

Wednesday 7 July 2010

## **VIC COALITION GOVT TO STAGE ANNUAL COUNTRY WEEK TO SHOWCASE REGIONAL VICTORIA**

A Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition Government will bring the country to Melbourne every year to showcase country Victoria's business, lifestyle and cultural riches at *Country Week*.

The week-long *Country Week* Expo will provide a platform for communities and businesses from regional and rural Victoria to sell the benefits of country life to people and businesses in Melbourne.

*Country Week* will be a great way for country and city communities to connect.

Regional tourism, local government, education, business and cultural groups will all feature at the *Country Week* Expo and provide detailed information about jobs, education and lifestyle opportunities for Melbourne families who are interested in moving to the country.

*Country Week* will also host a diverse array of cultural, artistic and sporting events highlighting the best of country Victoria.

Under the Coalition's \$2 million plan, *Country Week* will be held at a different time of the year from the Royal Melbourne Show and will complement the rural and regional focus of the Show.

*Country Week* will bring together all the wonderful elements that make living in the country so rewarding.

Young professionals and families contemplating the move will be able to visit the various *Country Week* exhibitions, stalls and events representing regions around Victoria to learn about the lifestyle benefits of moving to the country.

Victorians wanting to know about housing costs, job vacancies, and opportunities to invest in or relocate a business will be able to find out more at *Country Week* as well as enjoying country-grown entertainment and learn about education, sporting, cultural and recreational opportunities across country Victoria.

*Country Week* builds on the Coalition's recent announcement of a \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund and will help to create new prosperity, more opportunities and better quality of life in regional Victoria.

## **Background on *Country Week***

### **Country Week funding**

The Coalition will provide \$500,000 annually over four years (a total of \$2 million) towards establishing and running Country Week in Melbourne.

We will encourage wide community and business participation in the event by building partnerships and encouraging sponsorship from the private sector, not-for-profit organisations, peak industry bodies and the media in hosting and promoting this major event.

### **Exhibits, events and public participation**

Country Week will focus on a central Expo in Melbourne's CBD but will also incorporate cultural, artistic and sporting events across the city.

These additional events will showcase the best of regional and rural fine arts, performing arts, music and sports and promote participation by providing the opportunity for talented regional and rural Victorians to display their skills.

The central exhibition in Melbourne's CBD will provide a platform for a wide range of exhibitors to set up stalls, showcase local products, answer questions and provide information to visitors.

Anyone from regional and rural Victoria will be able to register to exhibit at Country Week. Exhibitors could include local councils, businesses, employment agencies, government departments, food and fibre producers, real estate agents, community groups and regional tourism organisations and operators.

Country Week will also incorporate initiatives that have proved a success at interstate Country and Regional Living Expos such as a 'big jobs board' to advertise thousands of jobs across regional and rural Victoria.

The exhibition will provide a unique and invaluable interface with Melburnians and an opportunity for country and city residents to network with each other to share ideas and experiences.

Entrance to Country Week will be free.

### **Labor's failure to take action**

Over almost 11 years in power, the Brumby Labor Government has failed to establish an annual marquee event staged in Melbourne to showcase living, working and investing in regional Victoria and encourage city-based families to make the move to the country.

John Brumby's failure has deprived regional cities and country communities of an important opportunity to take their 'local product' to the city and interact directly with Melburnians.

Regional wine and food shows have proved very successful in Melbourne but over the past 11 years under Labor, John Brumby has ignored the benefits of significantly expanding on these small events and failed to support a major event that includes all aspects of regional and rural Victoria, including business, career, lifestyle, culture, sport and community opportunities.

In November 2009 the all-party Victorian Parliamentary Rural and Regional Committee recommended that the government establish a Country Week to assist with promoting regional Victoria to the city.

The Committee's report on Regional Centres of the Future recommended that:

*"... the Victorian Government investigate further the possibility of holding a 'Country Week' in Melbourne as a three year pilot project to assist in its Provincial Victoria marketing campaign." (Recommendation 19)*

The Brumby Government supported this recommendation but has failed to take action to establish an event.

The Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition believes strongly in providing every opportunity for regional and rural Victorians to promote the benefits of living, working and investing in our regional cities and country communities. Establishing *Country Week* as a focal event will give regional and rural Victoria a unique opportunity to directly promote country life to the city.

## **Similar events interstate**

Queensland and New South Wales already run *Country and Regional Living Expos* which are similar to *Country Week*.

The Country and Regional Living Expo is held at the Southbank Convention Centre in Brisbane and at the Rosehill Racecourse in Sydney. These events attract a wide range of exhibitors including local councils, government departments, regional employment agencies, real estate agents, businesses, food and wine producers and tourism operators.

The expos have attracted up to 8,000 city visitors to each event annually and have had a significant impact on people's attitudes to moving to the country.