



Media release

The Place To Be

From the Minister for State and Regional Development

Monday, 13 March 2006

\$110,000 BOOST TO INCREASE VISITORS AT ARARAT'S J WARD

Ararat's J Ward tourist facility will be upgraded with the help of \$110,000 in Bracks Government funding, the Minister for State and Regional Development, John Brumby announced today.

Visiting Ararat, Mr Brumby said the funding to Ararat Rural City Council was being brought forward through the Bracks Government's *Small Towns Development Fund* in response to the devastating bushfires that swept through the area in January.

"The Government is doing all it can to help support fire affected communities and this project will provide a timely boost for this unique tourist attraction," Mr Brumby said.

"A heritage-listed former prison for the criminally insane, J Ward is a unique and important regional tourist facility that attracts more than 12,000 people each year.

"This project will restore two of the guard towers at J Ward and redevelop the former recreation area into a conference centre and meeting area with interpretive signage.

"Restoration and preservation of this historic facility aims to attract more people to the region which will provide a boost to tourism and economic development.

Member for Ripon, Joe Helper, said the Government was providing up to \$110,000 toward the \$165,000 project, with the Friends of J Ward group contributing \$50,000, and \$5000 through in-kind contributions.

"The new meetings facilities at J Ward will also provide a boost to Ararat's conference hosting capabilities as there is limited meeting space in the town," Mr Helper said.

Mr Brumby said funding for J Ward was an important part of the Bracks Government's overall \$10.8 million recovery package for Victorian communities affected by the bushfires earlier this year.

The recovery package includes:

- **\$3 million** to assist farmers and rural landholders with business recovery, pest control, soil erosion and the de-silting of dams;
- **\$2.2 million** for a range of initiatives to rejuvenate the natural and built environment including:
 - rebuilding walking trails in the Grampians to reactivate tourism, the continuing engagement of summer fire crews until April to rebuild trails, with priority given to "iconic" trails to enable them to open before Easter;
 - boosting the State's fire mapping capacity to assist Parks Victoria with assessing the extent of fire damage;
 - measures to assess and protect cultural works; and
 - repairs to damaged water authority works.

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- **\$1.6 million** in new tourism industry support, including a marketing and advertising campaign to help bring people back to the bushfire affected areas;
- **\$300,000** for Ararat, Northern Grampians, Southern Grampians shires and the Rural City of Horsham for community development initiatives;
- **\$135,000** for small-scale community projects across all the fire-affected areas;
- and **seven** community infrastructure projects brought forward under the Government's *Small Towns Development Fund (STDF)*, in Ararat, Halls Gap, Rawson, Walhalla, and Yea.