at the sample kit (Appendix Four) for ideas as to how you could draw up an interview kit for use in screening candidates at any election for public office. This is not a once-off action. It may take time for candidates to accept this process as a basic expectation in a democracy. So stick at it!**

BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX: EDUCATING ABOUT DEMOCRACY

While there is a lot of attractively presented educational material used to teach 'democracy', much of what is taught about the role of citizens concentrates on the historical development of our system of government, the individual's role as a voter and little else.

In the Purple Sage dialogue it was older people with their longer life experience who most commonly expressed unease regarding the dismantling of democratic institutions in Victoria. Indeed, recent government attitudes and behaviour highlighted a very different set of messages about public process to voters, especially to younger people.

Recent history in Victoria shows the need for vigilance in safeguarding democratic values and practices, yet the motivation to protect and even enhance our democracy can only come with a clear understanding of democratic structures and processes.

How can you defend democracy if you don't know what it is you are defending?

- The next phase of Purple Sage will secure funding to produce a refreshingly new, easily accessed democratic primer which gives a broad and informative account of our democratic rights, responsibilities, institutions and the role an individual can play in a democratic society.

There were three candidates in my electorate – Liberal, Labor and the Hope party. The Hope party candidate did not have a listed telephone number. The Labor person had a mobile telephone. He lived some distance from the electorate. He arranged to come and see me, but didn't. I left the questions with the Liberal candidate and made several phone calls before the election. I then wrote to him after the election, but have not yet had any response. I have written to him again and I hope he might eventually reply.

■ Purple Sage Group Leader metropolitan Melbourne

DEMOCRACY AND BUSINESS

Business benefits from a healthy, prosperous and stable democracy. Too often, we see examples of business, especially in this global era, considering itself to be quarantined from the rest of the community. This is well illustrated in the recent debate within the banking sector in Australia.

The Chief Executive Officer of the National Australia Bank has acknowledged the need for banks to 'manage the contentious issue of balancing commercial and community objectives'. In accepting a social obligation, the banker recognised that 'more people, irrespective of their means, can afford a sustainable service'. The position, however, was challenged by a banking analyst who stated, 'It really is the shareholder that counts, not the community. I hope the banks don't start making decisions based on community considerations.'

Eighteen people in the queue this week. Two tellers behind the counter and the usual long and tedious wait. Media reports tell us of the billions of dollars in profits made by our banks. We look forward to a user-friendly bank to serve the whole community.

A letter to *The Age* 10 November 1999

DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?

1



DEMOCRACY IN VICTORIA – WHO CARES?



The values and guiding principles identified for business in our section *Action for our Times* enjoy support within different parts of the business world, but they are not universally acclaimed. We should be striving to see these values accepted and practiced more widely.

Put simply, business leaders and owners need to be driven by a spirit of enterprise rather than greed. They must acknowledge that their responsibilities extend beyond the shareholders and accept that they have a responsibility to minimise detrimental environmental and social effects brought about by their enterprise.

Businesses, dependent on consumers for profits, aim to be responsive to consumer opinion. We need to keep it this way. We need to remind ourselves of the very real power we hold and actively seek to influence companies' actions on issues of service and product quality, environmental practice, workplace change, corporate ethics.

The Age writer's observation captures the daily experience of thousands of Victorians. What can we do in response?

- ▶ **We can decide then and there to sever our ties with the bank in question, vote with our feet and find a better service, but it may not be much better elsewhere and there may be no other option.**
- ▶ **In this case, we can politely insist on seeing the manager to formally complain about the poor service. We can then walk outside, go to the Post Office and send a fax to the bank's Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Following this, we can ring the complaints department of the bank's headquarters. One final step is to send a letter to the Banking Ombudsman who is there to receive and act on your feedback on banking practices.**

These steps may well have their frustrations, including long waits at the end of the phone and many minutes of piped music. Patience is required as we work to bring about the desired change.

If you are a concerned shareholder, you have a different type of power and different opportunities to exercise it.

- ▶ **Organised groups of shareholders who are actively trying to influence the business behaviour of particular companies may already exist. You could seek these out and join up.**
- ▶ **If there doesn't seem to be such a group, consider starting one.**
- ▶ **The next stage of Purple Sage will compile a facts sheet detailing existing shareholder groups.**

We can also think of increasing our power as consumers by implementing boycotts. We can let business know how we feel and what we value by choosing carefully when we purchase goods or utilise services. We can inform ourselves about business practices and refuse to support businesses when we disapprove of their performance in certain areas.

We don't have to start from scratch. There are organisations around the world implementing various initiatives such as Buy Nothing Days, Adbuster Programs, Campaigns against Commercial TV and creative resistance contests.

- ▶ **You can download this information from the worldwide web. Start with <http://adbusters.org/information/foundation/index.html>**

Employment, unemployment and job security

BACKGROUND



- ▶ Sharp impacts
- ▶ Alternative directions

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



- ▶ The watching brief
- ▶ Conveying the picture and the message
- ▶ Local action: A stocktake on jobs
- ▶ Local action: Campaigns
- ▶ Job security
- ▶ Stimulating employment opportunities

Employment, unemployment and job security

BACKGROUND

High unemployment is now the experience of many countries. Australia is no exception.

Over the past fifteen years, Australia has experienced a profound period of economic restructuring that has resulted in massive labour adjustment and job losses. Prime age working men have lost out heavily in the full-time labour market. More and more people with long and stable work histories have been retrenched. Youth unemployment has reached new heights.

SHARP IMPACTS

Inequalities have grown sharper in families, neighbourhoods and regions. Areas such as the LaTrobe Valley experienced unemployment rates over 18 percent, compared to southern Melbourne suburbs with rates below five percent. Part-time and casualised employment increased hugely, making Australia one of the most casualised workforces in the OECD.

From 1983 to 1990, Victoria led the nation on jobs. Unemployment stood on average at 6.5 percent, below the national average of 8.3 percent. The recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the unemployment rate soar to over 11 percent. The initial burst of job cuts in the first year of the coalition government pushed the State's unemployment level

to 12.8 percent in August 1993. In the years since, the unemployment rate nationally has slowly and steadily fallen and Victoria, until recently, remained above the national rate.

Since 1992, the coalition government's public sector cuts saw State government employment in Victoria fall by approximately

People without jobs don't spend. They don't save. They don't pay taxes. People whose jobs are under threat don't work efficiently either, they knuckle down to a surly self-defence. And they lose faith in a future beyond their own control.

Don Edgar The Age Opinion 28 December 1996

66 000. Severe reductions also occurred in local government employment. What is not known is how many of these jobs were transferred to the private sector or how many were lost altogether.

The human costs of mass unemployment are huge and, for many families, likely to be felt for generations. The economic costs have been conservatively estimated by researchers such as Daryl Dixon to exceed \$20 billion per annum.



Participation in the labour force is both a right and a duty for those who are able. Australia cannot endure a situation of permanent and inevitable rejection and dependency for hundreds and thousands of its citizens. Ending unemployment is the most important means of ensuring economic security for all, reducing poverty and of achieving a more equitable, harmonious and productive society.

John Quiggin and John Langmore Prologue Work For All: Full Employment in the Nineties 1995

Apart from high and chronic unemployment, there are unprecedented levels of workplace stress and job insecurity. Senior management has been 'downsizing' and 'rightsizing' as a major tactic to reduce unit costs and increase profits. The upshot is that more and more Australians in paid work are reporting increased hours of work, low morale, a heightened sense of stress and greater job insecurity.

ALTERNATIVE DIRECTIONS

Some recent developments suggest many other people believe it doesn't have to be this way.

The experience of several OECD economies demonstrates that unemployment can be kept to lower levels and that large-scale casualisation of the workforce does not have to occur. On the working time issue, the European Working Time Directive is instructive. It came into force in October 1998. In essence, the Directive limits the working year to 48 weeks, the working day to 13 hours and a night shift to eight hours in 24. Employers stand to be penalised if they do not comply with these time limits.

Locally, since 1995, Australia's biggest retailer, Coles Myer, has defied the workforce trend of casual employment with a national campaign to cut thousands of casual positions in its grocery stores and boost instead its full-time, permanent workforce. The campaign enjoys the support of senior management because of the demonstrated benefits, including increased productivity and reduced training costs.

Throughout the Purple Sage dialogue, people consistently nominated unemployment, youth unemployment and job security as issues of great concern throughout the State. There was also a sense of frustration about the conduct of public debate and a perceived lack of commitment from government to resolving unemployment. Why is a wealthy, developed country such as Australia unable to provide employment for its people, and especially its young people?

There is real discord here. People unambiguously want unemployment placed high on the political agenda, but does government at large share the same priority?

We have an unprecedented crisis in the work opportunities and life prospects for young Australians aged between 15 and 24. We have significantly diluted our inheritance and it will take enormous effort to re-invent a political culture and the social institutions necessary to again give our young people hope and dignity.

John Spierings Young Australians in the Working Nation 1996 p. 26



AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

No single action will reduce unemployment. But solutions do exist. By way of example, we can start with the succinct ten-step plan by Alison McClelland, Director of Social Policy at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Reducing unemployment requires both a clear ethical starting point and good economic and social policies:

1. **Political commitment is critical.** An unemployment target can formalise, sustain and make the commitment accountable. Individual governments do have some scope to take action in a globalised world.
2. **Good macro economic management** is needed, especially to avoid economic downturns and recession, but also to encourage high levels of economic and employment growth. We need to be prepared to keep interest rates low and acknowledge that sometimes deficits are good.
3. **A more interventionist approach to industry development** (and related to this, regional development) to ensure that we generate exports and jobs growth – not necessarily in the same industries – and that different parts of Australia benefit.
4. **More employment in the public sector**, an area in which there has been massive job shedding and which contributed to high unemployment in the past six years. We need improved employment in areas such as education, health, and community services as well as greater attention to public sector job creation programs that could be connected to regional development and the improvement of infrastructure.
5. **An incomes policy** so the benefits of economic growth can be translated into more jobs and not just higher incomes for the better off. The Accord did make a difference in reducing unemployment over the 1980s but it was unable to moderate wage claims by the very highly paid and some of the benefits of wage moderation were wasted on unproductive investment.
6. **More and better education**, especially for disadvantaged young people, to ensure that we can compete effectively internationally (without going down the low wage route) and to ensure that those from lower-skilled or low-income families have better prospects of getting reasonable jobs.
7. **Good labour market programs** to help unemployed people take advantage of jobs growth. Successive Australian governments have adopted a stop/start approach to the running of work experience and training programs and as a result have often not achieved high quality assistance and generally not provided enough.
8. **Changes to the distribution of work** to reduce the excessive time some are working and increase the inadequate time of others. There are some areas where this is helpful, but it is no panacea.
9. **Some changes to income support** – to provide more adequate assistance to unemployed people and to improve rewards from work.
10. **Tax reform**, and not just a GST, which is unlikely to have a major impact on unemployment. Broader tax reforms could ensure that we can fund, in an economically responsible way, government action to improve our physical and social infrastructure. A broader base for taxing income and consumption will also allow these rates to be more easily varied to aid macro-economic policy.



FAIRWEAR – A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FIGHTING EXPLOITATION OF OUTWORKERS

The small group of women entered the Motto shop to try on clothes. They suddenly burst out of the change rooms in their underwear, announcing to the expectant media that they would wear no clothes at all rather than be clothed in exploitation. The media gave them the coverage that their underwear did not!

The event highlighted the plight of homebased outworkers in the clothing, textile and footwear industries. There are over 300 000 in Australia, or fifteen homeworkers for every factory worker. For making a designer-label \$70 shirt, the homemaker might receive only \$3.

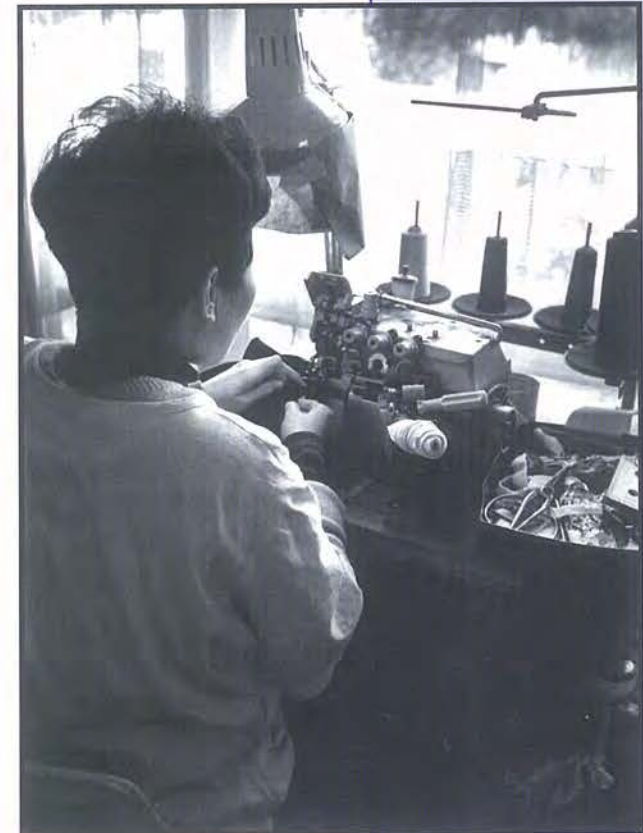
The owner of the targeted shop had refused to sign the FairWear Homeworkers Code of Practice, which includes a retailer commitment not to sell products produced by exploited labour. After the action, church organisations urged him to reconsider. His wife had some public speaking engagements cancelled. The owner eventually signed.

