

***2018 PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PARLIAMENTARY CONVENTION***

***'Should a sugar tax be introduced to improve public health?'***

**Legislative Assembly Chamber  
Parliament House  
Melbourne**

**15 August 2018**

## Participants

### Student

Zohra Sos  
Eliza Khan  
Christiana Sison  
Orson Lapsley  
Sevahn Maxwell  
Hugh Toner  
Abigael Bam  
Nandan Krishna  
Leesha Hetrelezis  
Joseph Duhlian  
Stefi Eibl  
Molly McCall  
Benjamin Saccone  
Isabella Baker  
Saumi Maddegama Arachchige  
Nate Hughan  
Kiera Edelstein  
Toby Snyder  
Brandon Tan  
Jessica Thompson  
Elizabeth Day  
Max Henderson-Drife  
Rosie Thompson  
Sipho Gray  
Ella Claydon  
Zuni Momen  
Micah Cursio  
Audrey Li  
Taj Cooper  
Ally County  
Kyla King  
Anders Millar  
Xavier Buenen  
Hudson McLean  
Marwa Al Salem  
Alize Perkins  
Georgia Short  
Sarrah Sadiq  
Kobe Swinburne  
Milani Kraja  
Zainab Raza  
Mohamed el Rifai  
Maya Cotton  
Lara Hopkins  
Jakeh Ah Fook  
Eve Dabab  
Olivia Taylor  
Fatima Qureshi  
Matteo Brazzale  
Alisa Sanelli

### School

Al-Taqwa College  
Al-Taqwa College  
Apollo Parkways Primary School  
Apollo Parkways Primary School  
Ararat Primary School  
Ararat Primary School  
Barton Primary School  
Barton Primary School  
Bayswater Primary School  
Bayswater Primary School  
Beaconsfield Upper Primary School  
Beaconsfield Upper Primary School  
Bell Primary School  
Bell Primary School  
Berwick Fields Primary School  
Berwick Fields Primary School  
Bialik College  
Bialik College  
Cairnlea Park Primary School  
Cairnlea Park Primary School  
Clunes Primary School  
Clunes Primary School  
Derinya Primary School  
Derinya Primary School  
Featherbrook College P-9  
Featherbrook College P-9  
Footscray West Primary School  
Footscray West Primary School  
Foster Primary School  
Foster Primary School  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School  
Greensborough Primary School  
Greensborough Primary School  
Harvest Home Primary School  
Harvest Home Primary School  
Hazel Glen College  
Hazel Glen College  
Hillsmeade Primary School  
Hillsmeade Primary School  
Islamic College of Melbourne  
Islamic College of Melbourne  
Ivanhoe Primary School  
Ivanhoe Primary School  
Lalor Primary School  
Lalor Primary School  
Manorvale Primary School  
Manorvale Primary School  
Mary Immaculate School, Ivanhoe  
Mary Immaculate School, Ivanhoe

<b>Student</b>	<b>School</b>
Oscar Anderson	Albert Street Primary School Moe
Zara Pudney	Albert Street Primary School Moe
Dora Williams	Mount Blowhard Primary School
Rohan Flowers	Mount Blowhard Primary School
Omindi Madduma Gamage	Mount Ridley P-12 College
Pranadh Anoop	Mount Ridley P-12 College
Emily Khor	Mount Waverley North Primary School
James Osborne	Mount Waverley North Primary School
Ollie Mangos	Oakleigh Primary School
Choetso Cohen	Oakleigh Primary School
Elijah Collantes	Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Primary School, Cheltenham
Isabel Chew	Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Primary School, Cheltenham
Miljan Dragic	Reservoir Primary School
Indyana Sporcic	Reservoir Primary School
Olivia Oenning	Resurrection Catholic Primary School, Kings Park
Brandon Wolfe	Resurrection Catholic Primary School, Kings Park
Lacey Moyle	Rowville Primary School
Cedric Caamic	Rowville Primary School
Rodrigo Viegas	Rowville Primary School
Jenna Thorpe	Rutherglen Primary School
Charlie Beattie	Rutherglen Primary School
Erin Robertson	St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Lara
Josef Paatsch	St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Lara
Bella Walsh	St Brendan's Primary School, Somerville
Zara Simpson	St Brendan's Primary School, Somerville
Joshua Cherukara-Mathew	St John Vianney's Catholic Primary School, Mulgrave
Sukhjan Kaur-Bajwa	St John Vianney's Catholic Primary School, Mulgrave
Sophie Kroezan	St John's Primary School, Mitcham
Luke Marriner	St John's Primary School, Mitcham
Harper Smith	St Joseph's School, Brunswick West
James Marchione	St Joseph's School, Brunswick West
Bridgette Veneris	St Joseph's School, Chelsea
Timothy Griffin	St Joseph's School, Chelsea
Elizabeth Alexander	St Michael's Primary School, North Melbourne
Rocky Quinlan	St Michael's Primary School, North Melbourne
Ted Frost	St Patrick's Primary School, Murrumbeena
Conor MacNamara	St Patrick's Primary School, Murrumbeena
Mia Davies	St Thomas More Primary School, Mount Eliza
Freddie Dwyer	St Thomas More Primary School, Mount Eliza
Gabriel Tarulli	Surrey Hills Primary School
Ruby Lee	Surrey Hills Primary School
Remy Giuliani	Viewbank Primary School
Bianca Stella	Viewbank Primary School
Dylan Lordan	Williamstown North Primary School
Lucy Boukamp	Williamstown North Primary School

## **The SPEAKER (Mr Martin Dixon) took the chair at 9.09 a.m.**

**The SPEAKER (Mr Dixon)** — Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Parliament of Victoria and the Legislative Assembly chamber. My name is Martin Dixon, and I will be your Speaker today, so I am like the teacher in your classroom. I have got to keep order and make sure you all behave, take your turn and follow the rules.

I have been a member of Parliament for a long while, for about 22 years now, and I am finishing up in November this year, but before I was a member of Parliament I used to be a primary school teacher, and I was a primary school principal for about 15 years. Then from 2010 to 2014 I was the Minister for Education, and I was looking after all the 1400 to 1500 schools in Victoria, so I have got a real passion for education.

I am so pleased you are all here and I am really pleased that your teachers and your schools have thought it important enough for you to come here and be part of this program. To the mums and dads who have come to take photos and watch you as well, welcome to the Victorian Parliament.

The first order of the day is a welcome to country, and our welcome to country will be from Perry Wandin. I will say a couple of words about Perry, so you know how important he is and how lucky we are to have him here with us today. A proud Wurundjeri man, Perry commenced delivering welcomes and smokings on country following the death of his father 11 years ago. Perry undertakes cultural duties to honour the legacy of his father and his ancestors. Perry has recently completed a certificate IV in government investigations and has been registered as an Aboriginal heritage officer, with the aim to investigate and aid in the prosecution of breaches of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. To date, Perry is only one of three registered Aboriginal heritage officers in Victoria. Can I please ask Perry to come up to the microphone and welcome us to country. Thank you.

### **WELCOME TO COUNTRY**

**Mr WANDIN** — Thank you, Martin. Good morning, everybody. I would like to welcome the students, parents and especially the teachers. But, firstly, I would like to pay respect to elders both past and present and to any elders and the students that are here today. You are the next generation, as I always say to our young ones coming through.

As you have just heard with my story, my father passed, I think it is going on 12 years now, and I was very proud to step into his shoes. But the only reason why things like that happen is because of our family line. My father was Ngurungaeta, meaning headman of Wurundjeri, and it was passed on down. It started way back here in Melbourne with Simon Wonga and then passed on to William Barak. So William Barak is probably our most known historical Aboriginal person in Victoria because of the stories and how he walked for two days into this place when he was put in the mission at Coranderrk back in 1863. William Barak alone has storylines. He was a great painter. His stories were fantastic because he led Aboriginal people in the right direction — coming down here to Parliament House, knocking on the door and virtually being turned away again. All he wanted was just another set of clothes, shoes, a blanket and medicine. It was pretty bad because the children at Coranderrk mission were dying at a very, very young age. But that is another story.

William Barak passed away in 1903, and he passed the title on to my great-grandfather, Robert Wandoon. So we are very proud of that. Robert Wandoon was a half-caste. So being an Aboriginal person, they said, ‘We can’t have a half-caste running Wurundjeri or being Ngurungaeta’. When he was born he was actually thrown into the Yarra, but all the elders and the farmers had actually seen this, so they gathered him back. Because of that he became Ngurungaeta. So we are very proud of that — or else I would not be here. So the story goes on until 1924. Then in 1924 most of the missions in Victoria were shut down and everyone was dispersed. Most of my family went down to Lake Tyers, and we have got a great herd of them down there; it is a big mob.

Wurundjeri Council became live in 1985. As Martin said, I am very proud to stand up here to take the shoes of my father. He became Ngurungaeta because he was the next one in line. But I do not get that position because he has passed it on to someone else, which is perfectly fine with me, because that is how tradition goes. I am also an Aboriginal heritage officer, and that is about taking control. If you see all these new estates that are being built, there are stone artefacts in the ground. They have been there for 30 000, 40 000, 50 000 to 60 000 years, and they tell us more stories about how our people lived over time. I am very proud to explain. I could go on, but we have got a very tight agenda.

In our Woiwurrung language, Womenjecka yearman koondi bik Wurundjeri bullak, meaning ‘Welcome to the land of Wurundjeri people’, and I do welcome you today, children. Have a great day, and thank you for listening to my story.

*Delegates applauded.*

**The SPEAKER** — Thanks very much, Perry. It is good to know that we are in a really important place which has been historical. This part of Melbourne has been a gathering place for the Wurundjeri people and other clans for a long, long while, and now with European settlement, it still is a gathering place. So it is a very, very important part of the long history of Victoria.

It now gives me great pleasure to introduce Ms Ros Spence, who is the member for Yuroke. Ros is here this morning to represent the Minister for Education, the Honourable James Merlino. Ros has got a few words to say to you.

**Ms SPENCE** — Good morning, everyone. It is great to see so many people here today. I would like to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, and I would like to pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge my friend the Honourable Martin Dixon, the member for Nepean and the former Minister for Education, as he told you earlier. The member for Thomastown, Bronwyn Halfpenny, is here. Bronwyn is here because there are some students from Lalor primary, I believe. Who is from Lalor primary? Bronwyn is your state member. She has come to see you today, so that is nice.

I also welcome Associate Professor Julian Rait, OAM, the president of the Australian Medical Association, Victoria;, the president of Sports Dietitians Australia; of course Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri elder; and the teachers and parents who are here today. But most importantly I acknowledge all of the students who have come here today to participate.

I am delighted to welcome you all to the 2018 Primary Schools’ Parliamentary Convention. It is certainly a hive of activity here today, and there is much energy, which I am sure we will see all throughout the day. I believe there are around 100 students that are attending today. This chamber normally has 88 members of Parliament, so there are a few more people in here than what we normally see. It is great to have you all come and see what is essentially Martin’s, my and Bronwyn’s place of work — Parliament House.

For 160 years Parliament House has been the home of democracy in our state, and from 1901 to 1927 the Parliament of Australia actually met here while the Parliament of Victoria met at the Exhibition Building up the road. The first Australian laws were made in the Legislative Assembly. Our first Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, sat in this very building. Stretching back even further, before Parliament House was built and even before the first European settlers arrived, different clans of the Kulin nation would also meet and hold ceremonies at this site. It is with great pride that I acknowledge the Aboriginal flag that flies above Parliament House today. It is my enormous privilege to spend so much time at such a significant traditional meeting place, a space for the people of Victoria.

Let me point out a couple of things you would normally see if you came in here on a sitting day. Where we have Julian sitting would be where the Premier would sit. Next to him would be the Deputy Premier, and the next seat down would be the Leader of the House. Opposite Julian would be the Leader of the Opposition, next to him would be the Leader of the Nationals and in the third seat would be the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. To my left would be the opposition bench and to my right would be the government. Along the front row would be the ministers. So have a think about what seat you chose today. It is not necessarily your role for the day, but it is nice to know. My seat is where you are. Bronwyn sits next to you, and Martin sits up the back next to you. That is where Martin normally sits when he is in here.

There is a lot of history in this building and also in the design of the building. One example is the distance between the two front benches, modelled on the United Kingdom’s House of Commons. It is said to be the length of two swords to encourage politicians to resolve issues peacefully, but it also shows how serious the different debates that take place here can be. However, the big thing to remember is that in Parliament we are representing the views and the needs of other people. Every member, no matter which party or whether they are a minister, backbencher or even the Premier himself, is responsible for representing the people who live in their electorate. Together all of you represent 50 government, Catholic and independent schools from across Victoria.

You have a unique opportunity to take over this chamber from the politicians so that you can listen, learn, speak and be heard by your peers. Today you will make opening statements. You will participate in group discussions, prepare bills, get on the soapbox and vote on your bills, just like we do. This is a great opportunity for you to embrace your leadership potential. One day that potential could well take you into the chambers of Parliament yourself. Everyone in Parliament today started out in your shoes — as keen students — and like you, we had something to say. That is why in the Education State today we are committed to giving you opportunities to offer your opinions and to be heard. We know it is important, and we are listening.

At the end of the day your comments and your decisions will be collected and passed on to the Deputy Premier. He is also the Minister for Education, and he loves to hear what you all think, so I encourage each and every one of you to actively participate in today's Convention, express your views and ask the hard questions. Debating should be fun, and what a great topic you will be debating today: should a sugar tax be introduced to improve public health? It is certainly an interesting question and one that has provoked significant debate in our community and communities abroad. Sugar taxes have been introduced around the globe from Mexico to the United Kingdom, and they are currently being debated in Canada and even here in Australia. We all know that having an active lifestyle is important for our health, our wellbeing and our success.

We know that chronic diseases directly attributable to diet, such as diabetes and heart disease, have increased dramatically, so we want you to think about whether a sugar tax would address the root problems and make people choose healthier options. Or do you think that there are other things that we should do instead? For instance, this year the government introduced a scheme that requires all major food outlets and supermarket chains to put the average kilojoule content on ready-to-eat food and non-alcoholic drinks and on their menus and labels. And in schools we have sports and dance activities, yoga classes, healthy canteens, breakfast clubs, kitchen gardens and mentoring programs to help students keep fit and healthy. But is that enough or is a sugar tax a good idea?

