



Hi there,

26th of November 2021

May things be looking up for you, with the festive season looming and the public health restrictions fading as Victorians' vaccination effort pays its promised dividends. Community at its best.

Well, they say a week is a long time in politics, but the past two weeks, since the last newsletter, have been particularly long, in the wrong ways.

I'll come back to the dangerous misinformation campaign being waged by violent extremists, shrill newspaper commentators and cynical politicians who place personal and political interest ahead of public interest.

Great stuff happening in our community

Good thing is, though, the last fortnight has also been packed with uplifting opportunities to participate in the community and to fight for and support the public interest.



Let's get this party restarted

Melbourne is one of the world's top live music cities, and Victoria one of the world's top festival zones.

So I was particularly pleased to have been able to champion — including to the the successful campaign of the Save Our Scene advocacy group in securing \$20 million to save live music in Victoria and in Northern Metropolitan.

I was happy to champion this cause directly to the Minister for Creative Industries and in this house. I would like to thank Simone Ubaldi from the Croxton Park Hotel, who created [Save Our Scene](#).



Bridge over troubled water

Shockingly, the Bell Street bridge over Merri Creek does not meet Australian safety standards. In recent days, there have been three serious traffic accidents in the area.

Pedestrians, including a large number of Coburg High School kids, are at risk, every day on and around the Bell Street bridge.

Safe Access over Bell Street Bridge for Everyone ([SABBE](#)), is a community group of school parents who are concerned about the longstanding safety issues in the Bell Street risk zone at the intersections of Bell, Elizabeth and Nicholson streets at the border of Coburg and Preston.

I have requested the Minister for Roads and Road Safety provide the community with a plan to prevent this catastrophe waiting to happen. I'll let you know his response — and will not let him neglect to give one.



A faded jewel

I'm seeking action from the government to restore and protect Edwardes Lake, once a jewel waterway of the north.

Pollution, sewage, industrial waste and stormwater events have had a devastating impact on the water quality. Earlier this year, the [Friends of Edwardes Lake](#) group noticed a cleaning fluid entering the wetlands via a storm water drain and I understand catchment pollution tracking was then undertaken to identify its source.

I've asked the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change for an update and to outline plans to fix this unacceptable sullyng of a historic community resource.



Caring for the carers

Education is at the root of pretty much all long-term solutions. I have an undertaking from the Minister for Higher Education to examine vastly expanding the education available to frontline health workers.

A recent survey by the Health and Community Services Union found 96 per cent of the workforce had witnessed violence in their workplace, and that there is a clear nexus between addiction and this violence.

The government offers limited scholarships to graduate courses on addiction management to general and mental health nurses.

I'm asking the minister to consider expanding the number of scholarships offered and include all allied health workers, such as occupational therapists and social workers.



Promise of medicinal cannabis and its sober cousin hemp

You've heard me on these potential boons for our economy and society a lot before, and you will again. These are reforms that evidence shows us will help make things better and fairer in communities, countries and, indeed, on our pale blue dot.

I gave the keynote at the La Trobe's Medicinal Agriculture Retreat on the future of industrial hemp and medicinal cannabis. You can find more information [here](#).



Truth matters

I mentioned in the introduction that there've been some bad stuff happening, too. I am primarily referring to the crowds whipped by people basically telling lies and/or wantonly misrepresenting the pandemic-specific legislation before the parliament and set for debate next week.

It is not ok to make death threats, bring gallows and nooses, abuse people. It is not ok to put people in real danger.

It is not ok to claim the moral high ground whilst acting immorally. It is not ok to threaten staffers, to go after people's families.

It is not ok to hypocritically stand on the steps of parliament and claim to be defending democracy whilst actually and knowingly subverting it.

The hypocrisy gets even worse. Authoritarians are presenting themselves as defenders of freedom and decency.

With next week being the last sitting week this year, we must pass pandemic-specific legislation before our state of emergency runs out. I'm asking other crossbenchers to [stump up](#).



Change can come

In recent days, Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa gave a fascinating, powerful overview of these issues in the Philippines at the Institute of Politics' annual [Salant Lecture on the Freedom of the Press](#).

She runs and writes for [Rappler](#), a digital news company focused on the use of social media to challenge pro-government propaganda in the Philippines.

Ressa received the prize for her efforts to “safeguard freedom of expression” through her journalism, according to a statement by the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

She said: *“If you don't have facts, how can you have truth? How can you have trust? If you don't have these three, you don't have democracy... One of the things that technology has shown us, and it is both good and bad, is that humanity around the world – we actually have far more in common than we have differences.”*

Meanwhile in the Victorian Parliament...



Maria Ressa has a pretty good point, no? We need to concentrate more on that, and then conduct ourselves with respect, courtesy and dignity - not just on social media, but in public policy debate and particularly inside parliament.

Local music showcase!

This week it's [Moody Beaches](#). With no COVID density limits, live music and dancefloors are back, which is great! But, musicians have done it incredibly tough over lockdown and it will be a long way back to 'gig life' as normal.



All through lockdown I've been buying a record or some merchandise every week to help local musicians get back on their feet, including a fabulous Moody Beaches tee

and a digital copy of their debut EP “Weird Friends”, which was released in August 2018 by Poison City. Records are available at [Poison City Records](#).

Moody Beaches are a post-punk grunge project from Melbourne, featuring members of La Bastard, Hot Wings and Sugarfiend.

They are back playing shows and will be performing at the [Northcote Social Club](#) ****this coming Sunday****, so get along to the show if you can.

Musicians make a pittance from Spotify – so help them out by going to a gig or buying some merch! 📄 <https://moodybeaches.bandcamp.com/merch>

Final thoughts

You may have noticed the federal Religious Discrimination Bill has been released, and it’s problematic to say the least.



If it is passed unamended, I’ll be urging the Victorian Government to launch a high court challenge to protect Victoria’s anti-discrimination laws. Here’s my 90 second explainer on it. 📄



That’s all for now, have a lovely fortnight.

Fiona