The FairWear Campaign was established in December 1996, after several years of increasing concern about conditions for Australian outworkers. It is committed to stopping the exploitation of homebased outworkers.

FairWear is not your average activist organisation. Their creative decentralised actions include prayer vigils and street drama outside retail outlets and workshops. They visit factories and courts to claim wages owed to workers, often with a

complement of religious women and men in full regalia. They act to embarrass retailers and manufacturers into more ethical, responsible and honest behaviour. FairWear understands that Australian consumers DO care whether their clothes are produced by exploited workers.

FairWear is an alliance between quite different groups in the pursuit of the common good. It combines the credibility of the Church with the strength of the community and the organisational ability of the unions. In recognising the value of alliances – often between unlikely partners – FairWear represents the way of the future for many activist organisations.



EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB SECURITY

The main responsibility for action on unemployment and job security remains with our national government and the practices of private sector companies. State and local governments are best placed to influence the extent of public sector employment within their respective domains as well as encouraging regional development and infrastructure. In addition, State government is ideally placed to provide sound public education and training programs.



We need to think about how people themselves can bring community pressure to bear on issues of unemployment and job security.



THE WATCHING BRIEF

Remember the watching brief is the first step.

In the case of employment, unemployment and job security, we can apply the watching brief in three ways – state and national governments and the private sector.

At the *state level*, we can identify key policy commitments of the new Victorian government:

The Labor government has proposed to stimulate job growth through major expenditure on city and country public hospitals (\$1.2 billion) and through the creation of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (up to \$170 million). Labor's proposed expenditure on schools and other public property would also be expected to stimulate jobs growth, both directly and indirectly.

Since no specific job numbers were provided, it remains to be seen what employment growth actually occurs as a result of these policy commitments.

This can become your watching brief.

- Watch for evidence that job numbers seem to be increasing. You can glean it from local newspapers and Centrelink offices. Seek figures from your local MPs, or from major service providers in your local area.

It is at the national level, however, that we should expect most policy leadership and action on employment, unemployment and job security. This suggests we ought to construct a watching brief on the policies and implementation record of the current Federal government.

- ▶ You can start this process yourself, or in a small group in your area. Contact the headquarters of the Federal Liberal Party and request copies of all existing policies regarding employment, unemployment and job security. Alternatively, you could try a Victorian senator, or the federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB).
- ▶ Once you have a reliable set of policy details, watch for the evidence of progress. Talk about the issue with others. Contact your local State and Federal MPs and use the record of progress as a discussion point.

At another level, we need to watch more carefully the new owners of our public assets. Traditionally, significant numbers of young people were able to take on apprenticeships with former public authorities, such as the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, the Gas and Fuel Corporation and the Public Transport Corporation. Are the new owners committed to apprenticeship training in the same way?

- ▶ Ring your electricity and gas providers and ask for details about the numbers of young apprentices within their company and the numbers proposed over the next three years. Contact your local train, bus, trams providers and put the same questions.
- ▶ Once you have some reliable details as to their apprenticeship plans, keep track of their performance.

- ▶ Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of current government policies on employment as well as the policies of other political parties. Remember if an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.
- ▶ You can keep in touch with organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government and private sector performance on employment. In this instance, you can start with:

**AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS,
RESEARCH AND TRAINING (ACIRRT)**

Tel. 02 9351 5626 Fax. 02 9351 5615

Institute Building H 10

University of Sydney, New South Wales 2006

www.econ.usyd.edu.au/acirrt/

VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL

Tel. 03 9662 3511 Fax. 03 9663 2127

54 Victoria Street, Carlton South, Victoria 3053

www.vthc.org.au

CONVEYING THE PICTURE AND THE MESSAGE

We have a responsibility to inform our political representatives of the needs and issues in their electorates. It is vitally important to make sure that they have the best possible picture of what's happening in the towns, areas, suburbs, regions and districts they represent. This is more than keeping up with events such as getting your local MP along to open a library. It is about providing them with a real feel for the issues and the impacts people are experiencing. If unemployment, or youth unemployment in particular, and the impacts felt by families and individuals is big in people's lives, then it is big enough to tell your representatives all about it.



EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB SECURITY

- ▶ Tell your story if you have been retrenched, or have felt the impact of unemployment in your immediate family or circle. Write it down or meet with your local MPs to give them the details of the picture and the effects on your life.
- ▶ An invitation to listen. Organise a community focus group of up to five families who are experiencing the consequences of job loss and are prepared to talk about what it's like: the number of job applications and rejections experienced, effects



on family of income loss, loss of identity. Invite your MPs to come and attend this focus group for the express purpose of listening. You can also invite other community leaders, ensuring that they are there to listen, and not to do all the talking.

LOCAL ACTION: A STOCKTAKE ON JOBS

It is still not enough simply to tell our elected representatives of personal experiences with unemployment, although the importance of bringing reality to their doorstep can never be underestimated. Facts and reliable, accurate statistics are needed to take the picture beyond a limited understanding.

In order to lobby effectively for improvements and developments in your area, you could develop a high-resolution picture of the employment data of your area. In the absence of such detail, there seems to be little political will for action, because politicians can't act on what they don't know.

- ▶ The next phase Purple Sage will develop and pilot a stocktake method for accurately building a profile of the employment situation in a designated area. This would detail job losses and growth across the various sectors of the economy, large and small, over a nominated period.

The stocktake method would also assist those using it to build a useful picture of future job trends and directions in the area. This material then becomes the critical information to support lobbying efforts. With this information in hand, you are much more likely to be able to put forward a cohesive argument for what you believe is needed in your area.

- ▶ It is important that as many residents of the area as possible are aware and informed of this high-resolution picture. Try publishing this information in your local media.



DO IT YOURSELF IN MIRBOO NORTH

The Gippsland town of Mirboo North stands out against the backdrop of other disintegrating rural centres. Its innovative structures for participation enable the town to focus community action on local wants and needs, and promote a strong sense of community spirit.

It all began in the early 1990s. Several local business women considered reorganising the traders' group, but then broadened their focus and organised the general meeting which gave birth to the Mirboo Community Association (MCA).

The MCA is now at the centre of town activity. It provides a forum where people can take their concerns, especially since local government has become larger and more remote. It is also where local groups go if they want something done. Groups apply to become a temporary committee of the MCA, which provides them with resources, a legal identity and a ready-made organisational structure. Completed projects include a skateboard bowl, a children's playground, the employment of local youth to build a walking track in bushland in the centre of town and the REV (Rural Enterprise Victoria) committee which employed a business facilitator.

More recently the MCA took over production of the local newspaper which was about to close. Using funding from Jobstart, grants from the shire and the skills of many volunteers, they totally revamped *The Mirboo North Times*. Now the newspaper has become a formal co-operative. It no longer makes a loss, although it's still run predominantly by volunteers. Its front page proudly announces, 'WINNER OF THE 1998 RURAL CITY

PRIDE AWARD FOR THE BEST COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER IN VICTORIA'.

This year the MCA facilitated a business venture that will support new business initiatives in the area. The venture also includes a weekday on-line banking facility with Bendigo Bank, as well as professional financial services. It opened a year after the Commonwealth Bank closed the door on its local customers. It has taken more money in deposits than initially expected, and is already employing local youth in real jobs with real prospects.

Gero Gardener was one of the people who started it all. She writes that 'the success of the MCA has been its community driven spirit that looks to maintain the values of those that live in rural areas'.



EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB SECURITY

- ▶ You could use this greater community awareness to gather momentum for a community forum to clarify and confirm the picture and to map out the strategies needed to develop employment opportunities in your area. It is essential that key influential people, including all political representatives, are a part of this process.

An exciting innovation in Sheffield, U.K. is creating new jobs for local people.

Sheffield Employment Bonds are a new social investment mechanism enabling local people to make interest-free loans so as to invest in their own area by helping long-term unemployed people enter or create new jobs.

The employment bonds are marketed and sold to Sheffield residents and former or non-residents with a concern for the city or targeted ethical investment. Money raised is invested in a leading housing association with Sheffield links, guaranteeing repayment to investors after 5 years. In each case the future return, 25–30% of the principal sum, is released in advance through a simple financial mechanism, and used for:

- a) New community based jobs, particularly where these achieve improvements in services and the environment in disadvantaged areas, mainly through grants coordinated by a local foundation.
- b) New jobs in the small business and community enterprise sectors, building a stronger future for the local economy, through revolving loan funds coordinated by local enterprise agencies.



LOCAL ACTION: CAMPAIGNS

There are a number of community-based initiatives, particularly in rural areas, working to generate jobs and reverse the overall social and economic decline of rural Victoria.

- ▶ You can support these initiatives, as many Victorians are already doing, by helping to publicise them, by joining in supportive marches and demonstrations, and by letting your local MP know that this is happening.
- ▶ Contact the Victorian Trades Hall Council and check out the possibility of running a 'Work For All' series of seminars or workshops at your local Neighborhood House or Community Centre, using a number of people who are well versed in the areas you wish to cover.
- ▶ Based on the information gained from the series of seminars, use the final session to draft some policy with the group which you then take to your local political representatives and seek a response.

JOB SECURITY

Given the widespread persistence of high unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, coupled with high rates of casualisation and job insecurity, there is a tendency to think that we're simply following worldwide trends. This is not the case.

We need to inform ourselves and others of ways in which the issues of unemployment and working time are being tackled successfully in other areas of our State, country and around the world. The European Union Working Time Directive is a positive example of a policy initiative that flies in the face of current Australian workplace practices.



We can use information technology to our advantage to access this sort of information. Once we have the information, we should introduce the new ideas and initiatives to public debate so that we embrace more than the limited world view of our leaders.

- ▶ **Support the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Work/Time/Life campaign** that is running for the next two years. It aims to address the unprecedented rise in casualisation of the workforce and the increase in unpaid overtime for many workers. The ACTU is working to develop community alliances around the country. Contact the Victorian Trades Hall Council to find out times of relevant seminars and gatherings throughout the State.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO STIMULATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In the first year of the coming century we will see major changes introduced into the way that we pay taxes (the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax) and the tax arrangements for businesses as recommended in the Ralph Report. How these new taxation arrangements will affect the ways in which a Victorian government can raise taxes is poorly documented and poorly understood.

A thorough examination of these new arrangements is needed, as a basis for a restructuring of State finances. The aim would be to identify additional funds that could then be specifically directed towards expanding employment opportunities for young Victorians.

- ▶ In its next stage, the Purple Sage Project will seek funding to hold a major conference dealing with the new taxation arrangements and State finances. The conference will aim to bring together experts in these matters as well as relevant government ministers and organisations dealing with youth employment.

Downsizing is a fancy word for being sacked. Nobody sees the unemployed as people – just percentages....all workers are under pressure, yet nobody is willing to tackle unemployment. ■ Purple Sage participants Mt. Waverley

Gambling: an addicted state?

BACKGROUND



Awakenings

Research confirms impacts

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



The watching brief

Community Support Fund

Generating awareness of gambling

Close to a problem gambler

State reliance on gambling revenue

Gambling: *an addicted state?*

BACKGROUND

Gambling is embedded in Australian culture. However, in Victoria's recent experience, it is the electronic gaming machines introduced in 1992, and the opening of Crown Casino on Southbank in 1994 (one of the largest casinos in the world) that made a different mark.

Pokies, roulette and blackjack burst on to the scene. Everyone's a winner. This is evidenced in all the advertisements. Jackpots. Jobs. Fun-loving young people. Flocking tourists. The State government wins too!

At the start of the 1990s, Victorians spent an average of \$253 each year gambling. By 1998, this had grown to an average of \$921, well above the Australian average. State gambling tax revenue grew from 6 percent in 1992 to 16.22 percent in 1997-98.

The slot machine 'entertainment' business targets everybody. Money's money. When we put 50 slot machines in, I always consider them 50 more mousetraps. You have to do something to catch a mouse. It's our duty to extract as much money from the customers as we can and send them home with a smile on their face.

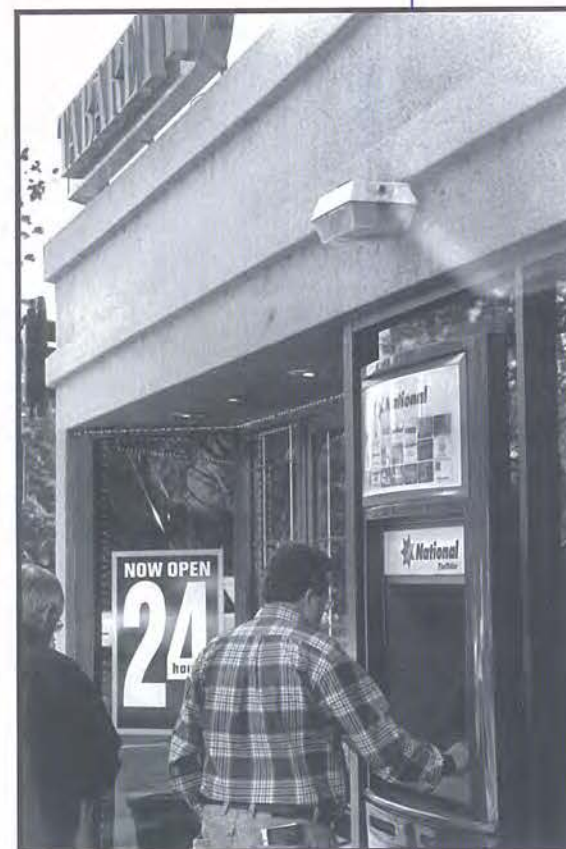
Bob Stupak, American casino owner, quoted in Robert Goodman *The Luck Business* 1995 p.121

AWAKENINGS

For the first few years of this astonishing expansion, information and debate was noticeably lopsided. The Casino and Gaming Authority advised us of the positive benefits with respect to job creation, turnover of gambling businesses and revenue generation. We were told that the economic benefits considerably outweighed social costs.