What you choose to believe today is entirely up to you, but it may help hearing opposing arguments. In a democracy such as ours it is so important to listen to different opinions and to take those views into account. During today's session, remember to ask questions and to share your views. Keep an open mind. You may find that your opinion differs from other students here. It may even differ from your friends. It might even change as the day progresses. However, debate is crucial to a successful democracy. When I am in Parliament I enjoy hearing the opinions of my parliamentary colleagues and putting forward my own. We do not always agree, but it does make for a lively debate.

Today's Convention is an opportunity for you to think about using your voice to bring about political change. This is only the start. After leaving here today you may want to speak to your school assembly about your experience at this Convention. You might want to write a report to your school newsletter or even the local newspaper. You may want to let your local council know about the program and how you have been involved. You might introduce ideas from the Convention to your school council, your student action team or your student representative council. You might even want to write a letter to your local state or federal member of Parliament about an issue you feel passionate about. All of these opportunities are in front of you.

I do ask one thing of you today. Pop your hand up if you have watched Parliament and in particular question time or if you have seen what Parliament looks like in action. When you have done that, have you seen people behave not so well towards one another? Yes? Well, my one ask of you is to be better. Provide a better example to your members of Parliament than what they provide to you.

Before I finish I would also just like to thank the teachers and the parents, particularly those who are here today, for helping you build your civic leadership as well. Without further ado, I would now like to declare the 2018 Primary Schools' Parliamentary Convention officially open. Thank you, and enjoy this amazing experience.

*Delegates applauded.*

**The SPEAKER** — Thanks very much, Ros. That was fantastic. So we have set the scene. We have what we call standing orders in Parliament, which are our rules of how we are meant to behave so that our debates can happen in a nice and sensible way and so that we all get a turn and we get to listen. The same goes for you — just as you might have some rules that operate in your classroom and in your school.

## OPENING STATEMENTS

**The SPEAKER** — We are going on to the opening statements. Each of you has 2 minutes. It has already been organised as to who those speakers are. I will call the students' names and the school that they are from. You will stand up and turn your microphone on. You will have 2 minutes. Please stick to the 2 minutes so that everybody gets their turn and we can keep everything moving. First up, which is always the hardest, we have Abigail Bam and Nandan Krishna from Barton Primary School.

### Barton Primary School

**Ms BAM** — Should a sugar tax be introduced to improve public health? When we were first faced with this question, we did not want there to be a sugar tax, because we were thinking selfishly and only about how it would affect our own lives. We then realised that we had to think of our nation and the benefits of introducing a sugar tax. Sugar can be very addictive and can impact our health drastically by leading to diseases such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease and more.

**Mr KRISHNA** — We stand here before you to discuss why we think Australia should introduce a sugar tax. On behalf of Barton Primary School, we are confident that there should be a tax on sugar. Sugar is a luxury, and we certainly do not need it all the time, so if there is a sugar tax introduced, due to the increase in price, products high in artificial sugar will not be as appealing to buy.

Some people may think that there should be no such thing as a sugar tax, but we have to think of Australia as a whole. We are definite that it will have positive effects on Australia's healthcare system, and it will decrease the morbidity associated with sugar-related diseases. This will cause less death and heartbreak for Australian families. If we make this tax happen, we will lead Australia down the right path. In addition, we will strive to be a healthier country.

**The SPEAKER** — You might notice that there is a clock above me that is counting down your 2 minutes. Suzie here is putting the clock on and you can keep an eye on your time there. That is always a good thing to do.

### Bialik College

**Ms EDELSTEIN** — Excess consumption of sugar leading to obesity is a major public health issue in Australia, yet Australians have no powerful cohesive strategy to prevent it. Research suggests that consuming large quantities of sugar can cause type 2 diabetes, leading to heart disease and kidney failure, obesity and extreme tooth decay. Consuming one sugary drink a day can cause weight gain of 6.5 kilograms in a year and increase the chance of kidney disease by 58 per cent. In Australia around 27 per cent of children and almost two-thirds of adults are overweight. These are extremely unhealthy numbers.

So what are we going to do to reduce the statistics? A tax on sugar is one idea to combat this national problem. Around the world 28 different countries have introduced a tax on sugar, which has had a strong impact on countries like Mexico, where at the end of the first year of the tax being introduced there was a decrease of 15 per cent in sugary drink sales. In Portugal sugary drink sales dropped by 25 per cent within the first year of the sugar tax. And now other large countries like Britain are adopting it too.

Our goal is to build a healthier Australia. Steps towards this may include healthy diet education within schools and making healthier foods more accessible and cost less. I firmly believe that the Victorian government should introduce a sugary drink tax. It is a useful step and a powerful place to start. If we implement the tax now, we will begin change now and have a positive effect on future generations of Australians adopting and being open to healthier lifestyles.

To conclude, sugar and sugary drinks are dangerous to our health and put pressure on our health system. Establishing a sugar tax is a strong beginning to addressing this health issue.

### Clunes Primary School

**Mr HENDERSON-DRIFE** — Good morning, students, members of Parliament and Speaker of the House. I am Max Henderson-Drife, the current male school captain of Clunes Primary School, and today I will be voicing my opinion on why I believe a sugar tax is essential to Australian society and that it will be beneficial to everyday life. I do believe that a sugar tax would be beneficial and should be added to Australia's long list of

pre-existing taxes, but only on condition. For instance, an apple contains on average 10 grams of natural sugar — fructose. A 600-millilitre bottle of Coca-Cola contains 10.6 grams of processed sugar, which can lead to weight gain, increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and depression. It can even lead to a fatty liver, making processed sugar much less healthy than its natural counterpart fructose.

In my opinion a sugar tax would be beneficial and would have the same or greater effect of similar taxes, such as the tobacco tax, preventing health conditions and obesity, heart attacks, diabetes and cancer while saving Australia's healthcare system, even if it was only for products with large amounts of added sugars, because let's face it, just about every food contains some form of sugar and sometimes even the foods that appear healthy can be loaded with sugar.

Around the world more than 26 countries have introduced a sugar tax, most of which have been successful. Meanwhile Australia, one of the fattest countries in the world, refuses to consider a so-called sugar tax.

### **Featherbrook College P-9**

**Ms CLAYDON** — Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Today I will be talking about my thoughts on whether a sugar tax should be introduced in our society to maintain public health. First, let's start with some statistics. Studies have found that during 2014 and 2015 almost two in three adults and one in four children were overweight or obese, and those numbers are continuing to increase. This is due to a lack of both healthy eating and exercise. As at July 2017 Australia was ranked 31 out of 192 countries on the overweight and obesity ladder. Out of our population of around 25 million, roughly 29 per cent of our adult population were overweight or obese.

In my opinion I think the introduction of a sugar tax would disadvantage those families that already do not spend a lot of money on sugary junk foods. A lot of families like my own enjoy a sugary treat on a special occasion. However, a sugar tax could be a great opportunity to fund new health and fitness programs in our community. Local governments could use this tax revenue to introduce new programs and advertising campaigns to educate kids and adults on healthy eating and exercise.

Other countries have tried and failed in introducing sugar taxes. These food taxes are seen as punishing bad eating behaviours rather than rewarding healthy eating and exercise habits. Denmark in particular dismantled its fat tax due to a lack of evidence that healthy eating habits improved, but rather it led to high administration issues, tax evasion and overall food cost increases.

The introduction of a sugar tax may result in households buying less sugary treats but it will not stop them. Sugar is an addictive substance that people enjoy eating. If someone wants a chocolate bar, they will buy one regardless of whether it costs \$1 or \$10.

In summary, I believe that overall a sugar tax is a bad idea. The government should be spending its time and money on education and encouraging people to eat more healthily and exercise, not on trying to make money off people's buying habits.

### **Footscray West Primary School**

**Ms CURSIO** — Hi, I am Micah Cursio from Footscray West Primary School. I strongly believe that it is clear a sugar tax should be introduced to Australia. A sugar tax is the extra money you have to pay for buying sugary drinks. I think drinks with more than six teaspoons of sugar should be taxed. This includes juices, cola, energy drinks and even iced tea. The extra money raised by this tax would be invested in public health programs to help diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity and tooth decay. This would be very helpful. Seventy-six per cent of people in Australia consume more sugar than is recommended. The more sugar, the higher the tax — I think it is very important that a sugar tax is introduced, because if we put a higher price on items, we could save 155 000 lives. People will not be buying as many sugary drinks and other foods with sugar because they will be more expensive, so it could be like a punishment. The sugar in any sugary drink is sugar your body does not need.

**Ms LI** — I believe a sugar tax is a worthy idea, but I doubt it is going to stop anybody. Stacking on extra dollars for a sugar-sweet beverage is not going to help the problem. Of course on the importance of people's health I am in agreeance, and I do agree with Micah. But the problem is that it is everyone's decision to do what

they would like to do, whether it is eating, drinking or fitness. Extra money is not the solution to that. To save lives, you must persuade them, and campaign. People spend money on what they want, so unless you want to dictate their money uses, there is not a way to change that choice. The tax itself will provide a much broader budget for the government. That can help hospitals that are trying to find a cure for diabetes, and public schools; provide money for education and public facilities around that. Saving lives is important. Sixty per cent of Australia's people are already obese and one in four are on their way to being obese. Australia has the most people diagnosed with diabetes in the world. This can really help the government, but not its people.

**The SPEAKER** — Thank you very much, Micah and Audrey — the first couple to have gone to 2 minutes. Next I will ask Taj Cooper and Ally County from Foster Primary School to make their statements.

### **Foster Primary School**

**Mr COOPER** — Good morning, everyone. First we would like to introduce ourselves. We are Ally and Taj. We are both school captains of Foster Primary School.

**Ms COUNTY** — Foster Primary School is situated near Wilsons Promontory and it is a lovely area to grow up in. We would like to welcome all students and supervisors to this Convention.

**Mr COOPER** — We are very excited that we will meet you all over the course of the day. As you can imagine, we are pretty nervous being up here in front of you all. However, it is a great privilege to give an opening address. So, Ally, what did you have yesterday for an afternoon snack?

**Ms COUNTY** — I had a chocolate brownie. What about you?

**Mr COOPER** — I had a sweet, gooey Mars bar because I was so hungry. They taste delicious and give me loads of energy.

**Ms COUNTY** — I love KitKats because they are the best. Do you like them?

**Mr COOPER** — Yes, I like them. But do you like Skittles, because I love Skittles? Skittles are great because of the chewiness and flavour.

**Ms COUNTY** — It is great how there are different flavours in the one pack. Hey, wait. Hang on, Taj. We are here to talk about whether or not a sugar tax should be introduced to improve public health and we have just been drooling about sugar!

**Mr COOPER** — Our belief is that there should not be a sugar tax introduced.

**Ms COUNTY** — Firstly, in our opinion, sugar should not be taxed because people who suffer from diabetes need to have confectionery as part of their sugar levels — for example, lollies like jelly beans — so that they do not get sugar hypos. How unfair is that? People need to maintain their health and now will be charged a tax.

**Mr COOPER** — Another reason why we feel there should not be a sugar tax introduced is based around sport. You need to have sugar during sports sessions because you need to keep your energy levels high, and you replace fluids as well as getting an energy boost. But you need to remember to not drink too much. I have been a dancer for six years, as well as before that being in the theatre. It is quite exhausting. And after work-outs and competitions, I certainly know that I need to replenish my energy with carbohydrates and food bars containing — you guessed it — sugar.

**Ms COUNTY** — For our final reason, companies can go broke because people will not be buying their breads, jams and anything that has sugar in it because of the tax. How will they tax these foods? Will they charge people different amounts for the amount of sugar in them or will they just charge one hefty tax? How ridiculous! Will it stop at these products or will it move on to the sugar in fruits? There will be fewer jobs in shops and companies, and that means there will be more families without jobs. This directly impacts on stress and mental health, another concern for our community.

**Mr COOPER** — In conclusion, we absolutely believe that there should not be a sugar tax introduced.

**Ms COUNTY** — The sugar tax could help public health, but it really does not do that much. It will actually cause more issues. We cannot wait to work with you today and listen to your opinions about this topic.

### **Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School**

**Ms KING** — Good morning, delegates. My name is Kyla King, and along with my fellow student, Anders Millar, we are attending today representing Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School. Through our reading and research we think there should not be a sugar tax introduced to improve public health, but instead an education program for children in child care, kinder-aged children all the way through schooling to educate people not only on the effects of sugar but on good, healthy food choices. This will benefit people more as they will learn the effects of sugar on their health. Sugar comes in all forms — good and bad, healthy and not healthy. There is a difference between a juicy fresh apple and a Mars bar. But even an apple contains 10 grams of sugar, the equivalent of two teaspoons of sugar. But an apple also has vitamins and fibre, which are good for our bodies.

**Mr MILLAR** — People are already cutting down on sugar. We are already starting to realise the effects of sugar, and if we continue to know more about what it does to our bodies, we will naturally cut down on buying it as well as food manufacturers changing their recipes. We can see this already in healthier food choices in fast-food chains, in drinks and in processed foods in general. Government should not control our lives to this extent. We should have a choice and take responsibility for our choices. We believe people will buy it anyway. Sugar is addictive. The more we have it, the more we want it. We like sugary foods. We like to buy them ourselves as a treat. But through education we will find out the amount of sugar in our foods so we can make healthy choices. These are some of the reasons we believe there should not be a sugar tax introduced to improve public health. We look forward to hearing the other ideas and discussions during the day.

### **Hillsmeade Primary School**

**Ms SWINBURNE** — Good morning, everyone. My name is Kobe.

**Mr KRAJA** — And I am Milani. We are the representatives of Hillsmeade Primary School.

**Ms SWINBURNE** — And today we will be talking about why there needs to be a tax on sugar. In Australia our childhood obesity levels are off the charts. This needs to stop.

**Mr KRAJA** — Over 47 per cent of children drink sugary drinks every day. Studies show a direct link between sugary drinks and obesity. If we start charging extra for sugar, they might just start to buy it less and influence them to make healthier choices, and that will reduce the percentage of overweight children.

**Ms SWINBURNE** — Sugar does not just only lead to weight problems; it can also impact our health in other ways, such as diabetes, heart disease and tooth decay. These are preventable issues and are causing an unnecessary burden to our healthcare system.

**Mr KRAJA** — Just how much is sugar really costing us?

**Ms SWINBURNE** — Over three-quarters of children are getting more sugar each day than is suggested by the World Health Organization. Something has to change.

**Mr KRAJA** — If Australia keeps going the way it is, the average person's life expectancy will drop dramatically. Do you really want to do that to this beautiful country?

