

Baby, it's a saviour

BRIGID O'CONNELL
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Hormone to help asphyxia bubs

VICTORIAN babies suffering asphyxia at birth will be given melatonin after research on animals indicated the hormone could significantly reduce damage from oxygen deprivation.

Of the four million babies a year worldwide who fall victim, half either die in their first few weeks or are disabled for life.

Researchers at the MIMR-PHI Institute of Medical Research's Ritchie Centre are preparing for a world-first

international clinical trial to test the effectiveness of applying melatonin patches to the skin 30 minutes after delivery.

Victorian newborns with suspected birth asphyxia will be given melatonin, either via a patch or injection, as well as standard cooling therapy.

In India next year babies will get patches, as the cooling treatment is unavailable there.

Medical PhD student James Aridas told the Perinatal

Society of Australia and New Zealand's annual conference that melatonin boosted the body's capacity to deal with damaging reactive molecules called free radicals.

"What happens following low oxygen at birth is you get a return of oxygen after the initial injury. Then the body produces heaps of free radicals, which damage cells," he said.

"We found that when you give melatonin to a newborn

(animal) soon after birth, you're able to significantly reduce the amount of free radicals that are flowing within the body and brain."

Mr Aridas said scans showed the threefold increase in molecules causing brain damage after asphyxia was "reduced immensely" when the patch was applied.

He will present this research today at the national final of the FameLab awards in

Perth, a global competition for early career scientists organised by Science in Public and the British Council.

Over the next six months the research team, supervised by Professor Graham Jenkin, Dr Suzie Miller and Monash Health neonatologist Dr Atul Malhotra, will train rural Indian health workers to recognise birth asphyxia, in preparation for carrying out human clinical trials.

The research project has been funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
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Geoff Shaw

Years on, and still unsure

ANNIKA SMETHURST

TWO years since the *Sunday Herald Sun* revealed allegations Frankston MP Geoff Shaw misused his parliamentary car and fuel card, the powerful committee probing Mr Shaw's actions is yet to finish its investigation.

The Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee is looking into whether the balance-of-power MP used his taxpayer-funded car for commercial gain, and could recommend Mr Shaw face a fine, suspension, or even expulsion from Parliament. Ombudsman George Brouwer referred the matter to the committee after finding Mr Shaw had misused his entitlements.

A subsequent police investigation led to Mr Shaw being charged with 23 counts of obtaining financial advantage by deception and one of misconduct in public office.

But in December all criminal charges against Mr Shaw were dropped.

The committee temporarily suspended the investigation while the matter was before the court, but later resumed its investigation and is yet to report back to Parliament.

Mr Shaw has repeatedly labelled the committee a "farce" and says investigation had been damaged by leaks to the media.

Committee chair Peter Walsh said he didn't comment on Privileges matters.

As the committee continues its deliberations, yesterday it was revealed that former speaker Ken Smith had signed off on the release of some footage showing the moments leading up to a clash between Mr Shaw and taxi protesters.

In October, a video of Mr Shaw was released to the media after he was involved in the scuffle outside Parliament House.

Four protesters were charged and the case is due to return to court today.

In February, a second video was leaked to 3AW showing the balance-of-power MP walking towards the rear entrance of Parliament, before turning around and walking towards the front steps, where taxi protesters had gathered.

Legislative Council President Bruce Atkinson told a Parliamentary Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing that Mr Smith had signed off on the release on two sets of footage.

It is still not clear who leaked the second piece of footage, which is believed to have been sent to police.



DON'T RAM THE RAM, TRAM

NO need to toot your horn, it's all OK. As Australia's Wool Week kicks in, sheep will be hoofing it to Melbourne's Federation Square to show off what

they do best — grow fuzzy stuff that has 1001 uses.

A two-day exhibition starting at the square on Thursday will include an art exhibition and displays of

wool in fashion, furniture and other fabulous fibres.

The star attraction around town will be merino Fred, who was a big hit with Duchess Kate during her

recent trip Down Under.

But Fred's brush with royalty hasn't gone to his head. The big fella will be clopping around the city, rubbing shoulders with the

commoners to spread the wool message. Sheep handler Jim Murray took Fred and his mate Truffle for a bit of a ramble yesterday.

PICTURE: NICOLE CLEARY

Oxford trip 'necessary', haircut less so

MATT JOHNSTON AND ANNIKA SMETHURST

A FOUR-day Oxford University IT course that cost taxpayers \$14,640 and was ticked off by CFA chief executive Mick Bourke during the agency's credit card spendathon has been defended as necessary.

But a sweeping review of all credit card expenses exposed by the *Herald Sun*, including meals for spouses and a \$22 charge at a hairdresser, will be undertaken by an independent auditor.

The probe, ordered by Mr Bourke who described some of the spending as "sloppy", will assess credit card receipts as far back as 2006.



CFA chief Mick Bourke.

The expenses came to light after a yearlong Freedom of Information battle launched by Labor MP Jane Garrett, and included parties at racecourses and lavish restaurant meals.

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews yesterday promised "those credit cards will be handed back and they will be

cut in half" if his party wins the November state election.

Emergency Services Minister Kim Wells stopped short of cutting up cards but said any expenses wrongly charged to taxpayers should be reimbursed. "When you are talking about a spouse's meal, or a haircut, or a 60 cent parking ticket, that is completely and totally inappropriate," he said.

Mr Bourke told 3AW that he "can't find a justification" for the \$22 hairdresser charge, revealed by the *Herald Sun*.

It is understood the charge, included in deputy chief officer John Haynes' expenses reports, may have been paid back, but should not have been run up on a CFA corporate

card. Mr Bourke said spending guidelines may need to be tightened and managerial decision-making may not always reflect "expectations of the community".

He said a lot of the lavish spending exposed "wasn't coming to my attention".

One expense signed off by Mr Bourke was for an IT executive to travel to Oxford University in the UK, costing \$10,640 for the four-day seminar, and \$4000 for flights.

CFA spokesman Gerard Scholten said the "high level executive strategic planning course" was at a time the state was transforming its emergency services warning systems, and was deemed necessary.



1D SEQUEL ALL THE BUZZ

ONE Direction are filming a follow-up to the feature film documentary *This Is Us*, says director Morgan Spurlock.

Rumours the band was working on a sequel started after Harry Styles (pictured) was seen being followed by a film crew as the band trekked up to Machu Picchu in Peru last month.