Despite these reassurances, fragmented and anecdotal evidence emerged of huge increases in problem gambling and negative impacts on different ethnic communities.

Concerns about growing numbers of problem gamblers were countered by arguments that we are mature adults, choosing between various entertainment options how we spend our money. Lingering unease about the probity of the casino tendering process was dealt with by refusing to make public relevant documentation.



GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?

The reference to gambling as just another form of entertainment is ingenuous! Ask yourself how many crimes of theft occur so you can finance a trip to see the movies, the footy, or the Melbourne Show? How many marriages break up because couples go to dinner after a concert? How many small businesses go bust because a businessman played golf every Saturday morning with his friends?

Purple Sage Project Staff discussion

Organisations such as the Interchurch Gambling Taskforce and the Victorian Local Governance Association took the lead within the broader community. They alerted people to the wider costs beyond the number of problem gamblers - to the geographic concentration of poker machines in lower income suburbs and depressed rural areas. They called for greater local controls, consumer protection and community education campaigns.

We like the freedom to have a flutter; most of us gamble because we enjoy it, and if we lose a bit in having fun, so what? But we also know that some people become consumed by it. The money for the kids' clothes or the mortgage payment disappears into the slots of the poker machines; people steal from partners or parents or strangers to feed their addiction, and their lives turn to misery.

Tim Colebatch The Age 20 July 1999

The debate drifted along. Spasmodic formal research showed negative effects impacting on different groups in the community, particularly women. Community unease forced the State government to place a temporary cap on the number of poker machines.

RESEARCH CONFIRMS IMPACTS

In 1998, at the request of the Federal Treasurer, the Productivity Commission commenced an extensive inquiry into Australian gambling. Its draft report, published in 1999, was explosive. It found that:

- ◆ Australia has 21 percent of the world's electronic gaming machines;
- ◆ an estimated 330 000 problem gamblers lost an average of \$12 000 a year;
- ◆ about 52 percent said they had borrowed money and not paid it back;
- ◆ 36 percent had sold property to raise money to bet;
- ◆ 43 percent said they sometimes went without food to pay for their addiction, one in four suffered divorce or separation, one in ten attempted suicide, and a further 140 000 also had severe problems;
- ◆ problem gamblers spread their misery to between 5 and 10 other people. On this scale, the lives of between 1.5 and 3.3 million Australians are touched by gambling troubles;
- ◆ young people are significantly more highly represented, and in ten years, women had gone from hardly featuring as gamblers to being 50 percent of problem gamblers.



A STATE ADDICTED TO GAMBLING?

If one thing stands out about the anti-gambling campaign in Victoria, it is the unlikely coalition of interests. Churches, local councils, welfare agencies and a host of very different community groups have all put aside other differences to work co-operatively on the common concern of opposition to gambling.

So far the campaign has had small incremental victories rather than spectacularly visible triumphs. For example, when the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal agreed that Maribyrnong Council had every right to ask an applicant for an extended gaming permit to demonstrate the social and economic impacts on the area, the decision effectively extended the law governing council influence over gambling in its own community. The recent draft report of the Productivity Commission on gambling was also more sympathetic to the anti-gambling lobby than expected.

The VLGA (Victorian Local Governance Association) has been very active in the campaign. Its Local Government Working Group on Gambling helps very different councils find common ground when confronting the effects of gaming in their areas. Even well-to-do councils acknowledge that gambling affects their operation, because all wealthy suburbs contain pockets of disadvantage. These are the areas where gaming venues are usually located. One of the major benefits of the Working Group has been increased co-operation on research and investigations, such as the economic impact study commissioned by Moreland, Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Greater Dandenong Councils. (The interim report is already available.) The VLGA

forum 'Regulating Local Gambling' held in June 1999 was another co-operative initiative of the Working Group. Now the VLGA plans to produce a website about gambling. It will include documents produced by members of the Working Group (including submissions), reports and research studies, and a section about efforts to change government policy on electronic gambling.

It's significant that while local councils have no direct control over gambling in their own communities, they believe their efforts HAVE influenced government. Now the State Government has announced a dramatic turnabout in gambling policy during the election campaign. If the changes actually happen, perhaps this will be the spectacular victory that has so far eluded opponents to electronic gaming. But if they do not ...

Anti-gambling crusader Tim Costello said recently that gambling was already the third highest revenue raiser towards State income. The budget papers for 1999 estimated that 16% of the State's budget would now come from gambling revenues. Does this mean that the State has become more addicted to gambling than any of its 'problem gamblers'?



GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?

The Productivity Commission confirmed a geographic concentration of poker machines in lower income areas as unique to Victoria. There is a form of economic apartheid – Footscray for example has an unemployment rate of twenty percent and has 116 machines for every 10 000 but in the electorate of Burwood where unemployment is five percent, the ratio is 16 machines for every 10 000 people. In contrast, there is minimal relationship between income and density of machines in New South Wales and no such relationship in Queensland.

Victoria is in a state of denial about its addiction. Those who profit from gambling are among the richest and most powerful vested interests in the State. Those who contribute most to these profits are the poorest in the State. The Government wants revenue and who better to get it from than the poor, who didn't vote for the Government and who are geographically segmented from the voters who do?

Ken Davidson *The Age* 17 June 1999

The issues and problems associated with the unbridled expansion of gambling are no longer out of sight, out of mind. This was finally borne out by the 1999 State election. Both major parties identified gambling as an election issue and developed detailed policy responses.



AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

The run up to the September 1999 election showed, for the first time since the introduction of the casino and state-wide poker machines in Victoria, that both major parties recognised expanded gambling was causing great concern across the State. As a result, they accepted the need to develop more comprehensive policy commitments that aimed to address the impact of expanded gambling in Victoria.

They were in agreement on many of the key commitments, including retention of the ceiling of 27,500 electronic gaming machines across the State, greater on-site control at gaming venues, including extra player information, and an enforceable code of conduct for venue operators and owners.

The policy commitments made by both major parties clearly indicate that irrespective of the election outcome, Victorians could have expected some concerted state level action on gambling and its associated negative impacts.

The ascendancy of a minority Labor government now puts its policy commitments on centre stage. Whether these are judged to be sufficient remains to be seen. At the same time, a response to an expanded gambling industry is an issue for the whole of the community and should not simply be confined to the proposed regulatory framework of a State government.





THE WATCHING BRIEF

Remember the watching brief is the first step.

The Victorian government's key undertakings on gambling are set out below. Watch for evidence that they are being translated into action. Is there a stage when you feel you can with some confidence mark a tick in the action box?

Retain the ceiling of 27 500 electronic gaming machines. ☐

Impose regional caps to prevent new machines coming into already oversupplied areas. As licences come up for renewal, machine numbers will be reduced to the regional cap. ☐

Halt the expansion of gaming venues in retail shopping complexes and centres. ☐

Ban new 24 hour licences in country Victoria.
When licences for existing country venues come up for renewal, they will be prevented from opening on a 24-hour basis. ☐

Require truth in advertising in the gambling industry. ☐

Introduce an enforceable code of conduct for gaming operators and venue owners. ☐

Reduce dependence on gaming taxes by seeking a fairer revenue deal from the federal government. ☐

Reform the Community Support Fund to ensure that problem gambling programs receive higher priority and communities affected by gaming are adequately compensated. ☐



Give local councils the power to object to the establishment of gaming venues on the grounds that there is a net negative impact to the economic and social wellbeing of their municipality, as well as having a greater say in the location and establishment of gaming venues. ☐

Strengthen probity checks on licence owners and operators. ☐

Limit donations to political parties by casino and gaming owners and operators and require full and public disclosure of any donations. ☐

Strengthen the role, independence and accountability of the Casino and Gaming Authority. ☐

Establish an independent arm of the Casino and Gaming Authority with the responsibility for contracting independent research into the effects of gaming. ☐

GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?



GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?



Once you have an account of these policies you can:

- ▶ Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of current government policies on gambling as well as the policies of other political parties. Remember if an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.
- ▶ Keep in touch with organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government's delivery of policy commitments on gambling. In this instance, you can start with

THE VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION

Tel: 03 9654 0333

Fax: 03 9654 0555

Level 1 Ross House

247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Victoria 3000

THE FINANCIAL AND CONSUMER RIGHTS COUNCIL INC

Tel. 03 9614 5433

Fax. 03 9614 8433

Level 2 Reid House

347 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Victoria 3000

THE INTERCHURCH GAMBLING TASKFORCE

MELBOURNE CITY MISSION

Tel. 03 9489 9666

Fax. 03 9489 5573

472 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy North Victoria 3065

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND

The State government has pledged to reform the Community Support Fund. This Fund operates under the *Gaming Machine Control Act 1991*. The legislation requires 8.3% of daily net cash balances from gaming machines in hotels to be paid into the Fund. You have every right to know how this gambling revenue is spent and whether any funds have come into your local community or region.

- ▶ You can ring your local MP and ask for this information.
- ▶ Ring up the people responsible for administering the Fund and ask for all publicly available information to be sent to you.
- ▶ Ask your local paper to publish the information.



GENERATING AWARENESS OF GAMBLING IMPACTS

Keep your local Members of Parliament aware of gambling issues, including local and other research on gambling.

- ▶ Tell them your views about the numbers of gaming machines and whether there should be a ban on inducements such as free food and drinks.
 - ▶ If you think it's warranted, put the case for more money from the Community Support Fund to come back into your local area or region.
 - ▶ Question your local candidates when they come to you for election to either local council, or to State or Federal Parliament.
 - ▶ Ask candidates at election time for their views on gambling. Ask them what they will do towards better management of this greatly expanded industry.
- You can rightfully, as one person or as part of a small group, approach your local councillor about gambling issues.
- ▶ Find out what the council has done so far and what it intends to do. Ask if the council has sought money from the Community Support Fund to assist families in need as a result of problem gambling.

We are concerned with the negative impact of gambling on our society; the government's dependency on revenue from gambling, the suggestion of co-location of ATM's and pokie machines in shopping centres.

We know that some money goes back into the community from gambling revenue but how much?

We need more information. ■ Purple Sage participants Briagolong

From the moment the government encourages its citizenry to finance the state by gambling – that state is in an unacknowledged crisis.

John Ralston Saul
The Doubter's Companion 1995 p. 141

You could also:

- ▶ Ask to be put in touch with others in your local area who may already be doing things about gambling.
- ▶ Ask council for its gambling strategy and ask it to find out and report back to the community on what other local councils have been doing on the issue of gambling.
- ▶ Ask council to initiate a study in the municipality on local gambling impacts and consequences.
- ▶ Suggest Council work with local gambling venue operators to establish a Code of Responsible Gambling.

Some things are too much for one person to do. However a small group of interested people could:

- ▶ Organise a local forum in your community. Approach a local organisation to auspice the event.

GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?

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GAMBLING: AN ADDICTED STATE?

- ▶ Ask someone to speak at your forum about gambling myths and the real odds of winning and losing.
- ▶ Contact the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority and ask for the numbers of electronic gaming machines in your region.
- ▶ Collect local experience and stories on gambling issues. Talk to your local traders about the impact of gambling on retail activity in their area.
- ▶ Feed people's experiences and views into the council, your local MPs, local paper and relevant state-wide groups.

CLOSE TO A PROBLEM GAMBLER

You don't need to be a gambler to be hurt by gambling. Thousands of people now have partners or other family members who have a gambling problem. There are services for problem gamblers such as Gambling Anonymous or Break Even, but you need to look after yourself too. Make sure your own story is told, even anonymously. It will help you and it helps everyone to know and understand gambling better.

- ▶ Tell someone in an organisation where you feel confident you could be listened to, confidentially.
- ▶ Write about the experience and send it to your local MPs or local church. Ask them to forward it to people they feel should be told.

STATE RELIANCE ON GAMBLING TAXES

Victoria's State government has, in the space of only a few years, become greatly reliant on gambling taxes as a source of revenue. This reliance poses problems. It may make government less prepared to introduce and enforce appropriate advertising codes. More troubling, however, is that gambling taxes are easily won and hard to give up. The risk is that government itself becomes addicted to a regressive but easy tax.

The State government has pledged to 'seek a fairer revenue deal from the federal government to reduce the State government's reliance on revenue from gambling'. The risk is that in the likelihood of a failed negotiation, and in the absence of other stated strategies, the heavy reliance on regressive gambling taxes will remain and possibly even grow.

There are tough questions here that go to the heart of tax equity and the structure of future state budgets. There needs to be open and informed debate on these questions across the Victorian community.

- ▶ To start this process of inquiry and debate, the Purple Sage Project in its next stage will commission an independent assessment of gambling taxes – issues and options, for community discussion.



The environment matters to Victorians

BACKGROUND

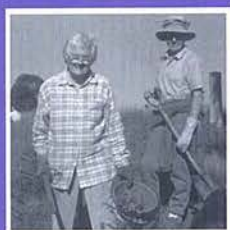


A changed philosophy

Sustainable energy use is essential

Victorians value their natural environment

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



The watching brief

Landcare

Global warming

Ethical investment

Waste collection and recycling

The environment matters to Victorians

BACKGROUND

Victoria has the highest population density in Australia – 80 percent live within 50 km of the sea. Over 40 percent of the land still belongs to the people (as unalienated Crown Land). Government is the responsible manager of this land. This is in

contrast to the situation with private land where government can attempt to regulate the practices of the private owner.