**Ms SWINBURNE** — Some devastating but true facts are: most people in Australia consume an average of 76 litres of sugary drinks per year.

**Mr KRAJA** — Some soft drink cans contain nine to 10 teaspoons of sugar. We should only be having six teaspoons a day.

**Ms SWINBURNE** — Two-thirds of people in Australia are overweight, and sugary drinks are the cause of one-fifth of it.

**Mr KRAJA** — But we can change this. The taxes paid should go to educating young children and their families about exercise and making health choices.

**Ms SWINBURNE** — We hope you take these suggestions seriously and consider just how much sugar we really should be having.

### **Lalor Primary School**

**Ms DABAB** — Good morning, everyone. My name is Eve Dabab, and I am here to represent Lalor Primary School with Jakeh Ah Fook. Today we will talk about our opinions on sugar taxes. I think we should introduce sugar taxes. Let me tell you why. Firstly, I would like to talk about diabetes. Sugar is the number one cause of diabetes, and it is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia, overtaking heart disease and cancer. Currently 1.7 million Australians suffer from some type of diabetes. That is more than 5.1 per cent of Australia. The total annual cost impact of diabetes in Australia is estimated to be \$14.6 billion. A sugar tax is a good start for tackling diabetes and obesity. Manufacturers will need to put less sugar in their products if they want to stay competitive. Australians' overall disease burden will reduce, and we will see a rise in quality and longevity. That is why we should introduce sugar taxes. Thank you for listening.

**Mr AH FOOK** — Australia is known for our justice and rights. That is why I strongly disagree about having sugar taxes to improve public health. Let us stop pretending that our unhealthy and unjust food systems can be solved by a tax on the consumer. In 1981 Ronald Reagan said to the United States, 'We have let government take away many things we once considered were not really ours to do'. Globally people have inadvertently bought into this logic of personal responsibility, reasoning that attacks on sugar will curb consumer demand and compel people to choose healthier options. While data support the fact that taxes effect consumer choice, specifically the power of taxes on cigarettes and sugary drinks to dissuade consumption, this logic is ultimately flawed. It ignores the institutions, policies and ideologies that create unjust, unhealthy food systems in the first place.

### **Albert Street Primary School Moe**

**Mr ANDERSON** — Good morning. My name is Oscar Anderson, and I attend Albert Street in Moe.

**Ms PUDNEY** — Good morning. My name is Zara Pudney, and I also attend Albert Street.

**Mr ANDERSON** — Before we start, we would just like to say that we agree that we should put a tax on sugary food and drinks. We will explain the reasons why now. Our main point for introducing a sugar tax is because one in three adults and one in four children suffer from being overweight. This can lead to type 2 diabetes, which Zara will talk about in a minute. Type 2 diabetes is also linked with obesity.

**Ms PUDNEY** — As Oscar said, type 2 diabetes is linked with obesity. If people eat too much sugar and do not look after their body, they can get type 2 diabetes, so we thought if we introduced a sugar tax on sugary foods and drinks of 5 or 10 per cent, making them more expensive, this would discourage people from buying them and hopefully reduce the number of people with diabetes too.

**Mr ANDERSON** — We also thought that a special symbol could be created, like the Heart Foundation symbol, to put on our low-sugar products so shoppers know what is a good choice. You are probably thinking, 'Which products should have the symbol?'. We were thinking that products that have 1½ teaspoons or less of sugar should get that symbol.

**Ms PUDNEY** — The taxes raised could be used to support public health, such as awareness programs on the health effects of too much sugar. The taxes could also support hospitals, schools, clinics and community health centres to spread the word about the effect of too much sugar.

**Mr ANDERSON** — Thank you for giving us the opportunity to attend Parliament and speak about proposed sugar taxes.

**Ms PUDNEY** — We cannot wait to have more discussion about this.

### **Mount Waverley North Primary School**

**Ms KHOR** — Good morning, everybody. My name is Emily, and I am here today with James Osborne. Together we are the school captains of Mount Waverley North Primary School. On the surface a sugar tax appears to be a good option to improve public health. However, it is not a perfect solution to solve Australia's

obesity crisis. There is no doubt that Australians love sugar. According to a CSIRO report, the top dietary weaknesses for Aussies include chocolate, lollies, cakes, biscuits and sugar-sweetened beverages. Taxing these goods, most of which provide no nutritional value, and increasing their price will clearly be a way of implementing consumer behaviour leading to better health outcomes.

A study undertaken by Veerman, Sacks and Martin found that, if soft drink prices increased by 20 per cent, in 25 years we could save 600 lives, prevent 4400 heart attacks, 1100 strokes and save our healthcare system \$609 million. Yet despite these obvious benefits, a sugar tax should not free individuals of their responsibility to educate themselves on the impact of sugar on their health. We must all take responsibility for our actions, highlighting the importance of health education from a young age. Research has found that a sugar tax could generate \$400 million in revenue each year.

Should sugary drinks be taxed, it is important that this revenue be put towards public health initiatives focusing on promoting nutritionally desirable foods and developing health eating and drinking habits. Should a sugar tax be introduced to improve public health, there is clear evidence this gesture would certainly help. However, the role of health education is also important in helping people take control of their health and make informed decisions about the things we eat and drink. Thank you for listening.

### **Reservoir Primary School**

**Mr DRAGIC** — We all need to take some action to improve public health, and taxing sugar may be one way. Firstly, Australia has the fifth-highest rate of obesity for people 15 years and over, and primary school-aged children are now creeping into the statistics as well. Secondly, sugar is a natural ingredient that has been part of our diet for thousands of years. Sugar is a carbohydrate that provides energy for the body. The most common sugar in the body is glucose, which your brain, major organs and muscles need to function properly. Some sugars are naturally found in food, so we do not need to be buying excess sugar. If the cost goes up, consumption will go down. Thirdly, we require better messages about our sugar intake through health programs in schools and on television.

**Ms SPORCIC** — The CEO of Diabetes Australia, Greg Johnson, said that many Australians underestimate the health problems related to excess sugary drink consumption, including tooth decay, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, stroke and some cancers. Why is the government not listening to health experts and shutting down these advertising campaigns if they know it is wrong? Is the government on the people's side or the side of the large sugar cane industry? Increasing the family grocery bill by taxing sugar will not magically make Australians healthier, but we can try. It will not happen overnight, but we can try.

### **Resurrection Catholic Primary School, Kings Park**

**Mr WOLFE** — Good morning. My name is Brandon Wolfe, and I am a grade 6 student. We are here to convince you that we should have a sugar tax. It could save lives, and here are my reasons why. To begin with, the Public Health Association of Australia announced this is a good time for Australia to push to protect public health via a sugar tax. This sugar tax will benefit the health of Australians. Official documents say overweight people are more likely to and often do consume soft drinks, sweets and sugary foods. People who are obese or are an unhealthy weight need a change. Even if prices are raised a little, it can make a big difference. The income generated from the sugar tax can be invested in public health initiatives so we can help each other power through this bad situation. There has been a 35 per cent rise in obesity in the last 25 years, and by 2040 the obesity rates will be at 91 per cent. Would you like to be living in this Australia? No. This is a situation we cannot tackle alone. We will have to pitch in here and think of this extra cost as a donation that will help change this. We have the power; we can do this.

**Ms OENNING** — Good morning. My name is Olivia Oenning. It is an excellent pleasure to be here and have a say in the law. It is vital that there be a sugar tax for public health reasons. Most people in the world love sugar, don't they? Therefore they all buy products that contain a large amount of unnatural sugars. The prices must be raised for a variety of different reasons, such as people get very ill if they eat too much sugar and people might get addicted to sugary products. It is also the Australian government's duty to improve the health of the citizens in our country, not make it worse. There is no nutritional value in unnatural sugary products. I firmly agree that there must be a sugar tax.

People with obesity are in danger of becoming ill. Immoderate amounts of sugar are being placed in products, which is unneeded. People could develop diabetes, heart disease, dementia or cancer because of these sugary products. There are no cures for these diseases, and they can lead to deaths and heartbreaks. This tax must be implemented immediately, as sugar can kill and make people who are loved very sick. If everyone can agree to make a change to the laws, it can make a big difference to the people who are in need of help.

Moving on, I will explain how a person who could get addicted to unnatural sugary products if prices are not raised. First they may not notice how bad it is to eat too much sugar, but then temptation may get in the way, and they might begin to eat too much sugar. Have you ever said to yourself that you will only have a tiny bit of chocolate but end up having a craving for more and eat the whole bar? People will start eating sugar day after day even though they have warned themselves earlier. Self-control is one of the hardest things to manage. If there is a sugar tax, it would help prevent these issues. An addiction to sugar is a danger to many people and their health.

**The SPEAKER** — Thank you very much. You are lucky I am being very kind. When people go over 2 minutes we just keep going, but when Parliament is sitting the Speaker just turns your microphone off and that is it. It does not matter if you have not finished. It is a good discipline.

### **Rutherglen Primary School**

**Ms THORPE** — Should a sugar tax be introduced? This is a question we were faced with at the start of this. We believe that sugar taxes should and will be introduced to help public health, because did you know that one can of Coke contains 10 teaspoons of pure sugar? Now, would that make you stop drinking it? No, probably not. Why? Because sugar is addictive, and that is why a sugar tax is being debated to help public health. Sugar is one of the main causes of obesity in the world, and people from children to adults are consuming way more than the recommended amount each day. An estimate was made in 2011 that the average Australian consumes 60 grams of sugar every day, which is equivalent to 14 teaspoons of white sugar.

**Mr BEATTIE** — The sugar tax is like the cigarette tax; it makes consumers think the price is too high and stop buying it. It is a simple change but could change our number 6 spot of the most obese countries in the world.

**Ms THORPE** — Almost 30 per cent of Australian adults are obese, and 35 per cent are overweight. In the 1980s it was less than 10 per cent, so obviously the percentages have been raised, but with a sugar tax we can lower those percentages back down to 10 per cent. Twenty-eight per cent of Australian children are obese, which leads to their lives being shorter than what they should be. It is not fair for kids to not be able to move or to potentially die, so the government needs to change something to help this and stop it from happening.

**Mr BEATTIE** — If you agree that we should have a sugar tax, you will understand that we are too high up the obesity charts and the government needs to change, as our health is important.

### **St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Lara**

**Mr PAATSCH** — We are Erin Robertson and Josef Paatsch from St Anthony's primary school in Lara.

**Ms ROBERTSON** — We are against a sugar tax being introduced, as it will not improve public health.

**Mr PAATSCH** — We support the comments by crossbench Senator David Leyonhjelm in calling a sugar tax a classic nanny state approach, with evidence that in countries where they have introduced a sugar tax the end result has not been a reduction in obesity. Although we do not deny that Australians are facing health issues, we believe the evidence that domestic consumption of sugar is on the decline.

**Ms ROBERTSON** — A tax alone is not going to solve the obesity problem overnight. If we educate people on healthy choices, this will result in a healthier community over time. Because fruit juices and milk-based drinks are excluded from this tax, it means some of the most sugary drinks escape the levy. For example, a standard Starbucks extra large hot chocolate contains 15 teaspoons of sugar, double the recommended daily maximum for an adult, but because it is a milk-based drink it is exempt from the levy. Clearly the sugar tax is an inconsistent approach to a wider problem.

**Mr PAATSCH** — A sugar tax will not educate people who already have unhealthy lifestyles or who are financially challenged. They will continue to buy unhealthy options as their attitudes have not changed. A tax will increase their everyday costs, adding to their financial problems. These people would rely on the government for increased assistance, which adds to the tax burden of everyday Australians.

**Ms ROBERTSON** — There is no evidence a tax will do anything to reduce obesity. It would do worse for our country than better, and it would cost jobs. We believe that slashing soft drink consumption is not the same as reducing obesity and therefore are against a sugar tax being introduced, as it will not improve public health.

### **St Brendan's Primary School, Somerville**

**Ms WALSH** — Good morning, my name is Bella and this is Zara, and we are from St Brendan's, Somerville. Today we would like to talk to you about our opinion on: should sugar taxes be introduced? Zara and I think that sugar taxes should be introduced. We think this because one in four children are obese or overweight. More and more people are becoming obese or overweight at an alarming rate.

**Ms SIMPSON** — If we do not introduce sugar taxes, it could make a lot of Australians obese or overweight. We need to introduce sugar taxes as soon as we can. It is unhealthy for children to have a lot of sugar. It is a fact that giving kids more sugary foods makes them misbehave, because sugar can make them hyperactive. It also causes sugar rushes, which are extremely bad for kids. Obesity for children can turn into diabetes, and this can cause a lot of problems in the future.

**Ms WALSH** — Obesity is becoming a big problem for Australia and the world, and we could do our part to downgrade this dilemma. It has worked in other countries around the world, so why wouldn't it work in Australia? The main reasons for going to the doctors are health issues caused by an overdose in sugar. As we know, this can lead to obesity, but it can also give you skin conditions as well as leading to many problems in the future, such as diabetes. A diabetes epidemic could mean many people having visits to the hospital and more money being wasted on hospital fees, which are expensive.

**Ms SIMPSON** — A sugar tax would not affect poor families or people. They would only have to pay \$5 a year. Even though these families and people do not have as much money as other Australians, they would still be able to get food and drink and they would now be able to make healthier choices. That is why Bella and I think the government should put a sugar tax on sugary items.

### **St Joseph's School, Chelsea**

**Ms VENERIS** — Hi, I am Bridgette.

**Mr GRIFFIN** — Hi, I am Tim, and we are from St Joseph's primary school in Chelsea. Did you know at least a quarter of Australian children are obese? This could lead to diabetes, low self-esteem, sleep apnoea, restlessness, tiredness and dental problems, and if it continues into adulthood, many more serious issues could occur. There should be a higher tax for sugary foods because they cause major health problems with children and there is no nutritional benefit from eating them. Studies have shown it can also be addictive; therefore should we not treat this the same as tobacco and alcohol, which are very addictive as well and have extremely high tax rates?

As a country we are lucky to have fabulous sports facilities and equipment. We are also very fortunate to be able to play outside, which many children take advantage of. The children laying inside, watching TV and other newer electronic devices, are exposed to advertisements that can easily lure young kids into buying unhealthy sugary products.

