



2004–05 **Victorian Budget**
Provincial Overview
Growing Victoria Together

Putting Families First

Message from the Premier



A healthy, prosperous Victoria relies upon healthy, prosperous regions.

Over the past five years, the Government has worked hard to turn around years of neglect in Provincial Victoria, investing in vital services and infrastructure across all Victoria's regions.

Our approach to regional development is proving highly successful and Provincial Victoria is enjoying record levels of investment, strong population growth and record low unemployment.

The Government remains determined to ensure that all Victorians – wherever they live – contribute to and share in the benefits of Victoria's strong economic performance.

The 2004-05 Budget continues to deliver substantial investment to Victoria's regions, meeting the Government's commitment to grow the whole of Victoria and ensuring rural and regional communities, businesses and industries have the support they need to attract investment, jobs and people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Bracks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

STEVE BRACKS
Premier

Message from the Treasurer and Minister for State and Regional Development



Provincial Victoria is entering an exciting new era. The Bracks Government's unprecedented level of investment in regional areas is opening up new opportunities and generating a new spirit of optimism in Provincial Victoria's cities, towns and communities.

Across the State, there are many great success stories: regional businesses that are making global connections and expanding into new export markets; regional industries that are becoming more innovative and developing new processes and products; and regional communities that are re-inventing themselves after years of decline.

The Bracks Government shares with the people of Provincial Victoria a clear vision of a dynamic future, where regions have the confidence and capacity to create their own opportunities and where thriving regional communities are among the best places in the world to live, work and invest.

The initiatives contained in the 2004-05 Budget provide further support and investment to realise that vision.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Brumby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JOHN BRUMBY
Treasurer and Minister for State and
Regional Development

A Snapshot of Provincial Victoria

- Provincial Victoria's population grew by almost 14 000 in the year to June 2003, ending the regional population stagnation of the 1990s.
- Many regional centres are enjoying population growth above the national and Melbourne average.
- Employment growth in Provincial Victoria is now higher than in Melbourne.
- In the year ending March 2004, the unemployment rate in regional Victoria averaged 5.6 per cent – compared to 8.0 per cent in the year to October 1999.
- New investment worth \$3.26 billion has been attracted to Provincial Victoria and 7 400 new jobs have been created.
- Building approvals in regional areas reached over \$3 billion in the year to January 2004 – the highest level on record.



Delivering for Provincial Victoria

2004-05 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Putting families first

Families across Provincial Victoria will benefit from the statewide introduction of a major package of benefits, including:

- a *Caring for Children* initiative that boosts children's health and dental services, and protects and cares for vulnerable children (\$177 million over four years and \$20 million total estimated investment, TEI);
- 100 extra GPs in community health services to improve access to bulk-billed medical services (\$8 million over four years);
- introduction of *First Home Bonus*, an additional \$5 000 grant for first home buyers across Victoria for properties up to \$500 000 (\$128 million in 2004-05);
- additional support for the families of children or family members with a disability (\$27 million over four years);
- a boost for affordable housing across the State (\$50 million in 2004-05); and
- higher levels of support for families on low incomes as part of a major reform of State Government concessions, including:
 - an increase in the education maintenance allowance (EMA) from \$127 to \$200 for primary students and from \$254 to \$400 for secondary students;

- the extension of public transport concessions to all Victorian health care cardholders;
- an increase in the local government rates concession; and
- the annual indexation of concessions to ensure the real value of benefits is maintained.

Investing in education

Education remains the Bracks Government's top priority. The Government is investing heavily to meet its goal of increasing the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria, and to ensure all Victorians have access to excellence in education. Key budget initiatives include:

- retraining 150 teachers in rural and regional areas in subjects where it is difficult to fill staff vacancies (\$2.5 million over three years);
- building a new school at Wallan, replacing the Barwon Valley School in Geelong and the Warragul and District Specialist School, and rebuilding the fire-damaged Cowes Primary School (\$15 million TEI); and
- upgrading and modernising 23 schools in regional areas (\$53 million TEI).

Rural and regional schools will also benefit from statewide initiatives in education:

- 250 extra teachers in government schools across the State (\$62 million over four years);
- increasing bandwidth in Victorian government schools, (\$12 million over four years and \$4 million TEI);
- new specialist facilities at secondary schools for programs in science and technology, arts, design, music, languages and sport (\$30 million TEI);
- building 600 modern relocatable classrooms (\$50 million TEI);
- additional maintenance in government schools (\$60 million over two years);
- a new Community Facilities Fund to build facilities that can be shared by schools and community groups (\$30 million TEI); and
- upgrading of TAFE teaching equipment (\$12 million TEI).

