



GIPPSLAND Times

& MAFFRA SPECTATOR



\$1.70 Inc. GST
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BRIAG FILM FESTIVAL TONIGHT

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BALLOON BAN

WEATHER Friday Partly cloudy - Min: 6 Max: 15 Saturday Shower or two - Min: 6 Max: 12 Sunday Showers - Min: 7 Max: 14 Monday Partly cloudy - Min: 5 Max: 15

Investigations into cause of deaths:

Warning to dog owners

DOG owners have been urged to take their pets to the vet immediately if they have eaten fresh or frozen raw pet meat and show signs of illness, following a spate of dog deaths across Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula.

Agriculture Victoria and PrimeSafe, the state's authority responsible for regulating pet food, are investigating the deaths of eight dogs and the hospitalisation of 44, to identify the potential causes of a "liver disease cluster".

The department is aware of an additional six cases, including one death anecdotally, and says the cases were detected in three clinics in east Gippsland and in south-east Melbourne.

A causative link to locally-produced raw dog food and the disease has not been confirmed, but has been established by Agriculture Victoria as "a possible common factor".

On June 29, Agriculture Victoria was advised of dogs that presented to a Bairnsdale veterinary

clinic with clinical signs of severe liver disease and/or sudden death.

Examination of liver tissue by the department confirmed severe liver disease, but has not pinpointed the source.

The department is concerned about a possible toxicity in food, as infection and other common possibilities have been ruled out.

As of yesterday morning, testing had ruled out canine leptospirosis, acute Ehrlichia canis infection and aflatoxin.

Fresh and frozen raw meat sourced from Gippsland and sold between May 31 and July 3 is a possible common factor, and Agriculture Victoria says it is investigating a potential connection.

One link between the cases is that affected dogs have eaten meat from the Maffra Knackery, which also trades as Backmans Meats and Backmans Greyhound Supplies.

However there is no suggestion they are at fault,

with investigators focusing on all aspects of the supply chain and other possible causes.

They are looking at food, food components additives, treats and other consumed items, water sources, environmental contacts, human and veterinary medicines and poisoning.

Agriculture Victoria urged dog owners who fed their dog fresh or frozen raw pet meat bought during this time to contact a veterinarian immediately if their pet showed any signs of illness.

The meat product is distributed statewide, so Victorian dog owners have been warned to keep an eye out, as there could still be cases in areas of the state so far unassociated with the cluster.

PrimeSafe is continuing to investigate compliance with the Meat Industry Act and the Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Pet Meat at licenced facilities.

Agriculture Victoria is also sharing information

with the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia.

Via its Facebook page, Main Street Veterinary Clinic in Bairnsdale said during the past month, it had seen more than 30 cases presenting with illness, with five deaths.

"Post mortem results have diagnosed acute toxic hepatitis and specialists are working on identifying the toxin involved," the post reads.

"If your dog has been fed this meat, the majority of dogs don't get sick, however, the signs to look for include excessive thirst, not eating, vomiting, lethargy, and yellowing around the eyes and gums."

Under the direction of PrimeSafe, Bairnsdale pet supply store Doggie Den issued an urgent voluntary product recall on all "10kg bulk coarse (chopped) beef", urging people to "stop feeding [the product] to your pets and return what is left to us".

Sale-based pet supplier Doggy Stuff does not sell the meat associated with the disease cluster.



Now is a good time to desex pets

With many local pounds and shelters historically experiencing an influx of kittens during spring, Maffra Veterinary Clinic head nurse Megan Walker is urging people to get their pets desexed now. July is National Desexing Month, and many clinics are offering a discount on the procedure. Ms Walker is pictured holding Izuku, a kitten brought in from a nearby dairy farm who was still a bit groggy after his desexing operation. Full story, page 4.

Photo: Sarah Luke



Wellington Shire Council is one of 46 councils which have pooled their electricity needs into one long-term contract which will provide them with renewable energy generated from wind farms in Victoria.

Wellington Shire signs up for renewable energy collaboration

WELLINGTON Shire Council is one of 46 Victorian Councils to join together and form VECO, the Victorian Energy Collaboration. VECO is the largest emissions reduction project ever undertaken by the local government sector in Australia.

The 46 councils have pooled their electricity needs into one long-term contract with Red Energy which will provide the VECO group with renewable energy generated from wind farms in Victoria.

Wellington Shire has committed 25 per cent of its energy load, with the switch to renewables occurring January 2022, at the end of its current power supply contract.

By using renewable energy, VECO says it will be saving 260,000 tonnes of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere – equivalent to taking 90,000 cars off the road.

The VECO project doesn't just benefit the environment – by joining together, each council will pay less for their power than if they sourced electricity individually.

The money saved can be put back into providing community services and programs.

Winter a good time to desex pets, ahead of spring litters

WITH an influx of unwanted cats and dogs into shelters during spring, a local veterinarian says winter is the ideal time to desex pets.

Maffra Animal Clinic head nurse Megan Walker said local pounds and shelters in particular experienced an influx of kittens during spring.

As someone who often sees injuries to wildlife because of feral cats, she urged cat owners to make sure their pets were desexed.

"We see a lot of issues with local wildlife around Maffra because unwanted kittens and cats keep breeding and breeding," she said.