**Ms VENERIS** — An average Australian child will watch 1100 junk food ads this year. Fast-food restaurants are marketed as cheap, fun and affordable to attract young people. It is very unlikely for commercials to be made to sell fruit and vegetables, though if they do, they are very unappealing for the audience. If many countries have added a sugar tax to law, should Australia follow in their footsteps? This extra tax money could be used to subsidise healthy foods. Many families cannot afford healthy foods, so the only other option are processed, sugary foods. If healthy foods were cheaper, this would make it easier for those families and they would stop buying unhealthy items. Another way we could use money is to get nutritionists into schools to teach children about healthy eating. This could also help some students with their diets if needed.

If we do not stop this obesity and overconsumption of sugary foods, we will pay with our health in the future. It will cost us in doctor and hospital fees and put a huge amount of pressure on our health system. There are many things we can put in place to stop sugary food and drink being so attractive. Adding a sugar tax may stop us from buying these products or from buying so much of them. There is a reason for the saying ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’.

### **Viewbank Primary School**

**Mr GIULIANI** — Hi, my name is Remy Giuliani, and I strongly agree that a sugar tax should be implemented in Australia. I am sure that it would help reduce obesity and could also reduce type 2 diabetes. A sugar tax might have a negative effect on the sugar cane industry because of less money coming into their businesses, but it would be worth it for the health benefits. It would also cost Australian taxpayers less because they would not have to pay over \$216.7 million, which is the estimated cost for diabetes treatment. It is likely that this figure has increased since the research was done in 1994. In 2015 there were 16 400 deaths from diabetes, and 55 per cent of them were from type 2 diabetes. This shows that the consumption of sugar can do a lot of damage to people’s lives and to all of Australia.

Many people say that other countries have tried a sugar tax and it has not worked. However, in Mexico it had a positive difference on sugar consumption, and the tax was only on drinks. If the sugar tax was on all sugary foods, it could make a huge difference in sugar consumption if implemented in Australia.

Sugar taxes can change behaviours in companies and consumers. Firstly, in the last four years 20 countries started using a sugar tax, and for a lot of those countries it worked very well and may have led to a reduction in obesity. Then in the UK, before the tax was even introduced, big soft drink brands changed their drinks so they had less sugar because of the sugar tax. If Australia did the same and had a sugar tax, we could spend the money made on it on sports and on obesity treatment, and that would amplify the benefits. So that is why I believe that a sugar tax would be worthwhile in Australia. Thank you.

**Ms STELLA** — Good morning, everyone. I am Bianca, and I speak on behalf of everybody that I know, from students to teachers, when I say: I believe a sugar tax is not a step in the right direction. Australian consumers will still buy soft drinks with additional cost, and what is going to stop them from buying sugary foods instead? In Australia we have similar taxes on tobacco and alcohol, but even with a tax on them you never hear anyone saying that they stopped buying these products because costs are too high. Other countries have established sugar taxes, but it will not be Australia’s solution to obesity. Although Mexico faced a 6 per cent decrease in soft drink consumption in 2014, followed by an 8 per cent decrease the following year, there was a gradual increase afterwards in sales, and consumption is now back to pre-tax levels. There is little evidence that an increase in price of soft drinks nudges people into a healthier lifestyle. In fact David Littleproud, MP, made a great point when he said:

Slapping an extra 40 cents on ... a soft drink will not stop people drinking soft drinks, nor from buying a donut instead.

The benefits of a sugar tax are short term, and its results could be compared with a bandage or a bandaid. At the start it helps, but eventually it can only go so far until it needs to be removed. We do not need to charge money in order to stop Australians from eating unhealthy diets, and I agree when other politicians or people say that a tax is not necessary and that instead we should focus on healthier lifestyles and other options. We should consider what wiser decisions Australia should make and that in the future our solution is an educated one. That is where I end my point of view. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**The SPEAKER** — That concludes the first part of our program. In a moment we will have our first guest speaker. I have just a couple of reflections. I think from what I have heard a lot of research has been done. It is really similar to what we do when we are here in Parliament debating new laws: we look at both sides of the argument, we look at facts, we look at statistics, we look at how this affects people in their everyday lives. Nothing is ever black and white — there are always good arguments on both sides — and in the end somebody has actually got to make a decision as to what is the overall benefit, even though a decision you make might not help some other people and might be detrimental to them.

One of the really core ideas that a few of you have touched on, which is really important and is a big debate, is what is the role of government? Should government be setting lots and lots of rules that people have to follow? You have got to weigh that up against the personal choice that people have got. We are in a democracy, and

people have got the right to make decisions about what they eat and drink and what their state of health is, and you look at what the cost of that is to the wider community? You have really encompassed all of those ideas, and as I said, it has been very, very reflective of what we actually do here in Parliament. So well done to all of you and for the work that you put into your submissions. We will give all those speakers a round of applause.

*Delegates applauded.*

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**The SPEAKER** — Our first guest is Associate Professor Julian Rait, OAM, who is president of the Australian Medical Association Victoria. I will say a few words about Associate Professor Rait. He has had 25 years of clinical research and leadership experience and is determined to advocate to improve the safety, quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery in Victoria for patients, practitioners and the community. He joined the Australian Medical Association as a young graduate from Melbourne Medical School. He is an eye specialist and led the glaucoma unit at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital for 12 years — in fact there was something about glaucoma on the news last night; I have a great interest in glaucoma, which I will tell you about later — and understands the challenges faced by the public health sector. Associate Professor Rait was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for service to ophthalmology and the development of overseas aid earlier this year. Congratulations to him on that. I ask Associate Professor Rait to come up and speak to us.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — I might just do it from here because I have actually smuggled some sugar into Parliament today. I have smuggled some things just to illustrate a few points. I have got lots of Freddo Frogs, I have got 500 grams of sugar, I have got a piece of fruit, I have got some maple syrup — my daughter lives in Canada; she brought that to me. I have also got some honey, a muesli bar and some banana bread. These are all really just to illustrate that there is sugar in lots of things. Whether it is in chocolate, ice cream, yoghurts, sauces, ready-to-serve meals, sugar is really everywhere in our lives, and I agree with many of the speakers today that we eat too much. In fact the AMA, which I represent and which represents most of the doctors in this state, believes that a sugar tax is an important measure to improve public health, but it is in addition to other things, which I will explain later.

Interestingly, these are all very pure sugars that we have: honey — there is lots of fructose in that; and similarly in maple syrup; and this is sucrose, which is table sugar. Over the course of human development it has actually been quite interesting because the amount of sugar we have eaten has steadily increased. Who knows what this is? What is it? Sugar cane. That is right. When was sugar cane discovered? Does anyone know when they discovered sugar cane as a food? Does anyone know where sugar cane comes from?

**Ms COTTON** — Was it in ancient times? I am not quite sure from where, but I believe it was a very long time ago.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — Yes. It was about 10 000 years ago, and it actually came from New Guinea, because what happened way back then is that they were using it to fatten their pigs. Interestingly, they started to think, ‘Maybe it’s a good idea. We’ll try chewing on this ourselves’. So 10 000 years ago in Papua New Guinea to our north, or what is now Papua New Guinea, they realised that you actually could eat this sugar cane and chew on it and it was actually quite sweetening. They would also be able to put on weight, which of course in their community, where they have a scarcity of food, was actually quite of benefit. Humans evolved really where there was very little sugar at first. It was only 10 000 years ago that we discovered it. When did sugar granules become available? Do you know when this started to be processed? How long ago was that?

**Ms COTTON** — I believe it was in the 17th century.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — Correct. It was 300 years ago. What happens is that you actually get to crush up your sugar cane and you get a syrup. If you actually distil that syrup, you can get sugar granules, which become sucrose granules, which are in modern table sugar. But interestingly since that point our sugar consumption has gone up even further. It was at about that time, about 300 years ago, that doctors discovered there might be something amiss with too much sugar. In fact I do not know if anyone knows, but 300 years ago doctors diagnosed diabetes by tasting people’s urine. Can you believe that? I am glad we have moved on since that and have got blood tests to do that. It is something that I was never taught to do, thankfully.

Interestingly even a few hundred years before that, Chinese doctors knew about it too. Chinese doctors actually had a term for it, which simply translates to ‘sugar urine disease’. Three hundred years before doctors in Europe discovered it, doctors in China were aware that too much sugar sometimes could have consequences. Nowadays sugar, whether it is in food, drinks or everything else, plays a very major role in our diet. Obviously that was not always the case, as I said. Over a period of time we have increased from having, say, one of these a year to now consuming about 50 of these or 60 of these a year. That is over the period of just two or three centuries.

Over the course of the 20th century sugar intake rose dramatically, but before that, in the 19th century, it went up really because people invented things like chocolates, cakes and lollies. In the 20th century we invented refrigeration, and as a result of that we were able to keep soft drinks at home. Of course they were loaded with sugar too, so our consumption at home of sugary drinks ballooned, as did we. This is because we are all very much hardwired by evolution to find bitter tastes unsafe and sweet tastes safe. This is why it was mentioned earlier that it could be addictive — because we are actually hardwired through evolution to seek out sweet things, because generally they are safe things to eat, whereas bitter things are not.

Interestingly sugar has been shown to have similar effects to an addictive drug, triggering us to always want and need more, because it stimulates the pleasure centres of our brain when we get a lot of sugar. It has been recognised over the years that if you actually withdraw from sugar, sometimes you can have withdrawal symptoms just like you are withdrawing from a drug.

If you imagine our body is like a rocket ship or a car or something like that, it needs fuel — good petrol. If we do not have the right fuel, of course, we might not be able to drive very far, or fly very far if we are a rocket, but equally as a human being we might not be able to exercise and do well. Studies have shown that eating too much sugar can be bad for us, as has been mentioned. As an eye doctor I see a lot of diabetic eye disease. It would be very nice if we could reduce the prevalence of that. We would not see the complications and the need to treat so many patients with that, and we would not incur so many costs in the community as a result.

Interestingly a good question that was raised earlier was, ‘Is it better for us to have sugar in fruit or in a piece of cake?’. Who can answer that question for me?

**A MEMBER** — In fruit.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — Why is it better in fruit?

**A MEMBER** — Because it is natural sugar.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — That is right, and also there is one other reason that someone mentioned earlier. What is that?

**Ms COTTON** — Fruit has natural fibre.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — Correct. So in other words, unlike other sugars, because there is fibre mixed with it, it is absorbed more slowly. Therefore the sugar does not give us an immediate hit, so it gradually increases over time, which is much better for our bodies and for our physiology.

But let us just have a think about how much is in these foods. How much do you think is in a muesli bar? How many teaspoons of sugar do you think we have in that?

**A MEMBER** — Three.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — That is right. Three teaspoons of sugar are in that. How much do you think a chocky frog has? I have got a whole packet here. That probably does not count, but how about one chocky frog?

**A MEMBER** — One.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — No, about four or five. That is a lot. That is more than our daily requirement, just in one chocky frog. Obviously chocolate milk, apple juices and things like that have a lot, but I have also got something here which kind of surprised me when I was doing research. This is banana bread. How much is in banana bread?

**The SPEAKER** — Just before you answer, could you say your name? We want to know who is answering the questions.

**Ms EIBL** — I think there would be six, maybe.

**Assoc. Prof. RAIT** — There are nine teaspoons of sugar. Can you believe it? Compared to all the other things it is extraordinary. I did not know there were that many, but that is exactly what it is. We actually have a lot of sugar in these everyday foods, and it really is kind of a problem. As we have also heard, refined sugar has been linked to many diseases and health complications with really scary names. But all these problems really mean ultimately that you will not be able to run, you will not be able to play with your friends and you will get breathless if you walk or go up a hill. These are all the complications of the things that we have been talking about earlier.

Of course a little sugar cannot hurt you. A little bit of sugar in your diet is okay, along with protein, fat, minerals and vitamins. All those sorts of things make up a healthy diet. But the real trouble is that if you have too much of it — and regularly too much of it — it can be a complication, particularly if you do not have a healthy lifestyle and exercise as well. Food including sugar is here to fuel our bodies and is obviously for us to enjoy from time to time, but too much for too long can be a problem. That is why the World Health Organization reckons no more than about 10 per cent of our energy requirements should come from sugar each day. In fact probably 5 per cent is better. That is probably only about three or maybe four teaspoons of added sugar a day. You can see that just by having one Freddo Frog you blow your whole daily requirements in one go.

Let us just talk a little bit about a sugar tax just to explain our reasoning about that, because we have heard debates here today, and pros and cons. The idea of having a sugar tax on sweet drinks would increase their cost maybe by 20 per cent. Imagine if you had a Coke can or a Fanta can or something. It might cost \$4 or \$4.20 or something. It would mean that if you had a sugar tax, it would cost closer to \$5. The higher price means that people might buy less soft drinks and maybe choose something to drink with less sugar in it. Obviously this is based on the understanding that tobacco taxes have been effective in reducing the consumption of cigarettes.

Nowadays, Australia's Parliament does not hesitate to raise tobacco taxes. It did so last year. It will probably do so again this year and the next. At \$40 a packet, cigarettes in Australia are now amongst the most expensive example in the world. I think that is a great thing. Lifting the price of cigarettes has been hugely successful, along with other measures, in reducing the amount of smoking in Australia. In 1995, 24 per cent of Australians smoked. Nowadays that is around 13 per cent or 14 per cent, so that is an example of where there appears to be a correlation with the tax.

Similarly the World Health Organization, which some of you have quoted, believes that a sugary drinks tax would work much the same as tobacco taxes in reducing consumption and improving public health. It would work as a price signal to discourage use. I think it would also have positive effects, as we have heard, on health systems as a consequence of reductions in diabetes and other diseases.

Interestingly when I was at primary school, when I was your age, tobacco companies were deploying tactics not dissimilar to what we hear in arguments about the sugar tax. They deployed tactics to ridicule doctors who argued against cigarettes. They tried everything at that time, in the 1970s, to confuse politicians and the public about just how dangerous cigarettes were. Likewise, the sugary drink companies have tried to convince politicians on all sides to go against the prevailing wisdom, prevailing medical advice and public health opinion that a sugar tax is a good idea. In fact just to put it in perspective a leaked Australian Beverages Council report revealed that they were spending lots of money to keep sugar taxes off the table. It named key politicians that they had successfully lobbied, citing the support that they subsequently received.

However, doctors all over the world have said that there is a lot of evidence that a sugar tax would work to reduce the consumption particularly of sugar-sweetened drinks. We recommend adding a 20 per cent tax to sugar-sweetened beverages.