In substantial parts of the State, poor land management practices in the past mean that

soil erosion and dry land salting are major problems. Some coastal areas suffer from the effects of high levels of use and inappropriate sewage disposal.

Pressure on the land is putting Victoria's biodiversity at risk.

A CHANGED PHILOSOPHY

The two terms of the previous Coalition government were accompanied by a dramatic change in the way the government perceived its responsibilities for much of the Crown Land estate. The Land Conservation Council, the statutory body that

determined how Crown Land was used, was closed down. The independent Office of the Commissioner for the Environment was closed down. Government no longer carried out its responsibilities according to any publicly available Conservation Strategy for Victoria. Government saw community assets such as national parks and coastal foreshores as simply places that should be developed by private entrepreneurs.

Up until the 1990s successive Victorian governments had, over the past eighty or more years, recruited and trained significant numbers of public service staff with wide technical knowledge and skills in land management. During the past decade, massive staffing cuts in government agencies have resulted in extensive de-skilling and loss of corporate memory. As a consequence, the capability of government agencies with responsibility for conservation and resource management must now be questioned.

Commercial considerations were not restricted to public land. The management of water in the non-metropolitan area was divided among five large corporatised water authorities with a strong emphasis on cost reduction.

There were indications that water would be privatised. The Victorian public was strongly opposed to the notion, sensing that the privatisation of Victoria's water resources would present significant environmental and public health risks. Assurances that water would not be privatised were provided by the major parties during the September election campaign.

Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned and the last fish has been caught will we realise we cannot eat money.

Cree Indian proverb



SUSTAINABLE ENERGY USAGE IS ESSENTIAL

The availability of vast reserves of brown coal and natural gas has had a dominant influence on energy policies of the past. Successive governments have shown little interest in supporting the development of alternate, clean technologies (for example wind and wave power, fuel cells) for the production of energy. The complete privatisation of the electricity and gas industries in Victoria has created a business climate in which the development of these alternatives is now even less likely.

Throughout the 1990s the State government preferred to deal with the energy industry at arms length. There were no indications that it accepted the responsibility for the development and implementation of a strategic and longer-term energy policy. It appeared to be prepared to expose the whole State to the real risk of an energy crisis rather than re-evaluate its belief in the free market and the benefits of privatisation.

VICTORIANS VALUE THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Polling figures show that the environment still matters to Victorians. Ordinary Victorians cherish and value living in a decent environment, whether at home, at the beach, in the country or in the city. We expect government to meet its environmental responsibilities - to care for public land and encourage private landholders to play their part in improving environmental quality.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

During the election campaign, the major parties released policy documents dealing with conservation and the environment.

In common was a commitment to retain the water industry in public ownership, establish a marine national park in Port Phillip Bay, reduce litter entering the environment, enhance household recycling programs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve Melbourne's air quality.

Labor's policies reflected a central role and responsibility for government with respect to protection and enhancement of both the urban and natural environment. A number of its policy items translate to greater regulation and the meeting of set targets for government and industry.



THE WATCHING BRIEF

Remember the watching brief is the first step.

The Victorian government's key undertakings on environment and natural resources are set out below. Watch for evidence that they are being translated into action. Is there a stage when you feel you can with some confidence mark a tick in the action box?

Maintain all water authorities in public ownership and protect and improve water quality.

☐

Develop a state-wide coastal conservation and management program.

☐

Stop the commercialisation of national parks and specifically protect the Port Campbell National Parks, the Phillip Island Nature Reserve and Wilsons Promontory. Wilsons Promontory would be proposed for nomination to the World Heritage List.

☐

Establish a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, a Sustainable Energy Development Authority and a Commissioner for Ecologically Sustainable Development.

☐

Establish a Port Phillip Bay marine national park, and implement a stormwater and litter control program.

☐

Revitalise the Snowy River system.

☐

THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS TO VICTORIANS

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THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS TO VICTORIANS

Introduce a number of reporting and management requirements across government to reduce waste production, greenhouse emission and to increase recycling. ☐

Set new waste reduction targets for industry and introduce a new industrial waste management strategy as the alternative to toxic waste dumps. ☐

- ▶ Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of current government policies on environment and natural resources as well as the policies of other political parties. Remember if an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.

- ▶ You can keep in touch with organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government's delivery of policy commitments on environment and natural resources. In this instance, you can start with:

THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

Tel. 03 9650 8296

Fax. 03 9654 6843

10 Parliament Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3000

www.vnta.org.au

ENVIRONMENT VICTORIA

Tel. 03 9348 9044

Fax. 03 9348 9055

19 O'Connell Street, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051

www.envict.org.au

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Tel. 03 9419 8700

Fax. 03 9416 2081

312 Smith Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066

www.foe.org.au



The natural division of Victoria into regions to the north and the south of the Great Dividing Range has led to communities holding divergent attitudes about water availability. In the northern regions water is a scarce and valued resource that is essential for farming, secondary industries and domestic use. In the major cities of the south, there is less appreciation of and concern about water. Residents assume that water will usually be available and summer water restrictions are relatively rare experiences. Water is used freely by domestic households both inside and outside of the home.

The time has come for the major urban populations in Victoria to engage in a far-reaching, community-based, water conservation program.

Over the next ten to fifteen years, this scheme would aim to bring about a major shift in domestic use and conservation of water. This change in people's attitudes to and use of water needs to be of the same magnitude as has been seen with the Quit (anti-smoking) campaign, and the Clean Up Australia campaign.



THE TREEPROJECT

GROWING TREES, GROWING STRENGTH, GROWING COMMUNITY

Good friends Maggie McLeod and Belinda Gross used to get together and complain about what was happening to the environment. Until it dawned that merely DISCUSSING what was wrong wouldn't change anything. Instead they asked themselves what they could DO that would make a difference.

They kept coming back to trees. Trees are symbolic of life, and planting trees is a positive thing that anyone can do. Planting trees also gets people interested in the environment, encourages them to find out more, and motivates them to act on their other environmental concerns. Shortly afterwards Maggie stood up in a seminar and ambitiously declared that she would plant a million trees – not that she had any idea how to go about it at the time! Much to her astonishment others immediately offered to help.

The TreeProject was born.

The members did their homework and talked to key people. They negotiated a site for their first planting at Yarra Bend Park in Melbourne, and did plenty of publicity. They worried that they'd never be able to plant the 5000 seedlings they had, but 700 people turned up and the plants were in the ground by lunchtime! That was in April 1989. During the year they planted a total of about 20 000 trees, all in metropolitan Melbourne.

In 1990 the group set up a scheme to help farmers revegetate their land with local indigenous seedlings grown by urban volunteers in their backyards. Now more than 500 000 trees have been planted in rural areas, many by the city volunteers who grew them. The project helps to tackle serious rural



problems like salinity and erosion, and builds and cements valuable relationships between city and country people.

This year the TreeProject planted its millionth tree, and celebrated ten years of planting using nearly 200 000 hours of volunteer labour. Maggie and Belinda are still involved, along with more than 1500 other volunteers.

Their message is that 'we must always remember that individual action DOES have an effect when individuals are not acting alone'.



THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS TO VICTORIANS



The scheme would aim to get urban households to collect, store and use the rainwater that falls on every roof as well as collecting and reusing greywater.

- ▶ You can let the Purple Sage office know that you are interested in contributing time and effort to get the scheme going.



- ▶ An initial strategy kit will be developed early in 2000. This will provide you with a brief outline of tasks that will need to be done in your own community. When you get this, you could start organising a group of interested people to share the work.

- ▶ The next stage of Purple Sage will seek major partners to deal with the public policy matters that require consideration to get the scheme implemented.

LANDCARE

As well as extending water conservation, we can focus on better care of the land.

LandCare is a highly successful program initiated in Victoria in 1986. It established partnerships between rural landholders and government. Commonly, government provides resources and technical advice while the landholder community does the arms and legs work.

It can become an even stronger movement in Victoria.

- ▶ You can join a local LandCare group. Find out from your local council the relevant contact details.
- ▶ As a small group you could even form a new LandCare group. Find out through the Landcare program how to do this.

We could adopt the LandCare approach in our towns and cities too:

- ▶ You could phone the Victorian Farmers' Federation and see if the existing guidelines cover proposals for urban land care. If not, contact your local MP and talk about your idea.
- ▶ As a group you could brief your local ward councillor about how urban LandCare could apply in your local area. Arrange a group to visit an existing LandCare project as a way of showing how a program could work in an urban environment.

GLOBAL WARMING

There is compelling evidence that the earth is warming up. This warming is linked to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere. Burning fossil fuels is a major contributor to this Greenhouse Effect. It now rates as one of the most serious environmental problems threatening the life support systems of the planet.

Communities all over the world are increasingly realising the threats from global warming. Now is the time for expanded alternate technology development.

In Victoria there are two activities where we use significant quantities of fossil fuels. We generate most of our electricity by burning brown coal and we are over-dependent upon our road transport system for freight and private travel.

- ▶ You or a group of friends, can write to your electricity supply company and ask what it is doing about supplying electricity that has been produced by alternate technology.
- ▶ The next stage of Purple Sage will seek to join existing campaigns being carried out to bring about more rapid development and use of alternate technologies for power generation.
- ▶ The next phase of the Purple Sage project will also explore, along with local government and regional organisations, the setting up of demonstration sites to show alternate technology being used for power generation.

ETHICAL INVESTMENT

Ethical investment describes a form of investment where the return on an investment is accompanied by an environmental and social benefit.

Investors selectively invest in businesses that develop and/or manufacture products used to enhance the environment. They have clear company policies and production practices aimed at minimising negative environmental impacts and maximising positive ones. They reinvest a proportion of the company's profits into conservation and environmental improvement projects.

Ethical investment offers a real opportunity for ordinary men and women to directly influence behaviour that affects the environment. It is important that existing opportunities for ethical investment are more widely known.

- ▶ If you want to invest some money, you can contact Purple Sage for a facts-sheet with some key contact points for ethical investment.
- ▶ If you are a shareholder in any public companies, write to the Company Secretaries for advice about present and future opportunities for ethical investment with that company.
- ▶ If you are not satisfied, form a shareholder affinity group made up of like-minded shareholders, to apply some collective pressure on the Board of Directors.

THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS TO VICTORIANS

4



We need to be respectful of environmental values including wilderness, urban forests and Landcare.

■ Purple Sage participants Ferntree Gully



WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

Victoria is ahead of all other states in terms of the public's participation in waste collection and recycling schemes, although more can be done in this area. Women especially are in a strong position to be able to broaden the extent of recycling.

There are some important initiatives in other countries that propose to intervene in the market in bids to ensure cleaner production and less waste. For example by the end of 1999, the European Union will have a directive whereby all manufacturers of all electronic goods – from toasters to washing machines to computers – will have to take back their products at the end of the product's life cycle. Sony Sweden already has such a policy in place.

- ▶ **We can run with this idea! You or a group of friends can start a local 'Take Back' campaign by choosing some simple household item that is discarded by the household as solid waste.**

Batteries or light globes would be a good choice to begin with. Write to the customer relations person for each of the major manufacturers of batteries or light globes and ask them for the location of a depot that receives used product.

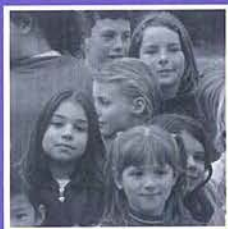
- ▶ **In order to extend the 'Take Back' idea in Victoria, start writing to the manufacturers of small electrical goods about their 'Take Back' policy. Tell them that you will not be choosing any of their products unless they are prepared to take back their product when it's worn out.**

- ▶ You could write to manufacturers and ask three questions:
 - what does the company do to reduce waste?
 - does the company have a 'Take Back' program for irons, hair dryers, electric razors, electric heaters, computers?
 - which brand name would they recommend for purchase since you require that the item, when obsolete, has to be taken back?
- ▶ The next phase of the Purple Sage Project will develop a partner relationship with appropriate organisations to inform the policy arm of each political party of the need for, and benefits of, 'Take Back' legislation.

We are not taking the threats to the environment seriously enough – loss of urban habitat and character, loss of wilderness, loss of old growth forests – and all the rest. There is short term thinking, an instant gratification mentality, and a preparedness to pass on outmoded and dangerous technologies to the third world. ■ Purple Sage participants Beaumaris

Community services & supports: on whose terms?

BACKGROUND



Shifting services to the private sector

People are not convinced

Major oversights

The shakedown is far from over

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION



The watching brief

Disclosure

Monitoring and evaluation

Community advocacy

Community re-investment

Linking communities

Celebrating our communities

Local action counts

Community services and support: *on whose terms?*

BACKGROUND

Provision of basic services goes to the heart of community functioning and well being.

Water to survive. Electricity and gas to supply our day-to-day energy needs for cooking and heating. Community services

touch our lives at any number of critical points: the education of ourselves and our children; helping us to stay healthy; enabling us to take pleasure in parks and open spaces; providing transport to work, school or the cinema; providing protection against bushfires; supporting us in emergencies.

A community cannot afford

to be careless in its approach to services and other supports. There is too much at stake. People's lives, the quality of children's education, the safety of public spaces, suburbs or regions becoming 'service poor'.

Managed thoughtfully and equitably, services allow us to translate our sense of fairness into access for all citizens irrespective of their means.