Delivering high quality and accessible health services

The Bracks Government continues to rebuild Victoria's health system, improving the quality of regional hospitals and health services, and upgrading aged care facilities across the State. Key initiatives include:

- building a new cancer treatment centre at Latrobe Regional Hospital in Traralgon (\$11 million TEI) and providing 14 extra beds for the Latrobe Valley Community Mental Health Centre (\$8 million TEI);
- expanding radiotherapy services at Geelong Hospital (\$18 million TEI) and continuing the major redevelopment of the Grace McKellar Centre in Geelong (\$50 million TEI);
- upgrading accident and emergency services at Maryborough Hospital (\$9.5 million TEI);
- redeveloping acute care facilities in Echuca (\$7.7 million TEI);
- building a new dental facility at Goulburn Valley Health and expanding dental services at the Rumbalara Aboriginal cooperative in Shepparton (\$3 million TEI);
- building a new ambulance station at Ballan, upgrading ambulance stations at Kangaroo Flat and Geelong, establishing five new community emergency response teams (\$3.6 million TEI), and replacing rural ambulances (\$2.5 million TEI);
- building a new 30 bed aged care unit and redeveloping acute care facilities at Yarrawonga (\$10.5 million TEI);
- redeveloping aged care facilities in Colac, including an extra 75 residential aged care beds (\$14 million TEI); and
- establishing a new 30 bed aged care facility at Seymour Hospital (\$5 million TEI).

Delivering for Provincial Victoria



Statewide initiatives that will benefit communities in Provincial Victoria include:

- a boost for services for people with disabilities (\$37 million over four years and \$10 million TEI); and
- implementing the Public Dental Health Program to increase the number of Victorians being treated in the public sector (\$58 million over four years).

Improving community safety

The 2004-05 Budget supports the Government's commitment to maintaining Victoria's position as Australia's safest State, including a \$112 million boost in operational resources for Victoria Police. Key initiatives for Provincial Victoria include:

- planning for new or replacement police stations in Mildura and Torquay and 14 rural towns (as part of the \$20 million TEI police station program); and
- introducing a new single statewide emergency number for the SES (\$0.4 million TEI).

The Government's successful *arrive alive!* road safety strategy resulted in Victoria having its lowest ever road toll in 2003. Rural and regional communities will continue to benefit from the Transport Accident Commission's \$130 million funding for road safety infrastructure.

Growing and linking regional Victoria

Over the past five years, the Government has invested substantial funds in building a world-class, efficient transport system across the State, linking Victoria's regions with each other, Melbourne, and domestic and international markets. Initiatives in the 2004-05 Budget continue this investment, including:

- the Government's financial commitment towards construction of the Geelong Western bypass (\$186 million TEI); and
- funding a new roads package to improve key regional roads, including the duplication of the Bass Highway from the Gurdies to Grantville, upgrading the Mooropna Causeway, and the South Gippsland Highway between Loch and Bena (\$73 million TEI).

Driving jobs and thriving industries across the State

The 2004-05 Budget continues the Bracks Government's commitment to supporting regional business and industry and maximising the capacity of local communities to take up economic and investment opportunities. Key initiatives include:

- delivering substantial land tax cuts to reduce the burden on regional land owners and businesses;
- establishing a new Regional Business Investor Ready program to assist regional businesses and communities attract new investment (\$6 million over three years);
- extra funding for the *Next Generation Food Strategy* to build an innovative, competitive food industry (an additional \$2.3 million over three years);
- introducing a two-year timber salvage program in forest areas affected by the 2003 bushfires (\$10.9 million over two years);
- providing ongoing funding for research and development into brown coal and to assist in the ongoing development of the coal industry (\$9.8 million over seven years);
- continuing with the national program to eradicate red imported fire ants (\$8.4 million over three years); and
- establishing a pilot for a statewide booking system for regional visitor information centres (\$0.3 million in 2004-05).

Regionally-based small businesses will also receive greater access to government services and support through the new Victorian Business Master Key program (\$6 million over three years).

The Government is also providing an additional \$5.7 million in the 2004-05 Budget to extend the successful *Make it Happen in Provincial Victoria* campaign to attract investment, jobs and people to regional areas, and to assist local councils in driving new economic and investment opportunities.

Supporting and strengthening regional communities

The Government continues to invest in strengthening and supporting rural and regional communities. Key budget initiatives include:

- supporting the continuing operation of the Office of Rural Communities (\$10 million over four years); and
- further investment for the Victorian Water Trust to improve water supplies and sewerage treatment in rural towns, upgrade irrigation systems and reduce algal blooms (\$68 million TEI); and

- upgrading public libraries and improving library services in Provincial Victorian communities (\$2 million over four years).

Responding to bushfires and the drought

The devastating impact of bushfires was felt across Victoria in 2003. While Victoria's fire-fighting agencies performed admirably, controlling the fires, saving lives and minimising property damage, more can be done to improve Victoria's performance in bushfire prevention, response and recovery. The 2004-05 Budget provides an additional \$168 million for a major new bushfire package, including:

- recruiting and training an additional 451 seasonal fire-fighters across the State (\$74 million over four years);
- a new year-round emergency service program, with additional fire mitigation teams provided to every region in Victoria (\$30 million over four years);
- a program of increased burning to reduce future fire risk (\$16 million over five years);



- a community awareness and education program (\$5.8 million over four years); and
- additional funding to upgrade and maintain fire roads, and purchase new fire equipment (\$1.7 million from 2007-08 and \$27 million TEI), and for the Government's contribution to building five new fire stations, modify six existing CFA stations and replacing 190 fire-fighting tankers (\$11 million TEI).

The budget also provides an additional \$5.3 million for drought-affected communities across Victoria.

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