In fact following Mexico's lead in 2014, 30 countries, including most recently Thailand, Estonia, the Philippines, South Africa, parts of Spain and seven separate cities in the United States, have all introduced soft drink taxes. Since then sales of sugary drinks have seen a sustained drop of about 8 per cent per year in these cities and countries. The fall in consumption among poorer communities, which unfortunately have been the biggest consumers of sugar-sweetened drinks, has been even larger.

Thus if Australia introduced a 20 per cent price rise on sweet soft drinks — the so-called ‘sugar tax’ — it is estimated that the tax, as we have heard from one of the speakers over here, would raise about \$640 million annually. Moreover, what it would do is save billions of dollars of healthcare costs each year because of the prevention of diseases which are linked to too much sugar.

Despite recommendations by the World Health Organization and the National Health and Medical Research Council to limit the drinking of sugar-sweetened beverages, Australians continue to drink too many of these things. As we have heard, quite a number of us have sugar-sweetened drinks every day. Approximately 40 per cent of males and 30 per cent of females over two years of age consume sugar-sweetened drinks every day. In Australia, the growing evidence has led to increasing public support for a sugar tax. A recent poll showed that 53 per cent of Australians support a tax on sweetened soft drinks. So it is not just the Australian Medical Association, it is not just doctors, it is not just public health people. Countless others whose job it is to look after the health of Australians are in favour of a sugar tax.

I will end by saying that it is not just about a sugar tax. Obviously it is about other things as well. I am sure we will hear soon about the importance of exercise, the importance of having a healthy lifestyle and obviously having the right diet. But at the AMA we also believe that there should be tougher restrictions on junk food advertising. We should set targets to reformulate foods with less sugar. We should develop strategies to encourage exercise, particularly walking and cycling, and we should fund public health education campaigns to remind people of the perils of too much sugar.

The AMA and doctors fought vested interests for 40 years to establish that cigarettes were bad. Likewise, I ask that later today you do what is right for the public health of our community and support the introduction of a sugar tax in Australia.

*Delegates applauded.*

**The SPEAKER** — Thank you very much, Associate Professor Rait. You gave a lot of interesting facts and figures. Like any good teacher, you involved the students and you had some good materials there that really illustrated the point. That is really powerful and it is a good lesson. If you are trying to make a point to somebody, just give facts and figures. That is probably all you can do in this forum. But when you have got other opportunities to have a discussion or to persuade people, it is good to have concrete things that you can actually show them so that people understand and get the idea a lot more strongly.

**Sitting suspended 10.28 a.m. to 11.01 a.m.**

#### **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**The SPEAKER** — Thank you all for getting back here on time. I hope you had a nice morning tea. Was it a healthy morning tea? Yes or no, depending on what you had. I had an apple.

We have our next guest speaker, who is Simone Austin. Simone is the president of Sports Dietitians Australia, and I will read a little bit about her. Simone has a track record of success as an advanced sports dietitian working for the past 10 years at Hawthorn AFL football club and previously with the Australian men’s cricket team; Melbourne Storm, who I barrack for; and the Melbourne City, the Western Bulldogs and the Melbourne Rebels clubs. She works at Swisse Wellness and has recently been presenting with their ambassador chef, George Calombaris. She is the president of Sports Dietitians Australia and a media spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia. She has featured on television, radio, online and in print media. She is currently writing a book, which is titled *Eat Like an Athlete*. Simone is going to talk to us now. Could you please welcome Simone.

**Ms AUSTIN** — Thank you all for your presentations earlier today. There has been some fantastic research, and you have all obviously put lots of effort into it. It is not an easy topic to decide on one way or another, so I do not envy you having to decide that this afternoon.

I will give you some information, probably on both sides. I find it a difficult one to decide on — as to whether we should have a sugar tax or not. I certainly can see some benefits from it, but I also think we have to have a bigger plan and very much a multifaceted approach, like lots of you have spoken about.

One of the things I will talk to you about first is my journey. I have worked in elite sport for 25 years. I started at the Western Bulldogs back in the mid-1990s. I worked with the Australian cricket team for around seven years. I have worked in Rugby League, Rugby Union and at the Hawthorn Football Club. Over my time I have seen our use of sugar change considerably. Back in the earlier days we probably would have had snakes for energy. We would have used more sports drinks. But now we really only use sports drinks on game day in small amounts, and not really after training. We do not have lollies all the time. We certainly do not have any after training. There are none after a game. There might be a handful of them on the bench to use during a game.

And why is that? Because we do not need pure sugar on its own. We can have sugary foods like we have talked about — it could be fruit, it could be carbohydrates in bread or it might be sugar in milk — and they will give us the sugar we need for our muscles and for our brains, but they will also give us those added nutrients that we have talked about, like vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fibre and some of the food's protein as well. We want them to be quickly absorbed. They are pretty quickly absorbed when we are having a fairly ripe banana or maybe a bit of dried fruit or it might be a small amount of sports drink.

The only time probably that the players would have a full Gatorade bottle would be after a game, and not even all of them will do that. Some of them will go for milk. There is a bit of a misconception out there that we need to have sugary drinks when we are playing sport, whereas water is going to hydrate most of us most of the time. If you are doing a marathon, maybe you might need them.

The hard thing is that when we walk into a milk bar, a 7-Eleven or a convenience store or when we are at a sporting event, we look at all those sports drinks and all those sports drinks around there. They are in our faces, so what do we want to do? We want to buy them. The biggest consumers of those sports drinks are not athletes; they are somebody who just walks in thinking that they would like to be like an athlete, and even then, athletes do not really drink them anyway, so we do not need too many of them.

My biggest thing is that I would like to see them moved. Do not have them in those fridges. I think behaviour change is what we need to look at most. So we could have a tax on sugary drinks but if they are still in our faces, what is our brain going to tell us to do? It is probably going to ask us to open that fridge door and take out that drink and have it, because as lots of you have said, we are wired to have sugary things. They send a pleasure signal to our brains so we want them. But it is a bit of 'out of sight, out of mind'. If they are not there, if they are not the first thing you see when you open your fridge at home or when you are in the supermarket aisles or at a sporting venue, then you are less likely to buy them no matter what the price.

Some of the hospitals in Melbourne, a couple of them, have tried this. They have tried getting people to make that behaviour change by making the healthy choice the easy choice. So if you walk into one of the hospitals in Melbourne, you do not see the sports drinks, you do not see the soft drinks there. If you want them, you need to ask for them. It is the same with the fried foods and the salads. We moved things around so that the salads are what you first see at the buffet. The fried foods are either there in small amounts or not there at all. So if they are not there and the healthy foods and the healthy drinks are the ones you are faced with, you are much more likely to make that change. So it is not just about the price.

But on the price, could we make water available? So again if I use the idea of the footballers, we have ice-cold water ready for the players. There are big containers. They might say Gatorade on the outside but lots of them have water inside so that players can easily pour that. It is ready and waiting for them. It is in those cups. I make the healthy choice the easy choice.

For yourselves at home in your drink bottles, what you take to sport needs to be water. Maybe if we subsidise the water and put up the price of the soft drinks so there is a big difference, that might make a change. When I work in private practice I say, 'Let's take the water to the event you are going to', or, 'Let's buy the water'. But they say, 'If I'm going to spend my money, I don't want to buy water. I can get that from a tap. I want to buy something that I think is value for my money, so I'm going to buy the sports drink or the soft drink'. They are not necessarily thinking of their health. But if I make a big difference and I make the water — I don't know — \$1.50 and I put a tax on the soft drink and it is \$3.50, maybe they will see a difference in the value.

People need to see value for money in what they are going to buy. We then need to get them to think that health is important so what they spend their money on is important. It is important to your health, and in the long term it is actually more effective, if you spend that couple of dollars on that bottle of water because you will not then

need to go to the doctor or the dietitian or the physio or the hospital or to buy your medicine. How we get those messages across is quite difficult.

If we have a sugar tax, I would really want to see some sort of guarantee on how that money is going to be spent. Will it be spent on educating children not to have soft drink in their fridge all the time, that it is a party-type food? Will it be helping canteens to have healthier food choices in their fruit salads or salad sandwiches or those other options that are going to be maybe a bit more expensive to have in the canteen and to purchase? Can we subsidise those somehow? Can we have improved access to allied health services? Research shows that if you have got someone, a coach, to support you along the way, you can make those behaviour changes, but a one-off talk from a dietitian or someone coming to your classroom is probably not enough for behaviour change. Can we have someone in there that comes regularly, or can we support people to go and see those health professionals on a regular basis to coach you to make that behaviour change?

Who would the tax hit? I know some of you talked about, ‘Will it hit the people who maybe have less money to spend?’, and if they are spending more on the sugary drinks, have they then got less to spend on the foods we would like them to eat — the nourishing foods. I have a feeling it might, because I think about lots of the people who do buy the sugary drinks on a regular basis, and it often is people who have less money, so therefore we need the education program in there and again that subsidy on the drinks that are healthy. The milk or the water are probably the two best drinks I can think of. Plain milk is actually the best sports drink. It has electrolytes, it has carbohydrate and it has protein. Can we subsidise that for kids in sport? Could we have your sport sponsored by milk rather than by a fast-food chain or by a sports drink company or by a soft drink company? How can we help that come along?

When I was in Europe a few years ago I saw in Rome there were places to have drinks; there were fountains everywhere. Water was easily accessible and there were not people walking around with cans of soft drink, cans of sports drink and other things like that. We have some water fountains here but not a lot. We need more. They need to be cleaned, they need to be hygienic and they need to be working, so when you are at school please do not stick a stick in the taps so the water fountain does not work. I remember being a bit of a nazi at my children’s primary school about how can you get them to drink water if half of the water fountains do not work, or they bring up a little bit like that and you have got to put your mouth near where everyone else’s has been and you do not want to do that because they have got germs — boy germs, girl germs; all those sorts of germs. These things have to be working. We cannot expect people to drink water if it is not easily accessible.

If you carry a water bottle, wash it. I remember — and I will not tell you which sporting team it is — a team that had their water bottles but did not dry them, did not clean them and they had mould. We had million-dollar players at some of these places drinking from mouldy water bottles some time ago. Even if you do not have sugar in it, we want drink bottles, but again they need to be cheap and you need to be able to have them accessible. You need to have them in school, but you also need to be able to wash them well. You only need to wash them with soap and water and a brush at home and air dry them. Again, that is about making water accessible for everyone to have.

But it is freedom of choice, and people can drink what they want. I went to a soft drink beverage forum that they held for dietitians. Can you believe that? A roomful of dietitians with one of those beverage companies. I did not want to be seen there, so I made sure there was not going to be any media and that they were not going to put my name on anything to say that I was there. But I wanted to go because I wanted them to make some change. When they told me that they thought they were making change, I said, ‘While you still sell 600 ml drink bottles, you’re not making change’. They said, ‘Oh, but that’s two serves’. I said, ‘Who stops at half of a 600 ml bottle?’. How many of you would stop drinking it if you bought a 600 ml bottle and leave half for later? Yes, no-one — or one or two people. That is not many people. So even changing the serving size of soft drink can help. It should be more like what you get on an aeroplane, a small 250 ml can, because we can all enjoy it sometimes. People understand that 1 litre or 1.25 litres is more than one serve, but very rarely would you stop at 600 ml. So I think we need to get them on board to make changes as well, because soft drink consumption is reducing now, which is fantastic. They are scared, so we need to put pressure on them that they will still make some sales, but they need to make some changes to how they do them.

They will reformulate, like the health star rating. Cereal companies in particular have reformulated to try and reduce sugar. Soft drink companies will reformulate to try and reduce sugar. That is great, but not if they pack it

with artificial sweetener. Again we need to have some assurance from some of the companies that they are not going to make those sorts of changes.

Dentists would love not to have sports drinks or soft drinks, and really so would I in many cases. If I could remove sports drinks and soft drinks, I probably would. But again it is people's choice. But they are non-nutritive and they are particularly bad for dental health, and I think that is actually one of our biggest health problems. If you cannot chew properly, then you cannot bite into an apple, you cannot eat good whole grains, you cannot eat nuts, you cannot eat cereals and you cannot eat meat. That is not just the elderly people in nursing homes. Young people who have poor dentition cannot eat those healthy foods, so I do think we need to reduce soft drink consumption, whether that is from a sugar tax or not, to actually improve our dental health so we can eat those foods to keep longevity of health. The people I do visit in a nursing home that have poor dentition cannot eat these foods, and then we have problems with — you do not want to talk about it — constipation and bowel health, and they cannot eat meat, so then they have trouble with iron deficiency. So it is really important in terms of a dental health issue.

We should intuitively know about eating and drinking. We should know when to stop, but that is easier said than done. You think about if you are a party and you have had a drink of lemonade or something that you like, you might go back for another one because it tasted pretty good. It is hard to stop when you start having some sugar. So in lots of ways the easiest way is not to have it in our daily diets; it is again to make that water easily accessible for us to have most of the time. But we need to educate people about that. It took me a while to educate even the sportspeople about the fact that, no, you do not need to have a sports drink all the time. You can come off the track and you can go and eat. That is how you will get your electrolytes, that is how you will get your carbohydrate and that is how you will get your protein — and it will be pretty quickly into your system.

So we need positive nutrition messages about what we can eat, not always about what we cannot. When you cannot have something, what do you want? You want it more. You are not allowed to go through that door there. What would you want to do? You probably did not even notice there is a door there until I told you you cannot go through it. Now what do you want to do? You want to go through that door. 'Don't jump in that puddle!'. 'Oh! I didn't even notice there was a puddle, but now it's there I really want to jump in it'. 'Don't have that soft drink. It's bad for you', so what do you want to have? You probably want to have the soft drink.

So if we are telling people they cannot have things, they focus on that. No-one wants to be told what to do. You do not want me telling you not to have it, you do not want to be told by your parents and you do not want to be told by your teachers. I do not want to be told by my children, and I still do not want to be told by my mum. We need to be able to give people positive messages about food and what we eat. All foods are okay in certain amounts. Now, that might sound boring, but it is true. One soft drink now and again — every two or three weeks — is not going to hurt you, but one every day is.

Having nutrition messages, as some of you brought up, from dietitians and nutritionists coming to schools would help us think about what we should eat every day for our brains. We should be having fruit. We should be having whole grains over white breads, because we are a country with lots of bowel cancer. We should be having protein sources like lean meats and fish or, if we are vegetarian, tofu. We could be having eggs or other sources. So what should I include in my diet every day? Tick that off your list rather than just looking up what you cannot.