Our State governments have been responsible for the provision of basic community services such as education, health, and transport. Traditionally they have used state taxes and federal funds to do this. Over time, the range and types of services, undergo adaptations to reflect demographic and other social and economic changes.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the emergence of an aggressive free market mindset led to a questioning of this whole arena of public provision. The need for smaller government became the dogma of the day. Public policy now emphasised 'leaner and meaner' government, 'competition', 'steering not rowing' and 'core' and 'non-core' services.

SHIFTING SERVICES TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR

This world view assumed that the private sector had the credentials to take over the running of almost all services. The environment of competition generated by profit-driven businesses would lead to greater efficiencies in the key services of electricity, gas, transport, hospitals and community support. Naturally, the consumer would reap the benefits of these new arrangements.

In a space of just seven years, almost the entire services landscape in Victoria was privatised. Longstanding, carefully evolved arrangements were radically altered and sometimes terminated altogether. As a result private providers now run many hospitals, several prisons, our ports, all bus, train and

In 1992 we travelled to work on state-owned trains and trams, had our homes and workplaces lit by state-owned gas and electricity, had our pay decided under a state-based award, bought our concert tickets from the state-owned agency, and had a flutter at the state-owned TAB. All that has gone, probably forever.

Tim Colebatch The Age 23 October 1999



tram services, electricity and gas distribution, and the construction and maintenance of public housing.

Against this backdrop of radical change, social expenditure on community services decreased. An audit of government spending carried out in 1999 by Hancock and Cowling at the Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne revealed that the benefits of growth in the State's economy did not flow to further social expenditure in education, health, community services and welfare.

Rather than delivering a social dividend, Victoria's real outlays per head of population on total social and community services fell 10.7% in the five years from 1993/4 to 1997/98. Real per capita spending on education, health and welfare all decreased significantly. The only areas to record an increase were law, order and public safety (a real increase of 6.6% per head).

PEOPLE ARE NOT CONVINCED

Throughout the Purple Sage dialogue, what became apparent was that people were clearly skeptical about these new arrangements and the capacity of the free market to deliver more and better services. For some, this skepticism was born from personal experience – Relatives on hospital trolleys; ambulance delays; increased school class sizes; parent groups working harder to raise school funds; food poisoning scares linked to reduced health inspection services; and transport services tailored to peak demand rather than being uniform and consistent.

People knew that their local communities were being weakened and they felt unable to do anything about it. They saw valuable safety nets withdrawn in terms of access to health services, legal aid, housing and transport needs. Some participants in the dialogue spoke of their personal reaction and their consequent decision to withdraw from voluntary activities in their community.

There has been a rejection of a new order that denies the altruism that exists within people and applies instead a value of competition to service provision. It is not that people cannot cope with change or that they suffer from 'reform fatigue' as described by various media commentators. People see aspects of this reform as wrong-headed. Understandably, they are angered when tried and tested approaches to services are discarded and quality falls away.



Healesville residents protesting against the loss of their Post Office. Reprinted with the permission of The Age.

MAJOR OVERSIGHTS

A lack of public consultation. This transformation in service delivery occurred at lightning pace and formal consultation took place with private consultants and potential new owners. An enormous reservoir of community experience and professional insight has been ignored.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?

Ignorance of intangible assets. The new arrangements were ushered in without consideration of the intangible values underpinning service provision and delivery across the State. These are the human dimensions, epitomised by the everyday and willing assistance of a tram conductor, or a volunteer worker with meals-on-wheels, which have not been factored in to the new models.

Lack of public knowledge about new arrangements. There is little or no knowledge in the public arena about the companies that have bought into Victoria's services. Major questions remain unanswered. What are Victorians getting for their money? Which owners are overseas based? How long are the arrangements in place with these new contracts? What happens with the continuation of an essential service in the event that a contractor defaults? What is the capacity (legislative and otherwise) of government to intervene in the public interest?

It is not always clear that the efficiency gains are (on net balance) positive. Furthermore, there is usually very little follow through research to discover who is losing out after privatisation.

John Nieuwenhuysen, Chief Executive, Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA)
Address to VCOSS Biennial Conference March 1999.

No systematic monitoring and evaluation. The claim of commercial-in-confidence has been used by government to exclude the public's right to know. There is no systematic process in place to inform the public about the experience of the privatised services and to evaluate the

performance of companies providing the services against promised outcomes.

It may be that the recent program of privatised services will ultimately serve the Victorian community well, even better than previous arrangements. However, in the absence of knowledge and public access to the detail of these new service arrangements, we face a situation where the full dimensions of the privatisation program can not yet be assessed.

THE SHAKEDOWN IS FAR FROM OVER

The shakedown from Victoria's radical change to private provision of essential services is far from complete. The adjustment process will take longer than the time spent introducing the change and it is likely to throw up some real challenges.

The service arrangements now in place are not simply technical and managerial changes. They grow out of a self-confident business and organisational culture that believes in a minimalist, regulatory role for government, sees no problem with reduced opportunities for public scrutiny and assumes no incompatibility between provision of service and meeting profit expectations.

Approximately three months ago, Melbournians received the news that their century old, publicly owned tramways system, the most extensive in the world, was to be broken up and sold to private investors.

On 17 November 1999, the *Herald Sun* revealed the existence of an Egis consultant report that had been commissioned by Yarra Trams, one of the new private tramway companies. This report proposed that up to 50 tram stops could be removed across 10 major routes as a means of increasing 'operational efficiency.' Predictably, disability groups and organisations representing older people pointed to the negative impacts that such a proposed 'improvement' would have on their lives. The Minister for Transport was reported as saying that it was 'too early for any wholesale changes to the tram network'.

On the same day that this story broke, there were two other issues concerning unknown contractual obligations. One dealt with the contracts government entered into with 51 Victorian state schools in the Self Governing Schools program. The other involved contracts for sporting events and their impact on the viability of sports facilities such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Waverley Park.



TOWARDS A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?

One of the ways of strengthening communities is to encourage people of all ages to work together on a project of common interest.

The theme for IYOP (the United Nations International Year of Older Persons) is 'Towards a society for all ages'. Planned celebrations across the world include simultaneous locally organised Global Walks to promote positive and active ageing. The UN especially wants to encourage old and young people to get together.

When the City of Greater Dandenong called for tenders to organise its Global Walk, the winners were students from Chandler Secondary College! The students are studying in a new VCE Community Services Program which their school is trialling for the Education Department. The course includes compulsory practical work – which is exactly what they're doing in organising this large community event.

Council's IYOP Committee includes a number of older people. Students are working closely with them to organise every aspect of the Global Walk, including the route, maps, entertainment, amenities, transport, advertising, safety, refreshments and commemorative T-shirts. They are RAPIDLY developing the requisite new skills in teamwork, networking, communication, information gathering, negotiation, policy and planning!

Importantly, students are learning more than the technical skills and knowledge required by their course. They are also learning about the older people they work, consult and negotiate with.



Their work is evidence of a true community partnership, which Council officers say 'is further strengthening links between youth and older persons'.



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



These examples illustrate neatly the potential dilemmas now facing Victorians with regard to the privatised provision of basic services. In the absence of public information, we cannot be sure of the relevant Minister's powers to intervene in the public interest. In the Yarra Trams case, there appears to have been no requirement in the consultancy brief to consult with tram users and representative organisations. The early signs hint at a service agreement between the parties that may narrow the range of social and efficiency considerations. A faster trip may well be important to some commuters. Ease of physical access for disabled people, mothers with toddlers and pushers, and other less mobile groups is another consideration.

The contract era we now find ourselves may well deliver positive outcomes for people but there are also some potential risks for the Victorian public. An existing contract, for example, in the transport area may well prove to be adequate in meeting public expectations of service levels and quality. But if it transpires that an existing contract is flawed from the public's point of view, can these flaws be addressed by re-negotiation? What happens in the event of a serious failure to meet set performance criteria?

It is increasingly clear that the agenda for community action in this privatised service environment has two main parts. First, Victorian citizens need to agitate for contract disclosure, independent monitoring, evaluation of performance, and effective advocacy on the part of consumers for the broader public interest.

Second, people need to continue to do what they are so very good at – adding value to and creating community assets. We need to celebrate all the wonderful things that go on in communities, often without wider acknowledgment. This capacity is now recognised as pivotal to developing sustainable communities that are underpinned by social, cultural and environmental wealth as well as economic value.

The most recent work in sustainable development offers communities a way forward in recognising, measuring, valuing, growing and securing the common good. We need to become more familiar with terms such as social, cultural and intellectual capital.

We need also to come to a deeper understanding of how we develop these intangible assets in our communities and how to demand that they be accounted for by government.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

The business culture surrounding Victoria's privatisation program is now embedded. The change of government in September 1999 introduces new factors into the scenario of service delivery. For Victorians who need services delivered with certainty, responsiveness and equity, some fundamental issues must be worked through over the next few years.

The overriding question is: 'In this new environment what safeguards are necessary in order to provide high quality, equitable and affordable services to all Victorians?'



THE WATCHING BRIEF

Remember the watching brief is the first step.

Service provision is made up of a complex array of systems. It is not practical to establish a watching brief that comprehensively surveys all entire systems and policy commitments. We have focused on the areas that had particular resonance through the Purple Sage dialogue – education, health, community services and transport.

The Victorian government's key policy commitments intended for the first four years are set out below. Watch for evidence that they are being translated into action.

Is there a stage when you feel you can, with some confidence, place a tick in the action box?

EDUCATION

Key commitments included:

Cap class sizes in Prep to year 2 at 21 or less.

Provide \$36 million in extra funds for the education of children with special learning needs.

Provide \$17.5 million in extra funds for programs directed at students with disabilities and impairments.

Provide \$8.7 million for extra specialist teachers.

Establish an independent, education-based review panel which would represent student input into proposals for school reorganisation and closures.

Lift the restrictions on teachers and principals participating in public debate.

Over time, ensure that the standard mode of employment for teachers is permanent.

Increase school retention rates through provision of enhanced student welfare and support services and 'school to work' transition programs.

Increase funding to the TAFE system with special emphasis on TAFE centres in regional Victoria.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Key commitments included:

Quarantine community services from Compulsory Competitive Tendering.

Increase funding support to neighbourhood houses.

Establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Child, Youth and Family services.

Discontinue the privatisation of Youth Detention centres.

Over time, allocate additional funds from the Community Support Fund to support pre schools.

Allocate 5% of public housing to people with disabilities.

Develop a Charter of Rights for disabled people.



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?

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COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



HEALTH

Key commitments included:

Major capital projects involving the construction of several new hospitals and the rebuilding or upgrading of many others. ☐

Increased expenditure on dental health care across Victoria so as to reduce waiting lists for dental treatment and the fitting of dentures. ☐

Expand ambulance services in metropolitan and regional areas. This would come about through replacement of old vehicles, the purchase of additional new ambulances and the recruitment and training of additional ambulance staff. More funding was also promised for air ambulance services. ☐



TRANSPORT

Key commitments included:

Commission an independent audit of the major transport contracts. ☐

Use the independent audit as a basis for determining what contractual information should be released to the public. ☐

Develop and implement Customer Service Guarantees. ☐

Introduce fast rail services linking Melbourne with major regional centres. ☐

Review country rail closures. ☐

Allocate \$120 million for the upgrading of the Geelong Highway. ☐

Extend and upgrade selected rail and tram routes. ☐

Give no further approval to the use of toll roads. ☐

Improve the network of bicycle paths around Melbourne. ☐

Reinstate 100 staff on stations and 100 conductors on trams. ☐

Spend TAC funds on improvements to or elimination of a number of accident black spots as well as improving other safety aspects to the transport network. ☐

Once you have an account of these policies you can:

- ▶ **Ask your local MPs (Lower and Upper House) for an update on the implementation of current government policies on service provision as well as the policies of other political parties. Remember if an MP is unenthusiastic about supplying policy material from an opposing party, contact the head office of the particular party for a copy of the relevant policy.**



- Keep in touch with organisations that can be expected to follow closely the State government's delivery of policy commitments on services. In this instance, you can start with

VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

Tel. 03 9654 5050 Fax. 03 9654 5749
Level 6, 130 Collins Street, Victoria 3000
www.vcross.org.au

THE VICTORIAN HEALTH ISSUES CENTRE

Tel. 03 9614 0500 Fax. 03 9614 0511
Level 11, 300 Flinders Street, Victoria 3000
www.vicnet.net.au/~hissues

PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS' ASSOCIATION

Tel. 03 9650 7898 Fax. 03 9650 3689
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, Victoria 3000
www.vicnet.net.au/~ptua

DISCLOSURE

It took a three-year battle by the Coburg-Brunswick Legal Centre using freedom of information legislation to force the previous State government to release contract details regarding Victoria's private prisons.

It is inherent in the democratic system that important issues of the nature of prisons and their management be publicly transparent so that there can be the best possible public understanding, awareness, and if need be, debate.

Justice Kellam, in a ruling that prison contracts be released under FOI quoted in The Age, 18 September 1999

As a matter of urgency Victorians need to pursue the issue of public disclosure of all existing contracts and service agreements that cover the private provision of essential services. It is an urgent task because we as are profoundly affected by the contractual obligations of private providers.

We should set a target of the next twelve months to do so.

It is not enough for Ministers and their staff to be privy to contractual obligations. The community's right to know applies because contractors are being paid from the public purse for the provision of services.

While there will be aspects of contract documents about which confidentiality must be honoured and maintained, there must also be a great deal of information to which the public (through some independent representative) should be given access.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



There are two possible levels of action on the issue of disclosure.

