

THE STANDARD

WEDNESDAY, April 29, 2015

The voice of the south-west since 1872

\$1.40 GST



FRESH OUTLOOK

DISTILLERY CHANGES HANDS: PAGE 3



WING CLIPPED

ROOSTER SIDELINED: SPORT



1504260w24 Picture: DAMIAN WHITE

Four million reasons to smile

Minister for Agriculture Jaala Pulford (left), agri safe clinician Tam Phillips, Western District Health Service CEO Rohan Fitzgerald and National Centre for Farmer Health director Sue Brumby are all smiles after a state announcement of a \$4 million grant for the Hamilton farmer health centre.

STORY: PAGE 2

DRIVERS UNDERPAID

Company told to apologise for \$260,000 wages error

FAIR WORK
By PETER COLLINS

AN Allansford transport operation has been found to have underpaid eight of its drivers more than \$260,000 in one of the biggest-ever wages breaches in the south-west.

Six long-distance drivers aged between 32 and 70, who had worked with Merri Transport Company for more

than 10 years, did not receive severance pay or wages in lieu of notice when they were made redundant in February last year after part of the business was sold to Ryan's Transport.

Two other drivers were underpaid a total of \$12,000 on a range of entitlements including travelling rates, loading/unloading allowances and public holiday rates.

The underpayments for each

employee ranged from \$3500 to \$60,940.

Federal record-keeping and pay slips laws were also breached, the Fair Work Ombudsman's investigation found. Acting Ombudsman Michael Campbell said it was not the first time the company had come to the authority's attention with inspectors dealing with six previous complaints dating back to 2002 which

resulted in employees being reimbursed \$23,100.

"As an alternative to litigation over its latest contraventions, Merri Transport has agreed to pay back the workers in full and has entered into an enforceable undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman," Mr Campbell said.

The undertaking includes a written apology to each of the eight drivers expressing

"sincere regret" and a commitment that such conduct will not happen again.

Merri Transport has agreed to provide workplace relations training for its managers, get a professional external review of its pay practices and carry out a self-audit of its record-keeping and pay slip practices.

Records and pay slips for last year and this year for at least 30 per cent of the

employees must be supplied to the ombudsman's office.

The company will also have to report on systems and processes implemented to ensure future compliance.

Mr Campbell said the investigation served as a reminder to all business operators to ensure they understood and complied with workplace laws.

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DID YOU WIN?

SUPER 75 OZ LOTTO DRAW 1106: 35 41 2 34 29 30

45 Supps: 19 & 3

Div 1: (No winners) jackpot;

Div 2: (2) \$51,400.25;

Div 3: (41) \$5162.15;

Div 4: (287) \$379.25;

Div 5: (2330) \$54.50;

Div 6: (54,029) \$26.85;

Div 7: (105,119) \$15.45.

TRAIN TIMES

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

Warr - Melb

Melb - Warr

LOCAL NEWS

National Centre for Farmer Health funded Dancing for joy

STATE FUNDING

By ALEX SINNOTT

JUBILATION and a few dance moves were on display yesterday with \$4 million in state cash securing the future of the National Centre for Farmer Health.

The Hamilton centre, situated at the city's public hospital, will gain \$1 million annually for the next four years to continue its research following the pre-budget announcement.

State Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford delivered the news to staff and civic leaders at the morning ceremony, with centre director Susan Brumby performing an impromptu dance of joy in front of the crowd.

Ms Brumby said the centre had been in financial limbo for the past few years and the cash would help to retain jobs at the Western District Health Services site.

"It's a fantastic day. I'm overjoyed and so is everyone here," she said.

"The community have been so supportive and really rallied behind us. They understand the important work and research that the national centre provides."

The Sustainable Farming Families program will be revived as part of the new deal after being in abeyance since June 2013.

"The information we generated from the program was recognised across the country — it was an award-winning program," Ms Brumby said.

Southern Grampians



Western District Healthcare board chairwoman Mary-Ann Brown (left), Minister for Agriculture Jaala Pulford, National Centre for Farmer Health director Sue Brumby and Western District Healthcare CEO Rohan Fitzgerald at yesterday's funding announcement.

1504280W14 Photos: DAMIAN WHITE

mayor Peter Dark hailed it "a big day for Hamilton and the wider region".

Cr Dark said the centre played an important role in health research, not just in the Western District but nationwide.

"This will lead to more jobs in Hamilton, so it's a good day from an employment side of things as well," he said.

Ms Pulford said the centre had been in need of state

government assistance for three years.

"The centre was hanging on by its fingertips and there was a real danger of it closing under the previous state government," the Agriculture Minister said.

"When we made the election commitment in October to fund the centre, there were tears of joy.

"We've stayed true to that commitment and the centre will now be able to operate

at full capacity." Wannon MP Dan Tehan said he welcomed the state input and added the federal Coalition made a contribution to the centre last year which maintained the service in Hamilton.

The \$4 million funding package will be confirmed in next week's Spring Street budget, due to be handed down by State Treasurer Tim Pallas on Tuesday afternoon.

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