I remember at one of my kids' school parties we did homemade pizzas and the kids loved it; we did spaghetti bolognese, and they loved it; and we then did a cupcake party. They also loved that, but what we were having was in moderation. So we can have bits of everything but focus on what we can have and focus on spending dollars — and public health dollars — on positive health messages.

A tax on alcohol and a tax on cigarettes we touched on. Yes, it may have reduced consumption — you do not eat cigarettes, but smoking, whichever — however, is it that or is it other public health messages? I think it has got to be a combination of both. People certainly drink too much still in Australia. Binge drinking is still a huge problem with the young. Again, it is not just taxes but education about alcohol and drinking that is needed, because we need both of those together.

My thoughts and my closing remarks are that the sugar tax could be part of it, but certainly not alone. We need to change the size of a serving. We need to change the positioning of soft drink in our shops, in our

supermarkets and in our fridges at home, and we need to have positive nutrition messages about what we can be eating, rather than always what we cannot be eating. Thank you.

*Delegates applauded.*

**The SPEAKER** — Thanks very much, Simone. I noticed a lot of people taking notes too, so that will help your arguments and help form your thoughts about which way you are going to be voting after your workshops, which will take you through to lunchtime at 12.30, and then we are back in here at 1.15 p.m.

**Sitting suspended 11.18 a.m. until 1.18 p.m.**

## **REPORTING SESSION**

*Moving and debate of motions*

**The SPEAKER** — For the next half-hour a spokesperson from each group will stand at their nearest microphone and summarise the group's findings. You will have 3 minutes. When you do come to the microphone, could you please once again clearly say your name and your school. Do not rush that bit. It is most important so that you get to see a copy of what you said. I am not going to do it in order. I will just surprise you and keep you on your toes. The spokesperson from group 4, please stand up.

### **Group 4**

**Mr McLEAN** — I am Hudson McLean, and I am from Greensborough Primary School. Before I begin I would just like to on behalf of group 4 thank all of Parliament for giving us the privilege to come here today and share ideas and opinions on this topic. We are in favour of this topic. To start off, making a sugar tax would mean lots of people consuming less sugar, because it would be more expensive and they would realise not to buy it, and the tax could save 1600 lives each year. Then the extra money could be used for Auskick, maybe dance groups or health programs to help in hospitals. It could save \$400 million each year, which would go towards health programs. You can still get natural sugars from fruits, so you can still get the sensation of having sugar but being healthy at the same time.

### **Group 7**

**Ms SHORT** — I am Georgia Short, and I am from Hazel Glen College. Group 7 is against the sugar tax, because it all comes down to one reason: choice. So unless the government would like to put a tax on choice, there should not be a tax. People can still choose to buy the sugary or unhealthy items because they are available to them, so they can choose whether to spend their money on the unhealthy drink or food. Companies will be affected by the sugar tax, because their sales will decrease. Sugar is addictive, so just raising the price by 20 per cent will not make a big impact, so it will have to be raised further. In conclusion, the sugar tax should not be implemented in Australia because it really should not be needed. People need to choose the right option.

### **Group 1**

**Mr MARCHIONE** — I am James, and I am from St Joseph's School, Brunswick West. We in group 1 are all very grateful that we were able to take part in this. We found this a hard topic to decide on which side we were going to take, but in the end we decided that it was only fair and right to have a sugar tax implemented. A sugar tax should be implemented because sugar can cause type 2 diabetes, obesity and many more diseases that can harm many people. Not only should we introduce a sugar tax by itself; we need to accompany it with excess implements. Education is one of the many resources that could accompany this sugar tax in this nation. Many people in Australia do not know the effects sugar has on us. Pretty much it is a silent offender that harms many, many people around Australia.

A sugar tax can seriously affect one's eating habits. It could leave people looking healthier and happier just from a beneficial no-sugar diet. Now, we want to introduce a labelling system based on the number of teaspoons of sugar that there are in a product. We will have green, yellow and red labels. This will be very similar to the already implemented health star rating that is on many products in Australia. This money will be raised from all the money that is going to be income from a sugar tax. We do not think that a sugar tax can be the only thing that will help this nation. We need further resources to help. This needs to happen because it will save 600 lives,

4400 heart attacks and 1100 strokes. Not just you need to listen to this; we need the whole nation to take our opinion on board. Thank you.

### **Group 9**

**Mr TAN** — I am Brandon from Cairnlea Park Primary School, and I am going to jump right into it. Introducing a sugar tax would be beneficial to our country as it could make people reduce the amount of sugar they buy to keep their costs down. Not only that, but they would also reduce how much the government spends on health because people would consume less sugar, improving everyone's health condition.

It is harder, or literally impossible, to stop all sugar from being sold, so let us take the money that is collected from the taxes and put it towards funding such as for education, health services et cetera. Australia does not exactly have the healthiest people. In fact it is actually home to quite a lot of obese people. Less sugar consumption could contribute to lowering that amount. Thank you.

### **Group 5**

**Ms AL SALEM** — I am Marwa, and I am from Harvest Home Primary School. I am representing group 5. We decided that we are against a tax, because as a group we think there are more efficient ways to solve the sugar problem. We can all say that a sugar tax is not enough on its own; we need better education to support Australians to consume less sugary drinks. Raising the prices for people who regularly drink, no matter what the price is, will not help much.

Even though a sugar tax is a good idea for many people, we believe that raising the price would hurt businesses that make the drinks. They say their drinks are not the only things that contribute to obesity or many of the other major health problems in Australia. So in conclusion we believe that Australia should not implement a sugar tax because we believe that Australians should make their own choices and not be controlled. Thank you.

### **Group 10**

**Mr KRISHNA** — I am Nandan Krishna from Barton Primary School, and I am speaking on behalf of group 10. Our group is against a sugar tax. The fact is that parents should be strictly responsible for their child's diet. The government should not be responsible for trying to take action on this; they are allowed to eat what they want to eat, or they might be really unhealthy.

Secondly, some people with diabetes that have low sugar levels need sugar, so when they buy it they will be taxed. They already have to pay for their treatments, so now if there were a tax on sugar they would have to pay more and more. Furthermore, people are addicted to sugar, so a tax would not do much. Since it is only around 20 per cent, they will keep buying it. How many times have you had one slice of a cake but keep wanting more, even though your parents might tell you not to? So it is really hard for people to try to stop — like cigarettes.

In conclusion, there are much better alternatives than putting a tax on sugar, like education limitations. Like nutritionists having to come to school to teach people what they need to eat, instead of what they want to eat, so that children now and in the future can have a better future. Thank you.

### **Group 2**

**Mr HENDERSON-DRIFE** — I am Max Henderson-Drife. I am speaking on behalf of group 2, and I am from Clunes Primary School. Our group believes that a sugar tax would not make a difference to Australian society nor benefit daily life because, one, people will still buy sugary drinks and food, which will result in poverty. Taxes do not bring in a lot of money, and even with these taxes Australia will still remain the fifth most obese country in the world.

Two, we believe that education would be a better solution than tax because teaching people would be stronger than taxing them. Three, we believe that promoting sugar as unhealthy with ads and other things that would help promote it as bad would soon change people's minds, and taxing them would not help them learn.

Four, we believe that people have the right to make decisions, voice their opinion and buy the food and drinks they want. If they want to make changes to their diet, then they will. So in conclusion, we believe that teaching is more powerful than taxing and a sugar tax is not a good idea.

**The SPEAKER** — That was a good slogan: ‘Teaching is more important than taxing’. I must remember that.

### Group 6

**Mr VIEGAS** — Hi, I am Rodrigo, and I am from Rowville Primary School. I am the spokesperson for group 6. Our point of view is that the sugar tax should not be of use in Australia. It might be beneficial for some of the population, but what about the other population, like the people who suffer from type 2 diabetes and farmers that grow sugar cane? So the sugar tax is not great, even if they are obese people. It is not our responsibility for what they consume. Did you know that the lower part of the wealth spectrum pays 5 per cent more than the wealthier part pays? Also, people do not listen when dietitians try to educate them. Thank you for listening to group 6’s idea.

### Group 3

**Ms MADDUMA GAMAGE** — Good afternoon. My name is Ms Omindi Madduma Gamage. I am from Mount Ridley P–12 College, and I am presenting on behalf of group 3. We personally believe that sugar taxes need to be introduced. We can slash the obesity epidemic that is currently occurring. We can do this by putting the money acquired through the tax price on sugary foods and drinks — we can pump the funds back into Australian health services to assist with changing individual behaviour and providing positive health messages to society.

Secondly, with this, rather than curing we can start preventing associated diseases that are heavily linked to the intake of artificial sugary foods and drinks. Like I have previously mentioned, we as a community can deter the population from consuming sugary drinks and foods. We can do this by not only introducing the tax but also getting the funds and then implementing quality education in schools. We can save our younger generation from diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and mental health issues, and in turn this will increase the quality of life for the younger generations. Lastly, if people are deterred by the tax, it will boost productivity in local products, with the support of local farmers in our society.

### Group 8

**Ms LI** — I am Audrey Li from Footscray West Primary School, and I am representing group 8. We were not all in favour of the idea of having to conduct a sugar tax. Just because Australia is one of the most obese countries in the world does not mean that we have to have a sugar tax. People still have the right to make their own decisions. It could also help businesses and lead to other daily foods being taxed. Sugar taxes will prevent people from getting many jobs. This will become worse for people, who will be continuously dependent on the government’s money.

## SOAPBOX

**The SPEAKER** — All the groups have reported back. It is interesting, there has been a bit of a swing against the tax. We will see where the vote ends up when we do the vote. What we have got now is this section we call the soapbox. We are a bit early, but we may give the opportunity for people to speak a bit longer or have more people speak. You get 2 minutes to get up and talk about your view, especially if you did not have the opportunity to either be one of the speakers at the start of the day or one of the people who reported back. So if you have not had a turn, I will probably prefer you. I will probably have forgotten who spoke this morning, but anyway, we will see how we go.

Soapbox is a good idea. We have something similar at Parliament. Every day we have a thing called members statements, so 20 members get 90 seconds each just to speak about whatever they want. It really ranges. Just taking a step back, when we make speeches in Parliament, we are not allowed to read our speeches. We have notes. You refer to your notes and you actually talk to the Speaker and speak and debate, rather than read something. But when we have members statements, because people have only got 90 seconds, they actually read very quickly and try to get as much as possible in it, and they maybe raise three separate issues.

A member might get up and say, ‘I was out at my local primary school talking to the grade 5s and 6s about democracy. The school captains’ — you give their names — ‘welcomed me, and the children asked some great questions’. They might then talk about a new policy that has been announced — they might be for or against

it — or they may talk about an issue in their electorate, about a road that might need repairing or a beach that might need cleaning, whatever it might be. So members have a soapbox. It gives them an opportunity to say it to the Parliament and to have it actually put into *Hansard*, onto the public record, so they can go back to their community and say, ‘I raised this issue in Parliament’.

We have two other things as well where we can raise issues. We have what we call constituency questions. After question time, 10 members get just a minute to actually ask a question of the minister. You have got to ask who, what, when, where or how — that sort of question. You do not get an answer straightaway, but the minister has to respond, I think, within 30 days — a written answer. You can say, ‘My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: when will Dixon Street repairs be finished?’. You are asking for some factual information.

At the end of the day we have what we call the adjournment debate, so usually in our house it is at 7 o’clock at night. Ten members have up to 3 minutes each to ask an action of the minister. You have got to say, ‘I would like the minister for the environment to investigate the pollution in our local stream and report back to me on what they are going to do about it’. You have to ask for an action, and the minister again has to respond.

So we get a few soapbox opportunities in here as well as debating laws. For example, if we were debating a law about whether we would actually have a sugar tax, that is a longer part of the day. When we speak on bills and propose laws, the first speaker has up to half an hour to speak about it, and everyone after that has 10 minutes. Then we may or may not have a vote at the end, and I will talk about that when we have our vote.

Enough from me. It is time for the soapbox. We will do it the old-fashioned way. In Parliament you just get to your feet, and I will point to you because I do not know all your names. If I point to you and you are the lucky person that has got 2 minutes — or up to 2 minutes — please say your name and your school, and you will have 2 minutes.

**Ms COTTON** — Is it about any issue, or is it just about the sugar tax?

**The SPEAKER** — I will just check on that. Good question. It is about the issue.

**Ms THORPE** — Does it have to be a who, what, where or when?

**The SPEAKER** — No, you can just say what you want.

**Ms THORPE** — My name is Jenna Thorpe, and I am representing Rutherglen Primary School. I think we should not have a sugar tax because, like a lot of people said in the keynote speeches — the people who were speaking for — people will not stop drinking the drinks that are raising money. But I think we should not, because all of you who said that do not have any evidence that that will happen. So I think we should not have a sugar tax, and I think we should just get people to come to schools and educate, and parents to educate children, not to eat the bad things. If we have a sugar tax it might really not do anything.

**The SPEAKER** — That was the government side. What I might do is go from the government side to the opposition side. Somebody from the opposition side stand up.

**Ms COTTON** — I am Maya Cotton, and I am representing Ivanhoe Primary School. I believe that there should be a sugar tax, but I do not believe it will do anything without support from other approaches. I believe that research should be done to see what education is key. Most people here I believe agree that education is key. Ms Austin decided that positive education was key, and I completely agree with that. But a sugar tax will not be effective unless we have other approaches. I believe research should be done to see what approach is best. I believe the government should invest in research to decide what approach in education is best.

Children can be contrary, so if you say, ‘You should eat apples and not lollies’, they are probably going to eat lollies and, just because you said to eat apples, cut apples out of their diet. I have a friend who is like that: ‘Let’s play something completely different’; ‘Okay, let’s do something else’.

I was part of group 2, where the idea of a labelling system came up, and I think that is a brilliant idea. I am very sorry, I forgot who suggested it, but whoever it is, well done. That is my view, and I hope it has enlightened you in some way.

**Mr DWYER** — My name is Freddie Dwyer, and I speak for St Thomas More. I think that before we have a vote we should think if we have a sugar tax, where should the money go? Also we should base the sugar tax on tobacco, which we have done, because it is kind of like the same situation. For example, maybe change the packaging because, if bright colours will make you feel happy, you will want to go buy that.