- ▶ **Press for full disclosure to an independent office holder.** This person would decide what contractual matters should be disclosed. This might become an expanded role for the Auditor General (or some new officer such as Information Commissioner).

Matters in contracts considered not to need commercial protection could be put onto the public record by the Minister with portfolio responsibility.

- ▶ **You or a small group can become involved right away by starting a letter writing campaign about the need for public disclosure of contractual obligations entered into by government on behalf of Victorian citizens.** Write to the Treasurer and to the Minister for Finance asserting the public right to know about these obligations. Ask them what the new government has established. Ask how the government intends to inform you and the Victorian people about this information.

We now find ourselves in an era for which there is no adequate legislative framework covering public disclosure. There are however models in other countries and there is a need for research to point the way on legislative initiatives to strengthen disclosure provisions.

- ▶ **The next phase of Purple Sage will bring together relevant community agencies to commence work on this matter.**

At the time of writing, some details were already starting to emerge about particular service contracts. No doubt there will be more movement over the next few months. This needs to be monitored and, at different points, we need to be able to do a stocktake.

- ▶ **The next phase of Purple Sage will link with key agencies, such as the Communications Law Centre, to assess progress on contract disclosure and we will publish an update on our findings.**

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is a pressing need the public to be assured by Government that there is active monitoring and evaluation of all private service providers. There is no information available at present.

These providers differ from normal businesses because our taxes pay them to operate, and the way they operate their business creates their profit. The impact on the user or the consumer will be felt, for better or worse, in the actual operation of the service.

Monitoring means we note and record the activity or performance. Evaluation means we reflect on the record and determine whether and how we might change things to bring about further improvement.

At the time of writing, our understanding is that one public servant, the Director of Transport, is responsible for compliance with regard to service agreements for trams, trains, and buses. Is this the best possible arrangement? We need to know what monitoring and evaluation systems exist in other areas such as public health, public housing, ports and roads.

How can we re-establish public goods and how can we understand and publish the real values and the real costs of our community? ■ Purple Sage participants Northcote

LANG LANG – FACILITATING SELF-HELP

Self-help often requires more than motivation. It may need a body with power to help and a willingness to listen. This is what Cardinia Shire did with the Lang Lang community. The revival of Lang Lang is evidence of their partnership.

Three or four years ago Lang Lang was dying. The main street was dirty with vacant and vandalised shops. The town of 900 people had lost 70 jobs in a couple of years. Its industry, railway lines, Melbourne Water, and depots for Telecom and local government disappeared. Then the banks, one closing at only a week's notice, the other going part-time. People were depressed.

In desperation the traders called a meeting to discuss reviving the town, then realised marketing wasn't the answer. It was a community problem. Council helped to get funding from the State Government's Streetlife Program to assist redevelopment. Encouraged by the shire, townspeople held a public meeting and developed a Township Committee. With delegates from every township group, and open meetings, everyone has a say about community priorities.

The Township Committee has been the key to revitalisation. Now Lang Lang reflects growing pride and community spirit. The once-vacant police station is now staffed. There are more businesses in the tidy centre. The new car park includes a half size basketball court. Streetscape work includes garden beds in the main street, adopted by locals who care for 'their' plants. There are regular town clean-up days, a free Christmas festival, Australia Day celebrations, and a citizenship ceremony with a Citizen of the Year award. And now there's the community bank.



A full-time financial institution was needed. Bendigo Bank was approached and the potential banking habits of the community investigated. 330 people attended the public meeting to discuss the proposal. Initial pledges exceeded the amount needed, even though everyone knew their money might be lost. The bank was launched in October 1998 and is already close to breakeven point. They've even launched an agency in nearby Koo-wee-rup in competition with the three major banks which still exist there – and it's doing well! Eventually all profits will be returned to the community, and will be used to further strengthen infrastructure.

Residents say, 'the bank puts us in charge of our own destiny'. But it was the Township Committee in partnership with Cardinia Shire which brought the community bank to a revived Lang Lang.



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?

- ▶ In the next six months, the Purple Sage Project will do a stocktake to establish what actual mechanisms and processes exist to systemically monitor the performance of contractors.
- ▶ Make sure you use the following opportunities: Friends of the Earth (FOE) recently created a website where they are encouraging people to record their experience of the public transport system (www.transportwatch.foe.com.au).
- ▶ Customer Service Hotlines for the companies providing your basic services. These companies usually have their own websites too. Access them and see if there is provision for you to give feedback on their performance.
- ▶ Obtain your own personal copy of all existing codes of practice and charters regarding the provision of basic services, e.g. the Public Transport Charter. Read these carefully. When you experience or hear of others' experience where the service does not match commitments in the code or charter, let the companies know.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Private providers of basic services must be able to respond to issues of community need. This requires structures, processes and resources so that there is strong and effective community input.

In a democracy, government has a direct responsibility to ensure community representation and involvement in these new service arrangements. A related issue here is the extent to which the private providers contribute to this funding and resourcing. This will require thought and resolution.

- ▶ The next phase of Purple Sage will map and publish by July 2000 the community representation arrangements that have been put in place by the Victorian government and private owners of services.

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT

Victorian citizens – in their communities and regions – have long been engaged in asset creation. A farming family might have excised some land for a local primary school, which is maintained by the local community for decades, and which becomes a focus for other community activities. The local hospital auxiliary will have worked voluntarily to maintain their hospital's financial viability. Perhaps they will have further embedded it as a community institution by organising and catering for local festivities, such as fetes; they will have raised funds for new equipment. Now they find the hospital and its equipment sold to a private for-profit operator who claims the physical benefits of all this hard work.

These examples tell us something very important about the way we conduct ourselves as members of a civil society. These layers of individual and community effort are investments that create community assets, both tangible and intangible. They are pivotal to the way we develop social cohesion. They have cultural, historical and social meaning for people and they serve the common good. Their worth extends far beyond their physical and material value.

This important community dynamic has not been properly understood or respected in government restructuring of service delivery across Victoria. People are voicing a deep sense of loss, grief and helplessness about the dismantling of these



Exhaustion from continual battles to save community assets is taking its toll on small rural communities.

■ Purple Sage participants Yarram

PRACTICAL RECONCILIATION BUILDING ACROSS CULTURES

Reconciliation is about people, not governments or grand gestures. About building bridges, not division. About cross-cultural community building. Most of all, about understanding.

In 1997-98 a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women got together at the Gurwidj Aboriginal Neighbourhood House in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote. They wanted to raise community awareness about reconciliation, and help everyone better understand the issues. They decided to spread their message by making and selling environmentally friendly calico shopping bags, screen printed with a motif and message about reconciliation. They planned for sales to become profitable and self-sustaining.

During the program the women learned and practiced new skills in design, sewing, marketing and screen printing. Along the way there was plenty of time for women from various cultural and racial backgrounds to discuss their experiences, and develop new and deeper understandings of each other's lives. The Aboriginal women related their own stories and what had happened to their families – frequent overt racism, children taken away ... They talked about what reconciliation means for them, and how they would like things to change. 'Stories were told with grace, generosity and irony – we wept and we laughed together.'

The bags were so popular that the first print run sold out, raising hundreds of dollars for further programs. They had to make more to keep up with the obvious demand.



More local people have become aware of reconciliation issues. They know more about Gurwidj too, and recognise the talents of the women involved. Now the City of Darebin is supporting the production of a book of oral histories of the Aboriginal women involved, so the reconciliation message will go even further.



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



community assets. The restructured service models (including compulsory competitive tendering) reflect starkly opposing values, notably the shift from co-operation and growth of the public good to competition and for profit ownership of assets.

Recent history in Victoria provides vivid examples of small groups of people being able to restore essential financial services in a way that brings communities together in partnership with the private sector. Through such ventures as co-operatives and community banks they have successfully consolidated local financial assets and created a service responsive to community needs. In many cases the new service outshines that which was taken from the community and has the added benefit of providing for long term community reinvestment:

You can be part of kick-starting processes like this. It only takes a handful of people to trigger a conversation about what's missing from their community, what's needed, and what they are prepared to support.

Community reinvestment legislation

There are countries with some instructive legislative experience regarding community reinvestment and local economic development. For example, in the USA, the Community Reinvestment Act requires banks to affirmatively seek out lending opportunities in the local communities they serve. Instead of siphoning money out of communities, there is encouragement and regulation to put money back in.

Many of Victoria's public assets are now owned by private companies. As we have shown in earlier sections, people attach a great sense of loss to this asset transfer. There is strong case to be made that the decades of asset building by people

around the State have not been adequately recognised and rewarded.

- In the next phase of Purple Sage we will research and develop a model of community reinvestment legislation that spells out the responsibility of government in service provision; and a potential requirement that certain corporations direct a percentage of their net profits to support economic and social development in local and regional communities.

Co-operatives and new partnership models

Many countries have well developed patterns of co-operative action. In the Victorian experience, co-operatives have come in all shapes and sizes! There are housing co-operatives, food co-operatives, land held in common, goods and income sharing co-operatives, marketing co-operatives. There has been a renewal of interest in this kind of business arrangements as a way of revitalising smaller communities. A recent example is a co-operative of smaller supermarkets who use loyalty cards and community benefit cards.

The emergence of community banking is an instance of a new partnership model between local communities and business – working together to achieve shared goals, to restore a level of financial service, to keep wealth in their own regions and use the proceeds to address local needs.

- Find out more about the different types of co-operative endeavour. Start with a copy of *The Co-operatives Act (1996)*. Contact a community organisation such as the Co-operative Federation of Victoria or Common Ground at Seymour and ask for information about different co-operative models.

There is not enough valuing of localised communities and friendships/networks.

■ Purple Sage participants Yarraville

PATIENCE AND COOPERATION

– FIRST NATIONS CREDIT UNION

In May 1999 the Aboriginal community celebrated the launch in Shepparton of its own financial institution. Paul Briggs, Chairperson of First Nations Advantage Credit Union, announced that culturally appropriate financial services would now be available to indigenous people right across Australia, and would improve their financial understanding, well being and independence.

The excitement of the launch obscured eleven years of backbreaking and patient preparation by Aboriginal leaders. Paul Briggs headed Rumbalara Co-operative in Shepparton in the late 1980s, and thoroughly understood the need for a better economic base for indigenous people. He investigated and became involved in the credit union movement. ATSIC state and national conferences between 1991-1995 agreed that indigenous communities needed economic infrastructure rather than welfare, and key people investigated possible options. Further wide-ranging consultation showed that Aboriginal people wanted their own financial institution. In April 1996 a committee was set up to develop a credit union.

Then in October 1996 a chance encounter at a national meeting of credit unions produced the relationship with Advantage Credit Union. Initially First Nations is being incubated by Advantage, but when key benchmarks are achieved it will become completely independent. In the meantime Advantage is mentoring First Nations staff and directors, providing management advice and training, and giving full access to its total infrastructure.

First Nations wants to change the economic future of Aboriginal people and organisations. They are committed to employing and training indigenous people to be staff and directors – although anyone else can join as an ordinary member. Because credit unions don't have to make profits for external shareholders, Aboriginal organisations should also benefit if they invest in First Nations rather than in banks. Thousands of dollars per annum could be saved in bank charges – extra money which would be available for services for indigenous people.

First Nations has been born out of consultation and co-operation – not competition. Networking and strong alliances have been crucial. Serendipity has played its part, but only because key players were able to take advantage of it. Tenacious individuals, determined groups, and committed communities have all been essential midwives to the birth. And it proves that sometimes communities have to be in for the long haul if they are to achieve their goals!



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: ON WHOSE TERMS?



- ▶ Ask someone to visit and speak at a local meeting about a successful co-operative venture.
- ▶ Contact the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs and inquire about the level and type of assistance your group can draw on in setting up a co-operative venture.
- ▶ Find out about the new banking partnership models now being established in different places in Victoria. Talk to the people who took the first steps.

Superannuation

The establishment of national superannuation funds are a relatively recent development in Australia. In Victoria alone, there are some 1.8 million people who now contribute a total of \$ 2.55 billion to superannuation funds annually.

The level of information and public discussion about where these funds are being invested is very low. There is virtually no discussion about the scope of opportunities including ethical and local/regional development investments:

- ▶ As a super contributor, you can get the annual report of your superannuation fund and see where contributions are being invested. If this information is insufficient, then write to them for more details of their investment strategy. It's your money they're investing!
- ▶ Write to your super fund and ask them to consider new directions for your investments that incorporate sustainable regional development programs.
- ▶ Start to create a picture of superannuation investments by collecting this information from your own friends and other

sources. Take the information into the public realm to enact a change in investment practices to benefit community rebuilding.

- ▶ The next phase of Purple Sage will include a dialogue with key regulators and superannuation providers to explore and broaden the scope for responsible investment
- ▶ The next phase of Purple Sage will also start a consultation with key players in the superannuation industry to identify where money is being invested. We will build an investigative partnership with other organisations about the nature and location of superannuation investment. We will research opportunities for ethical investment of super money to enhance sustainable community development.

Sustainability

It is timely to become knowledgeable about the broad social context of sustainability and common good assets:

- ▶ Learn to recognise, evaluate and develop these, engaging other people, and your local MPs, in discussing the means by which these can be secured against future loss.
- ▶ Access the Internet and visit the following websites on sustainability:

<http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu./CommunitySuccess/indicator1-1.html>

<http://www.sustainable.org/creating/indicators.html>

<http://www.undp.org/popin/wdtrends/bssgoal.html>

Money is being spent on city projects – money is not being generated within rural communities.

