

## *Victorian Hansard Goes Live*

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Yes it's official! Victorian hansard is now available as a searchable full-text database on the Internet called *VicHansard*. Victorian hansard was officially launched on the Internet by Victorian Treasurer and Australia's first Minister for Multimedia, The Hon. Alan Stockdale MLA at the Victorian Parliamentary Library on 5 June 1996. Law, academic, government, as well as school and public libraries are now able to access this storehouse of political information via the World Wide Web.

The full-text of Victorian hansard is available from 1991 onwards in a remarkably easy to use database utilising KE Texpress software developed by Knowledge Engineering, a Melbourne-based company with an impressive track record, both locally as well as overseas. The availability of hansard in this format on the Internet has already set national standards which other Parliaments around Australia are keen to follow.

Taking just 6 months to transform the Unix-based system into a suitable Windows interface, Jon Breukel, Senior Reference Librarian at the Victorian Parliamentary Library and database manager says, "over the years the database has proved extremely useful in locating relevant information quickly, displaying the ability to generate summaries, statistics or printouts of whole speeches upon request. The current Internet version will take this one step further, as now, all those with Internet access will be able to engage in a database which previously was only available for the exclusive use of MP's and selected clients".

*VicHansard* on the Internet will provide an invaluable tool for searching information contained within the printed version of hansard. Users are able to search under specific MP's names, second reading debates, adjournment and grievance debates, questions on notice, questions without notice, ministerial statements, personal explanations, petitions, papers and business of the house. KE Texpress software also allows for extremely powerful text searching capabilities in which individual words or phrases can be quickly searched, producing almost instantaneous results (vagaries of Internet slowness permitting).

In charge of the busy reference section of the Parliamentary Library, Jon points out that because of the dynamic political environment, speed is of the essence and can actually make or break a political career. It has not been unusual to see Victorian Members of Parliament rush out of their legislative chamber, log on to the *VicHansard* database and perform quick searches to verify a particular issue in question, then rush back into the chamber, armed with valuable pieces of information extracted from the database in order to go on and prove a particular point.

*VicHansard* database now containing over 200,000 records is equivalent to about 40,000 pages of text or 27 million words! It has enabled library users to find what they are seeking quickly and accurately. The interface available on the Internet has meant users can now perform basic or advanced queries, as well as access the important *Dailies* (or Daily Hansard) being the most recent unedited proof-version which is made available on the Internet by 9 30 am on the following day of a current day's sitting of Parliament (usually about 2 hours before the printed version becomes available).

Although Internet surfers in the far reaches of the globe may not get all that excited by what Jeff Kennett has said in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Victorians and others with a keen interest in Australian politics will certainly find the *VicHansard* database extremely useful in eliciting political, social and economic information in a quick and easy manner.

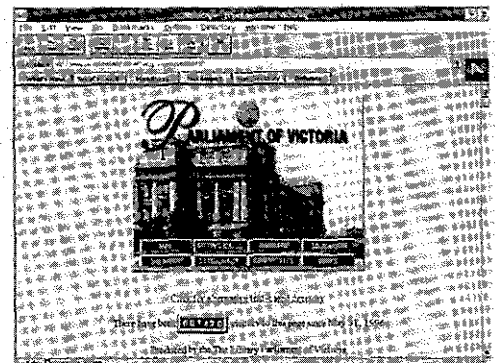
As administrator of the *VicHansard* project, Jon Breukel is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the database and is excited at the future benefits which it has to offer "This is really only the first step towards making current political information more accessible on a common platform, such as the Internet, to the wider community, who not only have a right to know what their elected representatives have been saying on their behalf in parliament, but should also be encouraged to become more politically astute and involved in issues of the day"

*VicHansard* has been made available on the Internet through the VICNET server located at the State Library of Victoria and can be found by clicking on the hansard button on the Parliament of Victoria's Home Page located at the following URL:

<http://www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/vicgov/parl/parlia.htm>



*Jon Breukel helps Lorraine Elliott Victorian MLA for Mooroolbark look up her contributions in the Victorian Parliamentary Debates using the new VicHansard database now on the Internet*



## VICTORIAN HANSARD ON THE INTERNET

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