**Ms EDELSTEIN** — I am Kiera Edelstein from Bialik College. As Ms Austin said, when you walk into a room or walk into a shop that has bright colours and bright things in your face, you are immediately going to be drawn to them. It is in your face, and it is sweet and your mind is drawn to it. So on the one hand we do want to be positive and we do want to be putting forward things that we should be having, not what we should not be having. But maybe we can look at that as evidence. If there is something in your face and you are immediately drawn to it, are we going to publicise that there is a sugar tax? If we do decide to implement it, are we going to say, ‘This is why’, and are we going to publicise it and make it big and in people’s faces so they remember, just like if they were to be buying a drink?

**Mr HUGHAN** — I am Nate Hughan, and I am representing Berwick Fields. I definitely agree that we should have a sugar tax. I also definitely agree with the keynote speakers, who said that when you walk into a shop the first thing you see are energy drinks and sports drinks and you are obviously drawn to them. I think that is just horrible. We should have more water and healthy foods there.

Also the Australian Bureau of Statistics says that just over half — 52 per cent — of free sugars in your diet come from beverages, so soft drinks, which is horrible. It should be more water and just other things like that. The intake of free sugars were highest among teenage males aged 14 to 18 years — this is also coming from the Australian Bureau of Statistics — who consume an average of 92 grams of sugar per day, which equates to about 20 teaspoons, which is way above the recommended dose. The top 10 percent of 14 to 18-year-olds were estimated to usually consume at least 160 grams of sugar per day, or 38 teaspoons, which is completely disgusting. It is horrible. That is like drinking two entire Coke bottles! Anyway, I do believe that there should be a sugar tax because it would definitely help. It would raise \$500 million a year, which could be used to fund education on the effects of sugar. That is my point of view.

**Ms SANELLI** — What I think we need is a motivation — something to send us in the right direction. We need something that will scream in the victim’s ear and say, ‘Listen up. You will go outside and you will exercise. You will start having a healthy diet’, and what I think the motivation should be is children. You see, we have been doing a unit on health this term, and I think that is great, but there are some problems with this. Firstly, we usually integrate it in the afternoon after you have had lunch and everyone is tired. Everyone has just had lunch. They are exhausted — either that or they are just drained — so no-one really pays attention. The only thing on their mind is getting out of school, freedom or seeing their dog or something. That is what they are thinking about. They are not focusing on the topic so they are not thinking about what they should be thinking about.

What we should do is put it earlier in the day so that people think about it, they voice their opinions and then people start thinking and talking about it. What I think the teachers should do is tell the students in a different way, because even if it is in the morning, students are still going to get bored if you are just hammering them with facts. We need to do it in a fun way, like implement a game into it or something.

Also, if the kids learn something, then they will tell that to their parents, and if their parents are struggling, then they will listen to that information, because it is from their children. Of course they would listen to it! So if we can feed information to the children, then they will pass it on to anyone who is obese or suffering and then they might take the opportunity to cure themselves.

**Mr CHERUKARA-MATHEW** — Before I came here today I thought that a sugar tax was a brilliant idea and that you should definitely have it. With so many obese and overweight children and adults in Australia, the sugar tax is just a brilliant idea to help them stop eating so much sugar. Then I realised that there are other ways apart from a sugar tax to help people. Education is one way. You could teach one generation and then if that generation knows how to cut down on sugar, then the next generation and the next generation will know how to cut down on sugar. So basically the sugar tax alone will not help with the sugar problem we have in Australia. So I think that we should definitely have approaches other than the sugar tax.

**Ms BAM** — I am currently on the fence about the sugar tax because my mum works at a weight loss clinic with her best friend. With Gatorade, I have asked my mum for it a few times and she has said no, because

personally we actually need six bottles of water each day to be completely good. For us kids it is probably two or three, but for adults it is six. With water, like they said, everything is right in your face. You are not going to be able to do it. Also, we learn really fun stuff, but I agree that we need more gaming to learn about stuff, because like they said, if we just get hammered with facts, we are not really going to want to do anything. We have all this advanced technology. Why not use it to learn about the proper stuff that we need?

**The SPEAKER** — I hope all the teachers are listening to how to teach better. That is good.

**Ms SPORCIC** — At the shops, like Woolworths, Coles, IGA or all those stores, when you are exiting through the cash register, normally you notice a lot of lollipops and candy. We should prevent that from being at the outer part, because it is targeting kids who go, ‘Oh, Mummy, can I get this? Oh, Daddy, can I get that?’. If you were to stop that being there and maybe put fruit there instead, it would probably cut down on all those extra sugars that people consume.

**Ms McCALL** — At the start, I was for the sugar tax. I thought that it would be healthy for Australia and all that. But now I am hearing a lot of good ideas for the against side. I believe it should not be applied to Australia because diabetic people need sugar if they get low blood sugar or stuff like that. Thank you. That is all I have.

**Mr GRIFFIN** — I am Tim Griffin, and I am from St Joseph’s in Chelsea. I came in today and I was a bit both-sided on the topic, but I am coming out really against it. There are some simple things that the government could do that will not waste any money really, and it is all to do with advertising. If you watch TV now there is a Hungry Jack’s ad that has a classic 1990s song. That draws in customers, so fast food for advertisers is cheap, fun and affordable. It is a fact that kids will actually watched 1100 junk food ads this year, which is an alarming number. Fruit and vegetables can be advertised on TV, but that is very unappealing.

One thing that Woolies and all the supermarkets do now is put the common items at the back of the store, so you have to walk past all the lollies and sugary foods, and you can grab them on the way to getting the things you want. Quite often you go in for bread and milk and come out with a packet of Tic Tacs. Thank you.

**Mr COOPER** — I am Taj Cooper from Foster Primary School. I believe that there should not be a sugar tax because I feel there are other ways around it. Education is a big one, not only using education at school but finding fun ways to do it — things like, say, using video gaming or sport to get the message across. Also with sport you need a drink of some sort, but you do not want to have too much of it, because then it becomes a problem and you get obese.

**Ms KAUR-BAJWA** — My name is Sukhjan, and I am from St John Vianney’s school. In the beginning I thought that there should be a sugar tax, but now my mind has changed, because I think that it is not the best alternative. Instead we should educate people. We need other alternatives. We can also reduce serving sizes, because people can still buy more and the government will just feed on their bad health. We should not do this; instead we should attract people to healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables. We are earning money because people are more attracted to sugary drinks.

**Ms CURSIO** — I am Micah Cursio from Footscray West Primary School. I walked into Parliament today thinking that the sugar tax was a brilliant idea that would benefit plenty of people and would be amazing. But now after hearing everyone’s opinions I think my mind has changed, and now I believe that the sugar tax is not a great idea. But we can still do other things to help people. Maybe if we lowered the price of healthier items, or foods, and maybe kept the other ones the same, it would still make a difference, so people would go for the cheaper things. Also, if we put a label on foods that say how much sugar they have or just a label symbolising ‘This is too much sugar for you’, then people would look at it more and go, ‘Oh, this isn’t going to be healthy for me’.

**Ms ROBERTSON** — I am Erin Robertson from St Anthony’s primary in Lara. I am against a sugar tax being introduced because I think that the people that are financially challenged have to buy unhealthy things because they are their cheapest option. Their attitudes will not change if the sugary options are taxed. They will not know any better and will just keep on buying the unhealthy things, and then they will have to come to the government for money because they will be broke. I think that instead of putting on a tax we should spend money on educating people not to buy the unhealthy foods — the unhealthy options. I think that is a better use of the government’s money. Thank you.

**Ms AL SALEM** — I am Marwa from Harvest Home primary. There are pros and cons on both sides, but I think I am going to be for, because I have heard a lot of people using the word ‘educating’ and saying they were going to educate people to eat healthier food. But I do not think that is going to work, because when you walk around the streets you do not see many obese kids, and if you do not learn at a young age, you are probably going to slacken off. So if you are an adult and you try to be healthier, you are probably going to slacken off after a few weeks, because you are going to think that it is not important any more. So I think putting on a sugar tax would be worth it.

**Ms KHAN** — My name is Eliza, and I am from Al-Taqwa. I came into the Parliament really, really against not putting on a sugar tax. I was for it, and I thought it had more pros than cons. But after hearing everyone’s opinions — everyone had really strong evidence — as Ms Austin said, we need to sponsor milk and water, not fizzy drinks. So when you go somewhere like the MCG, on the ground you would see Gatorade or Coca-Cola. You would not see milk or water. That is just impossible. We need to raise awareness for future generations, because as students we need to step it up. We need to tell everyone, we need to raise awareness of what it is, but we need to do it in a positive way. If you just smash it in their face and say, ‘Okay, this is this, that is that. You have to listen. You have to do that’, they will not do it. They will just slack off, because e kids.

Even with advertisements, when you go to a shop you see lots of advertisements, but you never see them for healthy food. It is mainly Hungry Jack’s, KFC and McDonald’s. It is all those drinks — the \$1 Frozen Coke at McDonald’s. You always see that, but you would not see natural fruits or anything to do with that. Maybe we need to tell the government to ask these companies to stop making these types of advertisement, and this has already been talked about. We need to tell them to stop doing that.

**Ms OENNING** — I think that improving the public health of Australia should be one of the first priorities of the country, but it is not. There is no nutritional value in unnatural sugary products. Obese people in our country can still have a happy, healthy life if we act on it now. Prevention is better than cure. More and more people are getting obese and it needs to stop. If we want happy, healthy citizens in our country, then it is the responsibility of our government and the food industry to introduce a sugar tax. Children are relying on adults for their future, and even if they take away the sugary products from counters, it would not matter because children and adults would still go looking for them in the aisles. But if they see that the prices have changed, just like fruits — in the winter some fruits are more expensive because they are not grown in that season, but in the summer they are less expensive. If the sugary products are more expensive, then it will be better because they will go looking for it, they will see the price and they will think to themselves, ‘I don’t want this. I don’t want to spend my money on this’.

**Mr BEATTIE** — The sugar tax has been everywhere. It has been to Britain, it has been to many other countries; everywhere it has been it has worked. Then the government decides to put a sugar tax on today. It has been happening for a while. Obesity has just been growing and growing and growing, then the government decides to do it. I reckon Australia should have a sugar tax because it is just crazy how many obese people there are. The money that will be there will go to the Australian health department, I think it is, and it will go towards diabetes and heart disease. So something that you think should not be done is going towards something that is very good.

**Ms SMITH** — This was a difficult topic because, let us face it, if we had a sugar tax of about 20 per cent, what would happen? Well, a \$2.50 drink would cost \$3. Is this the massive change we want to see? No. But if we were educated on why this tax should be implemented, then maybe we would see a difference. My point is that having a small tax is not going to help us. But telling people why there is a tax will. If I told you sugar is unhealthy, would you stop eating it? But what if I said sugar causes type 2 diabetes, and what if I told you that last year there were 4400 amputations in Australia because of it? Do we want a future of obese humans? Do we want a future of sick humans? You cannot just tell us there is a tax; tell us why.

**Ms WILLIAMS** — I am actually in the middle of whether or not we should have a sugar tax, because one side of me is saying, ‘This would be better. It will make people change their minds’, but the other part of me is saying, ‘How is it going to change them? What part of this is going to make people who are really wealthy and make a big amount of money change their minds about the way they eat?’. I think that we should have a sugar tax, but we should also stop things like the KFC and Hungry Jack’s ads and replace them with positive messages about fruits and vegetables and how they can improve our future. Then maybe we would have a better life and we would not be one of the most obese countries, with diabetes and everything. It would just make life

a whole lot better. Just take plastic bags, for example. What did we do to get rid of them? We voted for it and we worked together to get rid of them. I think that if we work together this time, we will be able to get rid of all the obesity and diabetes.

I would like to ask everyone in this room a question: would getting a sugar tax change your opinion on the way that you look at your sugary foods? Would it make you want to stop eating lollipops or Skittles or Mars bars? I would not think so. For me, it would not change my mind. But if I saw how great fruits and vegetables were, I would think, 'Hey, maybe this is the way I want to live my life. Maybe this would make me better. Maybe this would make me a better person. Maybe it would help me'. That is the reason I think we should have a sugar tax, but not only that, we should make an impact and stop doing things like just saying, 'Oh, this is really great. Maybe if you get KFC, you will be a better person. It will make you more energetic; it won't make you fat'.

**Ms SHORT** — I am Georgia Short, and I am from Hazel Glen. I am against the sugar tax because many people have mentioned that it can harm your body — like you may get diabetes and you may get an issue. I have thought of this, and I said, 'Oh! So if we can do that to stop people from becoming obese and getting diabetes and all of that, can we put a tax on everything else that hurts us?'. For example, today I hit my leg on a table. Do we have to put a tax on tables because I hurt myself? Today I burnt myself on hot water. Do we have to put a tax on water because I hurt myself? Like, just put common sense into it. If it is affecting us, people should have the common sense to stop doing it.

**Ms MOYLE** — Good afternoon. My name is Lacey Moyle, and I attend Rowville Primary School. Something we in group 5 discussed was some alternatives to the sugar tax, which are: clear labels on the front of packages which include how much sugar is in each product — on the backs no-one can understand what they say; visits to schools regularly from healthcare professionals; and instead of unhealthy advertisement, free government-funded healthy food advertisements instead. Taxing people will not help. Clear and effective alternatives must be put in place to change Australia. We have to appeal to the people of Australia. We need to change taxing.

**Ms EIBL** — Hello. My name is Stefi Eibl, and I am from Beaconsfield Upper Primary School. Today when I walked into Parliament I thought that there should be a sugar tax, and I am still thinking the same thing. We do not want the next generations to look back at our generation and think we knew that this was a problem and we stood back, we knew that this caused these things — like diabetes, heart disease, fatty liver disease later in life and obesity — and we did nothing. We knew that this was an unhealthy country, and we did nothing. We do not want them to think that, because that is not who we are here in Australia. We need to be better than that. We can do better than that. I think if we all worked together, we would be able to make this sugar tax work.

**Ms SOS** — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Zohra, and I am representing Al-Taqwa College today. I believe that a sugar tax should be implemented to improve public health. Obesity is a worldwide epidemic, with Australia ranking in the top five most obese nations in the world. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found in a report that Australia has the fifth-highest obesity rates for people aged 50 and above. This is a huge problem, since 31 per cent of diseases mainly include chocolate and confectionery, cakes, biscuits and sugared sweets and drinks, and these diseases are all preventable.