"Farmers often find kittens at the nearby dairy and we desex, vaccinate and microchip them before they're allowed to be adopted to try and reduce the impact of feral cats in the area."

Cats and kittens that are not desexed are at risk from multiplying, and cats can have litters every couple of months.

"Desexing is the gift that keeps on giving because it saves our wildlife if there are less feral cats out and about," Ms Walker said.

The clinic runs a kitten adoption program, where orphaned kittens that have been microchipped, desexed, vaccinated, defleaed and wormed are made available for adoption.

People who want to adopt a kitten are encouraged to phone the clinic and add their names to a waiting list.

The clinic hopes the program will reduce any influx of kittens come spring.

According to the RSPCA, desexing can also have a health and behavioural benefits for pets - desexed pets are less likely to get mammary cancer and won't get uterine infections or have false pregnancies at all.

Desexed animals are generally less likely to roam, which reduces the risk of them being involved in a road accident or contracting infectious disease through fighting another animal.

Spayed animals are also less likely to show aggressive behaviour or scent mark by urinating on things.

Ms Walker said she saw many issues arising from unwanted pregnancies and complications, adding



A local veterinarian is urging people to desex their pets ahead of spring to prevent an influx of unwanted animals into shelters in spring and to prevent more animals becoming strays and harming wildlife.

desexing was a "small price to pay" in comparison.

The Lost Dogs' Home spokesperson Suzana Talevski said for female furry friends, spaying reduced the risk of mammary, ovarian and uterine cancer.

It also prevented pyometra (a uterus infection), a life-threatening condition which requires emergency surgery.

In addition, she said desexing reduced hormonal fluctuations associated with their heat cycles, which meant less unpredictable behaviour and calmer personalities.

Ms Talevski said it was heartbreaking knowing there were litters of kittens and older cats homeless on streets this winter.

"Desexing our cats is one of the best solutions to reduce the number of homeless animals," she said.

She added preventing pregnancy would also save money in the long run, as caring for a litter of kittens or puppies could be costly when the expenses of feeding them, vaccinating, microchipping and check-ups were added up.

July is National Desexing Month, and many clinics are offering a discount on desexing.

Ms Walker said her clinic there was 20 per cent off all routine neuters during July.

The National Desexing Network also offers low cost desexing vouchers for people with pension or concession cards, which can take up to \$100 off the regular cost.

"Pet owners who get their pets desexed, are pretty much lifesavers without realising it," Ms Walker said.

– Skye Mitchell

The chance to catch thousands of dollars

THREE black bream fish have been tagged and released for the annual Twin Rivers Bream Classic, with the lucky recreational fishers to catch the first two winning \$5000 each.

The classic will be held at the Gippsland Lakes and Tambo, Nicholson and Mitchell Rivers this weekend, providing another boost to the local economy.

Having tagged bream added to the competition will provide an incentive for more fishers to register for the event.

The Victorian Fisheries Authority will work with competition organisers to tag three black bream, with the first two caught during the weekend competition earning their captors a \$5000 prize.

The tagged bream will be within the new slot limit of 28 to 38cm, which came into effect in the Gippsland Lakes and feeder rivers in April this year.

The new slot limit provides added protection for larger bream in the system.

Large black bream are more prolific breeders, produce more eggs and contribute more to future generations.

The Twin Rivers Bream Classic is in its 24th year, and has also changed to a catch and release only competition without live weigh-ins this year — aligning with the VFA's Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishery Plan that aims to return the region to the fishing mecca it once was.

The new slot limit, improvements to fish habitat and removing commercial netting are all steps to improving recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and boosting regional tourism for small businesses like hotels, bakeries, motels, and caravan parks.

If fishers can't make it to the Twin Rivers Bream Classic this year, they will still have plenty of chances to catch a winning fish because the Gippsland Lakes and tributaries remain home to 150 uncaught Golden Tag fish, including one worth \$10,000.



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Supply chain issues across the state continue to affect building and construction work progress and increase material and trade costs. File photo

Focus is on supply shortages for building and construction

A WEBINAR was held this week for Master Builders Victoria members to hear firsthand reasons for supply chain shortages that are crippling the building and construction industry, including a shortage of timber.

The peak building body arranged the webinar to help members deal with challenges facing the construction industry, which, in addition to COVID-19 and the uncertainty of lockdowns, include struggling to source key materials.

Chief executive Rebecca Casson said while supply chain issues across the state continued to affect building and construction work progress and increase material and trade costs, it was important to note Victoria was not alone.

"Current conditions have seen a reduced capacity in supply chains for building products not only across Australia but overseas as well," she said.

"We also understand from talking to many of our members that the extent of the delays and the cost increases vary greatly, and they

depend on the contractor, their suppliers, and their locations – and we know this is a very real problem across our industry."

Ms Casson said members were also provided with important legal advice including confirmation that members cannot include a special condition in their contracts to charge owners for any unexpected price rises.

"This is strictly prohibited under the legislation," she said.

"Even if owners agree to this clause being inserted into a contract, these clauses cannot be included in our contracts in any capacity whatsoever."

"We are continuing to discuss these types of issue with Commissioner for Better Regulation and Red Tape Commissioner Anna Cronin, who has been asked to investigate the issue of building and construction material shortages."

Master Builders Victoria says it has committed to advocating for support packages for builders and suppliers withstanding the worst of the price increases and delays.