

## FRANKLY SPEAKING

*From the Chairman's Desk*

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## MARKET HOURS

We are all well aware that in recent months the Melbourne Market Strategic Alliance Group and the State Government have been negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the relocation of the market to Epping. The MOU, which has been agreed to by both parties, includes the formation of a new operating company controlled by the new shareholders and the market users to run the market at Epping. The MMA will be wound up when the Footscray Road site ceases to operate. The MMA will be co-operating with the new operating company to ensure a smooth transition to Epping.

At the same time these negotiations were taking place, some market organisations approached the MMA seeking a change to later operating hours for the market here at Footscray Road.

The MMA has now completed an intensive investigation into the use of the market by the buyer groups. We have identified that on a busy day about 880 Fruit and Vegetable buyers use the market of which just over 75% of buyers enter after 4am. Average time spent in the market is just under 3 hours.

The MMA Board has also received letters, survey results, and formulated study presentations in relation to trading hours from the Vegetable Growers Association Victoria, the Victorian Retailers Association and Freshstate. All of these presentations have been tabled and discussed.

We have been working with the Growers, Retailers and Wholesalers Advisory Committees to find a solution as some groups believe the current hours do not create a level playing field for all buyers. The subject has been debated at the Advisory Meetings over the last 9 months.

While all of the Advisory meetings and some representations agreed that early buyers permits should cease there was no consensus among the various user groups as to the opening times of the trading floors once this occurs.

The MMA Board was disappointed with this result as after an enormous amount of dialogue the MMA Board has been placed in the position of making a judgment of the market hours that will help to ensure future efficiencies and create a continuous viable market for the benefit of all the industry as it moves rapidly ahead into a new area with huge logistics and other technical changes for the better.

Armed with making a decision, the MMA has taken into account all market users views and has made the following changes to trading floor hours.

As of 7 April 2008 early buyer permits will be cancelled and the trading floor operational hours will commence at 4am.

It is fair to say that when we explained our position to the Retailers, Wholesalers, Growers, Florist and Flower Growers Advisory Committees in February

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three committees agreed with the move but the Retailer and Growers members of their committees moved a motion of protest and requested the MMA Board to re-consider the decision. The Board at a special telephone link up re-considered their decision and decided to stay with the original decision of a 4am start.

Further discussions will be held with the market user groups to finalise the rules of operation and you will be fully advised when negotiations are completed.

We are aware of the competitive nature of the market and realise not all market users will agree with the changes, however we have consulted and believe the move is good for the total industry.

Neil Lowe, Chairman

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CEO - Peter McLennan**

### **MARKET HOURS & ACCESS**

While discussions on this topic have continued, a number of valid arguments have been put forward to support the retention of early opening hours. The main argument put forward is that access to the market will be difficult with later hours. In the past six months the Authority has been involved in making the following changes to market access and parking that has significantly improved access and has improved available breathing space in the market.

These changes include:

1. The changes made to Footscray Road at Gates 1 and 6 and the changes to traffic at Appleton Dock Road has reduced the time and effort required to enter and exit the market. These changes have significantly reduced the traffic build up on Footscray Road during peak hour periods.
2. Completion of the new car park at the western end of the market has enabled the Authority to relocate between 50 to 60 trucks away from the trading area, providing improved access to retailers and unloaders.
3. Gate 6 has been modified to reduce a significant occupational health and safety issue at the western end of the market. In addition, the Authority is further improving access at Gate 1, which is now open 24 hours per day 7 days a week. Gate 1 has replaced Gate 6 as the preferred entry point into the market, and the Authority is anticipating that once current construction and market hours have settled down, the need to open Gate 6 for 24 hours a day will be reviewed.
4. The development of upgraded operating rules with the change in market hours will further improve vehicle movement and parking within the market area. Copies of the new operating rules will be provided to market users during the next two weeks.

It is now up to the market tenants and their customers to ensure that they all reap the benefits of this change.