Sugary foods provide minimal nutritional value. Not only that, but they also displace many nutritious foods, such as vegetables, fruits and milks, which are vital in the growth of a child. Many people have been saying that a sugar tax will not prevent people from buying these sugary items. Well, the reason for this is that these people are not aware of the harm sugar can have on one's body. We must educate these people of the effect of sugary items, and a sugar tax is definitely a step in the right direction.

**Mr SACCONI** — Hi. I am Benjamin Saccone from Bell Primary School, and I think that there are multiple things that we need to do to become a less obese nation, including using a sugar tax to reduce amounts of consumption of sugar by people as well as reducing the price of healthier foods and drinks to make them more appealing to people. Also I believe educating people on how to have a good diet as well as having a sugar tax will help a lot. If we promote sports and physical education and encourage a good healthy diet, that will also help a lot. Finally, restricting advertising of unhealthy foods and drinks and unhealthy food and junk food industries, like KFC and Macca's, I think, will go a long way, I believe. Thanks for listening to my point of view.

**Ms DAY** — Hi. My name is Lizzie Day, and I am from Clunes Primary School. I believe that there should be a sugar tax introduced. The government are not saying, ‘Do this, do that’, when they introduce the sugar tax. People are paying their taxes. Some of their tax is for public health services, and people and the government are spending money helping these people that have had too much sugar and have illnesses because of it. Not that it is bad that we help these people; they should know better than to eat this much sugar, and we are suffering because of it.

Do you ever see that look on your parents’ faces when they open up their bills and it is a lot of money? They have to pay for people that have eaten too much sugar and are getting sick because of it. This is not the government saying, ‘Do this, do that’. This is the government saying, ‘You still have the ability to choose what you do and what you eat’. But it is them saying, ‘You have to pay the consequences now, and you have to help these people pay for your mistakes’.

**Ms KROEZAN** — I believe we should have a sugar tax. Many of today’s arguments have pushed me back and forth, but I still stand where I stand. The tax is going to be a guideline, a starting point. The tax would not stop problems like obesity on its own, but it could definitely make a start. When you walk into a store or turn on the TV, unhealthy products are thrown in your face via ads or are stocked on shelves. We have a choice to change that and we can change it. We have the choice to stop consuming unhealthy items. No-one is telling us that we cannot stop or we have to. We have the choice to solve future problems and change lives for future generations. There is a lot we can do if we have a starting point, and a sugar tax is exactly what we need.

**Mr GRAY** — I personally do not think that we should have a sugar tax because we are all capable of making our own decisions. If we want to live our lives to the least, if we want to make ourselves fat and make ourselves have bad health, that is our decision. We are living in a democracy, not a dictatorship. People cannot tell us what to do — unless they are your parents obviously — but people cannot force you to live life. If you do not like something, you do not have to do it. You only have one life and you can do whatever you want with it. You do not have to be stuck in an endless loop of sadness because people are making you eat foods you do not like, making you exercise when you really, really do not want to. People make their own decisions, they have their own rights. People cannot force others to do things they do not want to do, and that is my opinion.

**Mr KRISHNA** — As someone said before, in supermarkets when you are buying whatever you buy, there are candy bars and lollies next to the counter. I am pretty sure that convinces people to buy that stuff, because I have a little sister and she does that exact same thing. More about the sugar tax is that the tax goes to the government, which the government can use to help schools and use to treat unknown diseases like diabetes and obesity.

**Ms J. THOMPSON** — I came in this morning thinking that a sugar tax was a good idea. Now I do not think so anymore. That is because I believe that people should have the right to do whatever they want. They control their own diets, and we should not have to do it for them. I also think that there are different ways to stop people from having too much sugar. We can educate people from a young age instead of making them spend more money on sugary foods. We are not the boss of them. They can choose for themselves.

**Ms HOPKINS** — I came here and did not know what I was going to choose. I was a bit on the fence, but listening to everyone’s ideas and thoughts I resolved that a sugar tax would be bad for the economy. The poorer people are addicted to sugar because it is cheap. You can buy an apple or something or a giant Freddo Frog. One of the speakers who came in before had a packet of the little Freddo Frogs and in each of those Freddo Frogs there is about four or five teaspoons of sugar, so imagine how many would be in the giant Freddo Frogs. The price of one apple and one of those giant Freddo Frogs filled with sugar would cost the same, so if we raised the price of sugary treats, the Freddo Frog would go up but the apple would stay the same. We would still be spending the same amount on healthy foods, and if you are addicted to sugar, which a lot of people are, you would just be spending more money on sugary treats, making people even poorer.

There were actual statistics in a survey that some people put together that showed that if we put the 20 per cent sugar tax on, people would actually buy less fruits and vegies and more things with salt. A sugar tax would only bring more pain.

## THE VOTE

**The SPEAKER** — Time to vote. When we have a vote in Parliament, if we are voting on a bill that we have debated and we want to become law, what happens when the debate is finished is the Speaker will say, ‘All those in favour say aye’, which is an old word for yes, ‘And all those against say no’. What is probably surprising is that for most of the bills that we vote on in here, there is agreement and probably 80 to 85 per cent of the bills get through — they are agreed to by both sides. If you look at Parliament on TV, you think we are arguing all the time and we do not get far, but during the day when the cameras are not here and we are working and debating legislation — the new laws — most of the laws actually go through. Either both sides agree, or everyone agrees, or they might agree to disagree. In other words we say it is the government’s prerogative — it is their right to introduce this bill and it goes through, so we do not have a vote. We only vote on some bills, and that is when there is a real difference of opinion.

What would happen in that case is the Speaker would say, ‘All those in favour say aye; all those against say no’. Then a number of people would say aye and a number of people against would say no, and the Speaker would say, ‘I think the ayes have it’ — in other words, I think there are more people saying yes than no — and the people who said no would say, ‘No, there are more people saying no’. So the Speaker would say, ‘A division is required’, in other words we have got to have a vote. We would have to divide and have a vote, so when we decide to have a vote, the Clerk — who sits there — has a little button. I will not tell you where it is, but there is a button in there you can press and there are bells that start ringing in the Parliament, because we are not always in here like you are now.

When you see Parliament on TV at question time, everybody is in this chamber. During a normal day we are in our offices, we are at meetings. We are in the building, but we are not always in here. We are watching it in our offices or listening to it somewhere so we know what is going on. So the bells start ringing underneath every set of bells in this Parliament, and they are everywhere. They are out in the back garden, they are in the new building, they are in the toilets and they are in every corridor. Every meeting room and every office has bells. So when the bells start ringing we are all trained to look up at the bells, and if there is a green light on, it means that the members of this chamber, the Assembly, have to come in for a vote. If it is a red light on, it means the members from the Legislative Council have to go into their chamber for a vote.

The bells unfortunately ring for 4 minutes. It used to be 2 minutes. See that egg timer there — that sand timer? That used to be a 2-minute timer, but as the building got bigger and members of Parliament had to have offices up in the attic and you took a long while to get down, it was extended to 3 minutes. Now we have got a new building out the back — I am probably the furthest away and one of the oldest here, so they give me 4 minutes to get here — the bells ring for 4 minutes. It is very hard to actually concentrate or be on the phones when the bells are ringing.

Anyway, the bells ring for 4 minutes. We come in and we sit down in our normal seat — we each have a seat that we have to sit in. Rather than have an individual vote where we all say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, the representatives of the parties — and we have some Independents in here; they do not belong to a political party — are asked what their vote is, and they say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Then there is a spokesperson for each of the political parties, like the National Party, the Labor Party, the Liberal Party or the Greens party, and one person says, ‘four yes’, ‘28 noes’ — whatever. Then the clerks add it all up, and then the result is announced. We know whether the bill has passed or it has not passed. So that is what we do. But we are not going to do that here; we are going to vote individually. There are actually some bills we do vote on individually and we do not have to vote with our party, but we will not go into that; we do not have time for that today.

You will be voting individually. So you have heard the arguments for and against. You have got your own ideas that you brought here and your own experiences that you brought here. You have listened to some experts, you have listened to some other students and, by the sound of it, people have changed their ideas because they have listened to other good arguments or they have learned new facts and figures they did not realise before. You have changed, and that is a really good thing to be able to do. But in the end you have got to make a decision, and that is what happens for members of Parliament. Sometimes we have really important, very knowledgeable people say one thing and then there are a whole bunch of other people on the other side who will say exactly the opposite, and both groups are very, very well qualified. In the end you have got to make a decision on what you think after you have done all the research you possibly can. So that is what you have got to do now.

### **Delegates divided on question.**

**The SPEAKER** — I will say it the way the Speaker would say it, and then I will translate it for you. The result of the division — in other words, the vote — is ayes, which is yes, 46; noes, 45.

**Question agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER** — How is that! They do not get much closer than that, and I am glad there is an odd number of people here.

### CLOSING CEREMONY

**The SPEAKER** — It gives me great pleasure to introduce the member for Kew, the shadow Minister for Education, Mr Tim Smith.

**Mr SMITH** — Martin Dixon is a great friend of mine. He is the member for Nepean, and he was the Minister for Education. I have taken up his cover, so to speak. I am now the shadow Minister for Education for the Liberal Party, which means we are in opposition, so we are over here. Young man, what is your name?

**Mr KRISHNA** — Nandan.

**Mr SMITH** — That would be my seat there that you are sitting in. You might ask why I am sitting on the second bench when I am actually a frontbencher. You understand the difference between ministers, shadow ministers and backbenchers, yes, everyone? It is because there is not enough room in here for all of us to sit on the front bench. I am the youngest Liberal MP in the Victorian Parliament, so because I am a junior woodchuck I get to sit up the back. That is the nature of politics. It is very hierarchical. It is a bit like Hogwarts and Harry Potter. Does this building remind you of Harry Potter and of Hogwarts? I call it the madhouse, because it tends to get mad in here sometimes. But I understand your debate today has been conducted very respectfully and everyone got an opportunity to speak and was listened to. I understand a few of you changed your mind about the issue. Is that right? Put your hand up if you changed your mind. What is your name?

**Ms J. THOMPSON** — Jessica.

**Mr SMITH** — Jessica, why did you change your mind?

**Ms J. THOMPSON** — Because I heard everyone else's point of view about the subject.

**Mr SMITH** — What persuaded you to change your mind, rather?

**Ms J. THOMPSON** — To hear what everyone else thought.

**Mr SMITH** — And you did not like the government telling you that you could not eat bad food, is that about it?

**Ms J. THOMPSON** — Pretty much.

**Mr SMITH** — I should take my own advice and stop eating so much. These are really important debates. You are 12 years old or 11 years old. The fundamentals of debate in our society are often around what the government can do to make society a better place compared with the freedom of the individual — what are people allowed to do themselves that is not infringing upon the rights of others? As you go through school and university you will learn about freedom of the individual versus the rights of the state. They are, I suppose, the two fundamental challenges that exist within our democracy.

Sometimes we have to err on the side of more power to the government because it protects our whole society and our community, and then on other occasions we need to be more concerned about individual liberty — about how important it is for people to be able to do whatever they want with their own lives as long as it does not infringe upon the rights of others.

When I am in here debating along with Martin, the Premier and the opposition leader, those things are often what we are talking about. On my side of politics — the Liberal side of politics — we tend to err on the side of individual freedom. I would have voted against a sugar tax. I think if Australian citizens, freeborn, are given what the Americans call certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, with those great rights come responsibilities, and one of those responsibilities is to look after yourself.

Eating lollies is bad for you if you eat too many of them and do not do enough exercise. You will put on weight, and that is bad for you. I think people know that. But equally I think there is a role for government to explain to people that by eating those bad foods and by not doing enough exercise you could get sick. You could develop diabetes or obesity, and these things will ensure that you do not have a very good quality of life and might not reach a ripe old age. That is a role for government.

I am really happy you have had these debates. I think you are so privileged to have been able to have these debates in this great chamber. I am sure you have been told about some of the momentous things that have happened in here. This was the federal Parliament between 1901 and 1927. Have you been taught that? We went to war from this very place in 1914, 104 years ago. Peace was declared on 11 November 1918, so we are coming up to the end of the century of World War I, and that is hugely significant, because our country has been a force for good in the world now for over 100 years.

We have stood up for democracy, which is what you guys have been doing here today, utilising your right to freedom of speech and to difference of opinion and to sit in this chamber that embodies everything that is good about our society, which is respectful debate, tolerance and respect, decency and our Westminster traditions from England of the rule of law for the parliamentary democracy and of one vote for every single citizen. Thank you for contributing to this today. I hope you have learned a lot. I think going forward you will reflect on the day as being a very important part of your education.

**Mr TARULLI** — I am Gabriel representing Surrey Hills Primary School. Good afternoon, Speaker, students, teachers and organisers. This has been a truly unique opportunity for the students who have participated in the proceedings here today. As young people with opinions and views about the way our country and particularly our state are governed, this has been an illuminating and unforgettable experience. It is one thing to learn about democracy in the classroom, but experiences like today really do bring it to life.

**Ms LEE** — I am Ruby. Some memorable moments from today have been listening to two fantastic key speakers and participating in interesting discussions.

**Mr TARULLI** — Without the efforts of the Speaker, the Honourable Martin Dixon, MP, who facilitated the smooth running of the chamber, this event would not have been possible. Can we please give a large round of applause to thank him for his contribution.

*Delegates applauded.*

**Ms LEE** — Similarly without the use of the chamber and facilities this event would not have been as auspicious or memorable, so can we please also give a large round of applause to Parliament House.

*Delegates applauded.*

**Ms LEE** — On behalf of all the schools in attendance today, thank you for this experience.

**The SPEAKER** — Thank you very much. Just before we finish I would like to thank you all for the great way you have participated in this. It is probably the last time that I will get to sit in this chair before I finish my career, so what a great way to finish it. It has been like a full circle. As I said earlier, I used to be a primary school principal, and now I am doing something with primary school children.

What you have done has been fantastic, so congratulations for your individual efforts with the way you have spoken, the way you have listened, the way you have thought about the issue and the way you have worked with each other. Special thanks to your teachers. You cannot underestimate the importance of young children having the opportunity to come in here — or even at school — to talk about democracy and practise and experience it. It is just so important. So thanks so much to the schools for spending the time to bring the children here and look after them. If any parents are here, you must be very, very proud of your sons and daughters.

Thank you too to the Hansard staff and the organisers, who have worked very, very hard in the background. I thought our two guest speakers were really fantastic. I noticed the professor did not leave any chocolates behind, did he? He took them with him. He has taken them home! Thank you very much for taking part, and I hope you have a safe trip home.

**Convention adjourned 2.43 p.m.**