

# Objectives achievable without water merger

I DO not desire to become involved in the publicity or marketing exercises currently being pursued by Melbourne Water in regards to the merger of various water boards and authorities—the community should have been involved prior to merger decisions.

Our board of commissioners representing 18 municipalities have made their views very clear to the Minister on the merger, stating they do not see any additional benefits to the authority's member councils or ratepayers.

Their primary concern is the retention of present levels of service provided by the DVWPA to the municipal councils and ratepayers. The authority in opposing the merger had regard to the following factors:

- The DVWPA rate is currently 13 per cent lower than Melbourne water (formerly the Board of Works).

- The authority by reason of its small and effective operation can allocate 69 per cent of its collected precept (rates) back toward the operation and maintenance needs of the district. In contrast, Melbourne Water, according to its annual report, appears to expend only 38 per cent for comparable activities. In the authority's district this represents \$1.9 million annually which is a significant reduction in service level.

- The DVWPA rate also provides for secondary activities such as waterway protection and enhancement, the provision of regional and open space functions in addition to the primary function of regional drainage and flood mitigation. By comparison, Melbourne Water funds the majority of these secondary activities through the metropolitan improvement funds, which is additional to its drainage rate.

- Melbourne Water rates also provide for the payment of public authority dividends to the Government which would impact on levels of service presently provided.

A recent statement by Mr Geoff Coleman MLA in Parliament and documented in Hansard quotes "...\$169.6 million is paid to the Government in rates through the

by MAURIE PORTINGALE, chairman of the Dandenong Valley and Western Port Authority

front door of the Board of Works, which converts to \$141 from each ratepayer."

The authority has also stressed in its responses regarding the merger that the appropriate manner in which to achieve a merger other than by community involvement and agreement is by way of legislation and providing the community the opportunity to evaluate and overview the proposal.

The authority is also concerned that the vital connection with local government and communication with the community will diminish, as may accountability and community participation.

We are concerned that the community benefit type services such as waterway protection and enhancement, flood mitigation, and the open space and environment activities may not receive the same level of priority in a commercially profit-oriented corporation as they presently receive due to local government's involvement in the management and priorities of the authority.

The authority also had regard to the fact that the for-

mation of the Dandenong Valley and Western Port Authority only last November followed a four-year consultative study under the direction of the Department of Water Resources. The study involved technical disciplines, local councils, the community by way of public meetings together with special interest groups and government agencies. Benefits to the community in forming the DVWPA were well researched, documented and clearly identified, quite the opposite to the merger process.

In taking this stance against the merger, the authority with its 25 years of experience in catchment management firmly believes that the objectives of the Melbourne Water Corporation can be achieved without the need for merger of the Dandenong Valley and Western Port Authority, and that the catchment and waterway management objectives for the ratepayers in the DVWPA District, would be best served by retention of the DVWPA as a separate body from the proposed Melbourne Water Corporation.

## Court action to stop merger

LOCAL councils have taken action against the Minister for Conservation and Environment Steve Crabb in an attempt to stop the merger of the Melbourne Water Corporation with other water authorities from going ahead.

Acting on behalf of member councils, Knox Council last Friday sought a Supreme Court injunction against the minister and his department, claiming they did not have the power to initiate the merger.

The case has been adjourned until 21 October subject to a judge being available.

## Dangers on bike path

THE Dandenong Valley and Western Port Authority says irresponsible teenagers who misuse the Dandenong-Carrum bicycle path are endangering the lives of residents.

Following separate incidents in which a four-year-old girl and an elderly man in a wheelchair narrowly escaped injury from a speeding trail bike, the authority is asking all parents to ascertain exactly where their children are riding their trail bikes.

The authority has received several other re-

ports of teenagers riding trail bikes along the path between Wells Rd and Launching Way at Carrum, a section used mainly by elderly residents and schoolchildren.

DVWPA bylaws officer Brian Henderson said that to travel at 80km/h on a trail bike along a path meant for pedestrians and bicycles "is a very dangerous practice" and he hoped that with help of parents the authority could stop it before someone was hurt or, perhaps, killed.