■ Purple Sage participants Clifton Creek

THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

PLUGGING THE LEAKS IN QUAMBATOOK

Quambatook is typical of many small Victorian country towns. It has been battered by continuing poor seasons, loss of services and infrastructure, and its population has dropped. People didn't know what to do about it.

Experience in other places shows that once a community understands the factors underlying their local economy, they are in a much better position to find successful solutions. In August 1999 a regional coalition organised a workshop to carry out a community audit at Quambatook to find out what was going on.

At the workshop Quambatook people were invited to think of their community and its wealth in two ways – as a cake and as a barrel.

The cake has three layers which must all be healthy and in balance if the community is to survive. The bottom (and most vital) layer is the natural ecology, without which there IS no wealth. The middle layer was described as social capital, or what people voluntarily do for their community. The top layer is financial capital, which can only grow with good social capital and a sound ecology. The icing on the cake is government spending. All too often the only part to get any attention is the financial layer – often to the detriment of the other tiers – but this can often lead to instability.

The analysis helped demonstrate whether Quambatook was going forwards or backwards in each of these areas, and just what the balance really was. They used Census and other statistics to analyse the economic and social make-up of

Quambatook. Measuring the natural ecology was more complex, but was a crucial part of the exercise.

The other analogy compared the town's economy to a barrel. Money and resources pour in at the top, circulate for a while, then eventually flow out the bottom. The workshop looked at ways of increasing what comes in, making it circulate for longer, and plugging damaging leaks.

As a result of the workshop Quambatook people were able to identify the gaps in their audit as well as areas for potential growth. They now have the tools to REALISTICALLY plan for the future.

A resource manual is being produced from the workshop, which will enable other communities to carry out their own auditing exercise.



LINKING COMMUNITIES

A recurring theme in the Purple Sage dialogue concerned people's desire to know about other communities' successes. There is strength in shared information, with people being alerted to new ideas, different ways of doing things, and forming strategic alliances across geographic and other boundaries.

We know there's no single definition of community and we know there's a vast literature that explores the concept. The starting point we have adopted in the Purple Sage Project is that people do have common interests; they like to belong; they like being connected to others; and that collective effort usually results in better outcomes. This is our sense of community.

- ▶ **Join a community organisation that suits your interests and values. There may be one you've been meaning to join for a long time.**

The potential of information technology to enhance our communities is great. We can use it to our advantage. It is up to all of us in our own ways to make useful links and connections and explore the technology available to assist with this endeavour.

- ▶ **If you aren't familiar yet with using this information technology, or you feel a bit skeptical or fearful of it, visit to a local library or neighbourhood house. Most libraries and many neighbourhood houses provide free access to the Internet and basic instruction for beginners. Discuss your attempts with family and friends. Share your knowledge of the technology and follow people's tips about worthwhile Internet sites to have a look at.**
- ▶ **You may already be a regular user of the Internet. Join an Internet discussion group as active member. Access websites around the world that have stories to tell of innovative ideas**

about models of community building. Put your own ideas and models on to these sites.

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY EFFORT

So often the good news simply doesn't get told. People around the State – whether country or city – display an enormous capacity to take initiatives which strengthen neighbourhoods and communities. Adversity also prompts great achievements.

The recognition of good community service often stops with service organisations, while the tireless, less visible work remains publicly unheralded. This is especially so with carers in our communities. The majority of carers are women, they don't receive public recognition, but their efforts have huge significance for the way we as a society look after those who are vulnerable.

It is important that we look for ways to affirm and celebrate the community service rendered by people throughout Victoria:

- ▶ **You and a handful of others could design a simple and effective acknowledgement event in your local community. When the township of Moe was reeling from the negative media coverage accompanying the disappearance and death of a toddler, the people of Moe had such an event. They stood, 5000 of them, around their township, arms linked, as an act of community solidarity.**
- ▶ **Ask your local council to consider, if it's not already doing so, staging an annual 'Thank the Carers Day' as a way of acknowledging and thanking people for their important contribution to the broader community. It could be scheduled in the community event calendar.**
- ▶ **Make sure that these messages and images get out to other communities. You could use talkback radio as a means of spreading good ideas and examples. Make sure your local media know about it. Tell your local MPs as well.**



LOCAL ACTION COUNTS

During the Purple Sage dialogue, people at times expressed a despair that issues were too big to do anything of meaning. Yes, issues can be big and complex. But imagine what things would be like if we conceded we could never do anything ourselves to make a difference!



There have been a number of huge issues running through the Purple Sage dialogue – widening inequality, an erosion of our democratic culture, changes to important services including education, health and transport, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, unemployment and job security and environmental degradation.

We have tried throughout this public document to indicate many ideas and strategies that can generate new or renewed civic engagement. It is fitting that this last section emphasises once more that local action counts and that individuals and small groups can trigger change and improvement. Take these final examples:

- Find out from your school council if there is an existing policy on consulting with parents. If there isn't, ask the council to

draw one up, outlining the basic steps the school must take prior to any decision-making affecting the school.

- Find out from the school council if there is an existing policy regarding commercial sponsorship. If there is one, ask the council to initiate a forum for parents to discuss it for its relevance and adequacy. If there isn't one, press for the development of such a policy.
- The local newspaper might carry a story about funding cuts to a local disability group. You might be recently retired and interested in new activity. Ring up the group and see if there is a way you can assist – by helping to campaign, by helping to write submissions for other funding, by volunteering a particular amount of time.
- The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation released a draft document for public discussion in the latter half of 1999. One Purple Sage group in country Victoria has already determined that it will continue to meet and that one of its priorities is to read and discuss the Draft Document for Reconciliation. Follow their lead.
- When the final proposals for a Document for Reconciliation are launched in May 2000, get a group of friends and acquaintances to meet and discuss how you can advance the cause of reconciliation in your local school, local area or region.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead
US anthropologist 1901–1978



Purple Sage Project

MANAGEMENT GROUP

Ben Bodna	Co-Chair, People Together Project
Bishop Michael Challen (July 98 - Aug 99)	Executive Director, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Alison McClelland (Sept 99 - Nov 99)	Director Social Action and Research, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Wayne Chamley	Member, Victoria Foundation
Mary Crooks (<i>Project Director</i>)	Executive Director, Victorian Women's Trust
Dur-e Dara	Convenor, Victorian Women's Trust
Pat Milthorpe	Committee Member, Victorian Local Governance Association
Jenni Mitchell	GirlStorey Manager, YWCA Victoria
Trudy Wyse	Manager Community Development, The Stegley Foundation

PROJECT CO-ORDINATION

Trish Pinto	Project Officer, Victorian Women's Trust
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PROJECT STAFF

Lerna Avakian	Office administration Communications Management of data base
Klara Blazevic	Statewide liaison with Group Leaders Co-ordination of consultation with Aboriginal organisations and communities Synthesis of stage 1 and 2 dialogue and think tank sessions Assistance in drafting
Nicky Friedman	Research Synthesis of stage 1 and 2 dialogue and think tank sessions Assistance in drafting Technical preparation of public document
Anna Lottkowitz	Statewide liaison with Group Leaders Regional and rural research and consultation Synthesis of stage 1 and 2 dialogue and think tank sessions Assistance in drafting
Liz McAloon	Statewide liaison with Group Leaders Regional and rural consultation Synthesis of stage 1 and 2 dialogue and think tank sessions Assistance in drafting
Lynn Muller (to January 1999)	Statewide liaison with Group Leaders

ADDITIONAL PROJECT SUPPORT

Beryl Evans	Facilitation role at think tank sessions Assistance with dialogue synthesis and drafting
Jacinda Forster	Research assistance at initial design stage
Margaret James	Research and writing of case study material Assistance in drafting workshops
Kate Kantor	Co-ordination of think tank sessions

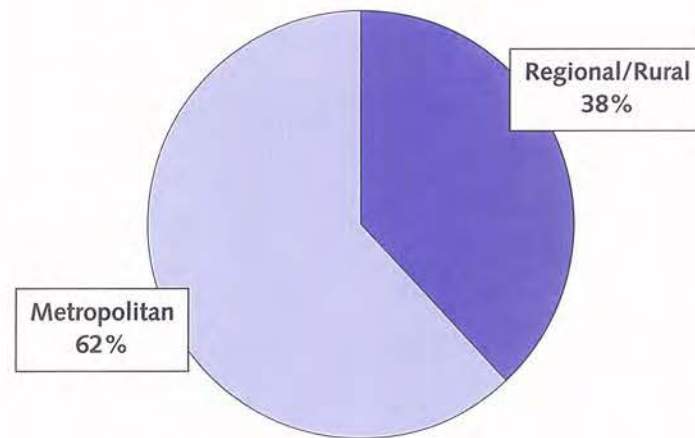


APPENDIX THREE

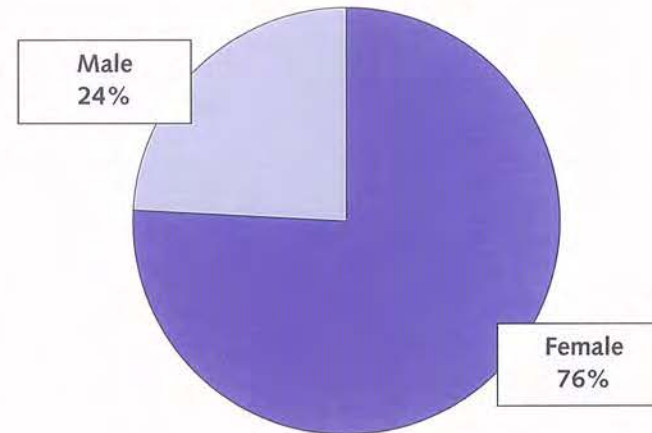
Huntly	Leongatha	Mt Eliza	Port Melbourne	St Kilda East	Via Wodonga
Huon	Lilydale	Mt Evelyn	Portland	Stawell	Violet Town
Hurstbridge	Lismore	Mt Franklin	Prahran	Stawell	Wangaratta
Indented Head	Little River	Mt Martha	Preston	Stony Creek	Wangaratta North
Inverleigh	Lower Plenty	Mulgrave	Queenscliff	Stratford	Wantirna
Inverloch	Lysterfield	Murrindindi	Raywood	Strathcona	Warburton
Invermay	Macleod	Murtoa	Red Hill	Sunbury	Warragul
Ivanhoe	Maidstone	Murungi	Reservoir	Sunshine	Warrandyte
Jan Juc	Main Ridge	Myrtleford	Ringwood	Surrey Hills	Warrandyte South
Johnsonville	Maldon	Narrawong	Rob Roy	Sutton Grange	Warrnambool
Johnstones Hill	Malvern	Narre Warren	Rosebud West	Swan Hill	Watsonia
Kallista	Mansfield	Newport	Rowville	Swan Reach	Wattle Glen
Kaniva	Maribyrnong	Newstead	Rye	Sydenham	Waurin Ponds
Kanumbra	Maryborough	Newtown	Sale	Tallangatta	Wedderburn
Keilor	McCrae	Noble Park	Sandringham	Tambo Upper	Wendouree
Keilor East	Melbourne	North Melbourne	Sandy Point	Tarwin East	Werribee
Kenmare	Melbourne Airport	Northcote	Scoresby	Taylors Lakes	West Melbourne
Kew	Melton	Numurkah	Seacombe	Templestowe	Whittlesea
Kew East	Mentone	Nunawading	Seaford	Templestowe Lower	Whorouly South
Keysborough	Merricks	Nyah West	Sebastopol	Terang	Willaura
Kilsyth	Metung	Oaklands Junction	Selby	The Gurdies	Williamstown
Kingsville	Mill Park	Oakleigh	Seville	The Patch	Winchelsea
Knoxfield	Mitcham	Oakleigh South	Shelford	Thomastown	Wodonga
Koroit	Moe	Ocean Grove	Shepparton	Thornbury	Wonthaggi
Korumburra	Monbulk	Olinda	Sherbrooke	Timboon	Woodend
Kyabram	Montmorency	Pakenham	Somers	Tooradin	Woodford
Kyneton South	Montrose	Parkville	Somerton	Toorak	Woorarra
Lake Boga	Moonee Ponds	Pascoe Vale	Sorrento	Torquay	Yambuna
Lakes Entrance	Moorabbin	Patterson Lakes	South Melbourne	Traralgon	Yarra Junction
Lalor	Mooroopna	Paynesville	South Yarra	Tullamarine	Yarram
Langwarrin	Mornington	Pearcedale	Southbank	Tyabb	Yarrambat
Lara	Morwell	Plenty	St Albans	Upwey	Yarraville
Laverton	Mount Waverley	Point Lonsdale	St Andrews	Venus Bay	Yarrawalla
Laverton North	Mt Best	Port Fairy	St Kilda	Vermont	



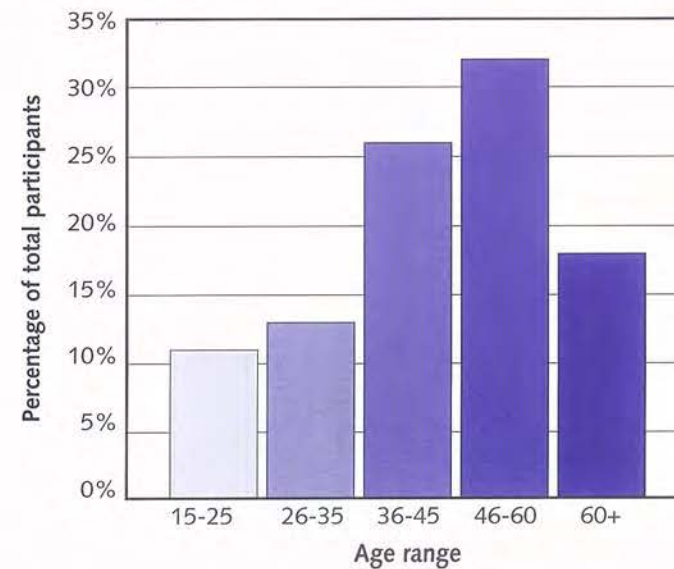
**Distribution of group leaders
across Victoria**



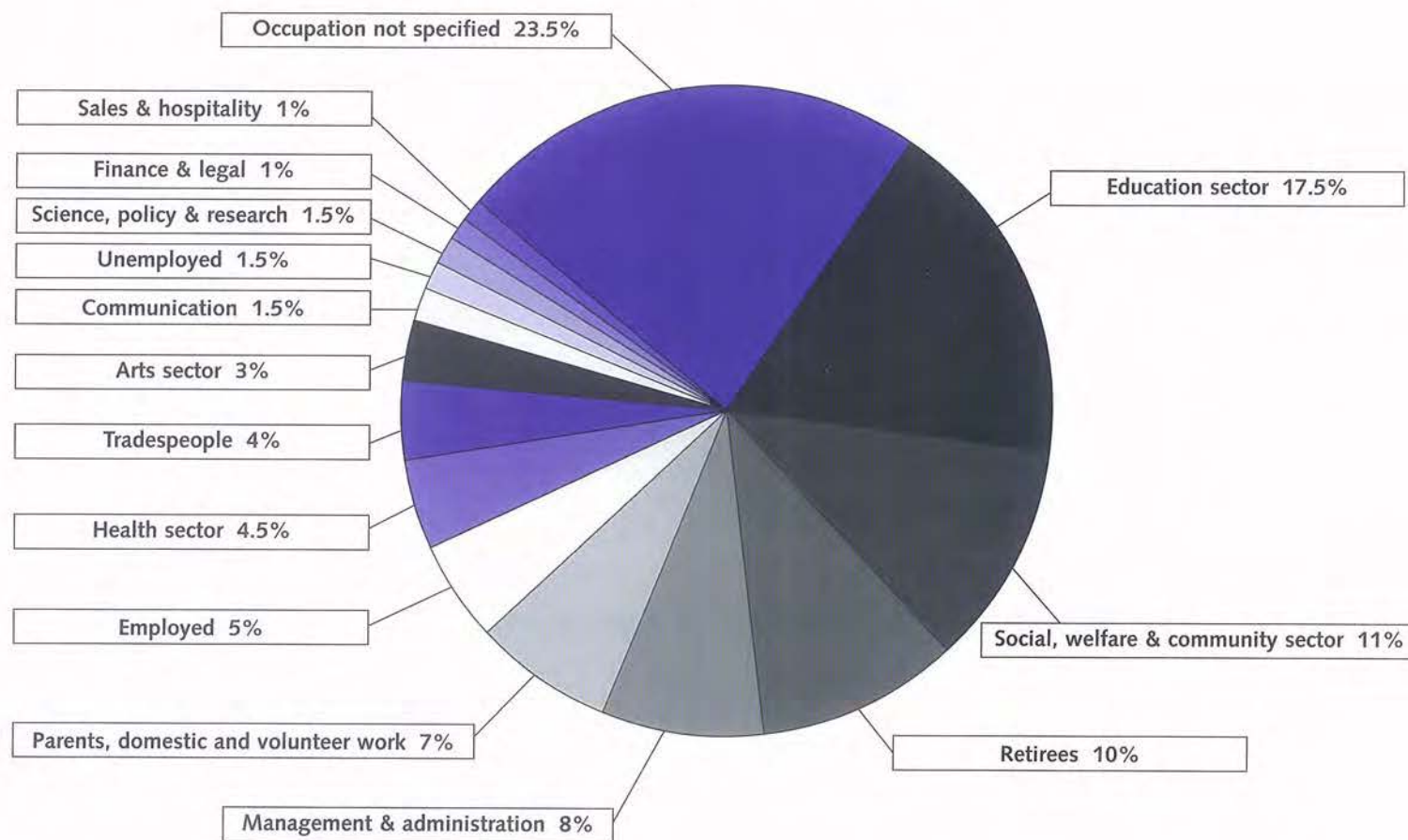
Gender of participants



Age range of Purple Sage participants



Occupations of group leaders



EDUCATION SECTOR includes academics, students (secondary and tertiary level), teachers

HEALTH SECTOR includes nurses, therapists, psychologists, counsellors

EMPLOYED including those who are self employed, part time, casual and full time workers

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION including human resources, clerks, consultants, managers, co-ordinators and local government councillors

PARENTS, DOMESTICS AND VOLUNTEERS including those in the childcare industry

ARTS AND HUMANITIES includes writers, librarians, architects, artists

SOCIAL, WELFARE AND COMMUNITY SECTOR including carers, social workers, youth services, disability workers

TRADESPEOPLE including security guards, postal workers, horticulturalists, construction workers and farmers

COMMUNICATIONS including computer programmers, marketers, advertisers



Non-English speaking participants

Languages listed as the main dialect spoken at home

Albanian	Maltese
Arabic	Mandarin
Bengali	Pashto
Cambodian	Polish
Cantonese	Portugese
Croatian	Punjab
Dutch	Russian
Ethiopian	Scottish
Filipino	Serbian
French	Shona
German	Somali
Greek	Spanish
Hararian	Tagalog
Hellenic	Tagra
Hungarian	Tigrea
Indonesian	Turkish
Italian	Vietnamese
Laotian	Yugoslav
Macedonian	Zulu
Malay	



STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Interview kit for candidates standing for the September 1999 Victorian State election

Produced by the Purple Sage Project

AUGUST 1999
VICTORIA



All citizens in a democracy have the right to a working knowledge of the social and community values of prospective candidates for public office.

This kit has been prepared through the Purple Sage Project for people in their local areas who wish to obtain detailed information from prospective candidates standing in the State election.

The kit is designed to assist you in questioning your local candidates to determine how each one's views and priorities accord with the values and issues expressed throughout the Purple Sage Project; and to obtain from candidates some commitments on these issues.

WHAT IS IN THE KIT?

1. A list of key steps that can be taken to ensure that candidates respond to the enclosed list of questions
2. A set of prepared questions for each candidate
3. A draft covering letter to accompany the survey form
4. A draft letter which can be used as the basis for communicating the results of your survey of the candidates, to local media in particular
5. Legal requirements

BASIC STEPS

1. Get a small group together

There's security in numbers! As soon as you receive this kit, get a small group together (at least three people). Make contact with several people you know (from your existing Purple Sage group or otherwise) and discuss the idea and process with them.

2. Arrange the interview meetings

Contact each candidate in your electorate and arrange a time at which you and the others can meet with him/her to ask your questions and record their responses. Get in touch with the Victorian Electoral Commission (13 25 57) if you need help with the contact details of candidates.

If a candidate is not co-operative, don't hesitate to point out that you have a democratic right to meet the candidate and to find out the candidate's views.

If a candidate does not respond, you need to increase the pressure with phone calls to the campaign office.

Don't be fobbed off by campaign staff.

Ideally, you should aim to drop the list of questions off to the candidates prior to the meetings with them. If this is not possible, provide them with a copy at the meeting itself. Be consistent however – the same procedure needs to apply to all candidates.

3. Conducting the meeting

It is suggested that at least 2 people go to meet the candidates, one to ask the questions and one to faithfully record the responses at the meeting. The second person can also make sure that the discussion stays on track and that the candidate answers the question asked rather than changing the subject.

You can roster these meetings and reduce the load on any one person.



APPENDIX FOUR

4. Reporting

Your group needs to decide on the strategy for making known publicly the views of each candidate on the areas covered. If any candidate is unwilling to participate in this process, it is also important for the voting public to know.






Give local media a copy of the questions for candidates and be prepared to give them more background about each issue. You may have to convince them about the importance of the survey of candidates. You can let them know that your group is gathering news that is very important for local voters and saving them a lot of work.

When candidates respond, be sure to contact them and thank them for their cooperation.

When it becomes obvious that one or some candidates are not going to comply, then you go to the media with what you have, and you highlight the details about who has and has not responded.

If you want to go a step further and prepare a survey report for broader use, feel free to contact the Purple Sage Office if you feel you need any further practical advice.

SO WE CAN MONITOR COVERAGE AROUND THE STATE PLEASE LET US KNOW AT THE PURPLE SAGE OFFICE

-  Which candidates you contacted
-  Which candidates you left the survey with
-  Which candidates you interviewed
-  Which candidates responded
-  Which candidates did not respond

(This information can be faxed, e-mailed or telephoned into the office.)

KEY QUESTIONS

1. THE PRIVATISATION OF WATER

During the past eight years, Victorians have seen a number of large and publicly owned assets broken up and sold to the private sector. Such assets include:

- ▶ The former State Electricity Commission of Victoria
- ▶ The former Victorian Gas and Fuel Corporation
- ▶ Public transport services

Water is the only utility that has not yet been privatised. We need to know candidates' position with respect to the possible transfer of water into privatised water services businesses.

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

Would you support, or oppose, the sale of Victoria's urban and/or rural water assets to the private sector?

Support ☐

Oppose ☐

Additional comments:



2. DEMOCRATIC REPORTING

One indicator of our democratic health lies in the ways our elected representatives report back and account to their constituency.

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

If elected, will you commit to arranging open meetings with your constituency on a monthly basis throughout your period of representation to discuss community concerns and report back on issues raised?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. PUBLIC EDUCATION

During the past eight years, there have been significant changes made to public education in Victoria.

- ▶ class sizes have increased
- ▶ a significant number of schools have been closed
- ▶ numbers of career teachers have been reduced and most new teachers are on short-term contracts

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

If elected, how will you undertake to:

Lower class sizes in the State schools in your electorate?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Address the issue of short term teacher contracts?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Promote the importance and value of state education?

Yes ☐ No ☐

4. UNEMPLOYMENT IN VICTORIA

There is widespread community concern about the unacceptably high levels of unemployment in Victoria, and especially youth unemployment rates.

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

If elected, what are at least 2 actions you will take as the local member to address unemployment, and youth unemployment, within your electorate?

1.

2.



APPENDIX FOUR

5. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The Purple Sage Project has identified widespread concern about the need to strengthen Victorian communities. This is a reflection of the fact that in many parts of the State people have been experiencing:

- ▶ sustained economic hardship.
- ▶ cutbacks in government services.
- ▶ social dislocation arising from unemployment and the casualisation of a large part of the current workforce.
- ▶ the loss of community assets, including bank closures, train services, school closures, public hospitals
- ▶ the removal of many government jobs from rural locations.

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

If elected, what would be your two major initiatives, as the local Member of Parliament, to improve regional and local economic and social development?

1.

2.

6. THE GAMBLING EXPLOSION

The recent discussion paper from the Productivity Commission has examined in detail the social and economic impact of an expanded gaming industry. It produced some disturbing findings:

- ▶ Australia has 21% of the world's electronic gaming machines
- ▶ There is an estimated 330 000 problem gamblers who lost an average of \$12 000 a year; and a further 140 000 were considered to have severe problems;
- ▶ Problem gamblers spread their misery to between 5 and 10 other people, meaning the lives of between 1.5 and 3.3 million Australians were impacted by gambling troubles;
- ▶ Young people were significantly more highly represented, and in a decade, women had gone from not making a significant percentage of problem gamblers to being 50% of problem gamblers;
- ▶ There is a geographic concentration of poker machines in lower income areas of Victoria. The relationship between income and density of machines is minimal in New South Wales and of no relationship in Queensland.

QUESTION FOR THE CANDIDATE

If elected, what are two actions that you will take to reduce the negative impacts which expanded gaming is having on people and businesses in your electorate?

1.

2.



Dear Candidate,

We are contacting all candidates who are standing for election in the electorate of

We are writing to you following our participation in the Purple Sage Project which has been carried out in Victoria over the past 14 months. Through an extensive community dialogue process, this project has enabled and encouraged thousands of women and men in Victoria to record their current experiences and their hopes and aspirations about the type of society of which they wish to be a part, in Victoria.

Recognising that you have decided to present yourself to, and seek the support of, the voters of....., we want to get a clearer idea about where you stand on some particular issues that were identified in the Purple Sage Project.

We have enclosed with this letter a list of questions and we are asking you to complete these and return them so we may communicate the results more widely throughout the electorate.

We thank you for your cooperation,

Yours sincerely,



Dear Editor (Radio Producer),

I am one of a small group of voters that have been canvassing the opinions of all candidates who are presenting themselves for election in the electorate of This independent survey of the candidates, on a number of key issues, is now complete and we are making the results available to you since we believe that these would be of interest to your readers (listeners).

We have enclosed with the survey results a copy of the questions that were asked of candidates. We are available to speak with you and give you more background to the questions if this is required. We can be contacted on

Yours sincerely,

Legal requirements

Section 267A of the *Constitution Act – Amendment Act 1956*, requires that a person printing, publishing or distributing **electoral matter** must include at the bottom of the document the name and address of the person authorising the statement (eg. "Authorised by Jane Smith, 101 Citizen Street, Newtown") as well as the name and business address of the printer. This authorisation is not required if you are simply making the survey results available to the media but if you intend to do more, such as a letterbox drop of a leaflet which summarises the results, or hand out a leaflet on polling day then it is necessary to comply with this condition.



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APPENDIX FIVE

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THE
PURPLE
SAGE
PROJECT

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