

Christmas carols can be sung

VICTORIAN Education Minister James Merlino's office has accused Owens Valley MP Tim McCurdy of being ill-informed and spreading fear over a petition claiming public schools had been banned from singing Christmas carols with religious praise.

A spokesman said a new policy around religious education that came into effect this year did no such thing and that the National Party member should

Government rejects McCurdy's campaign as 'shameful'



BY BRAD
WORRAL
bworral@
nedia.com.au

be ashamed of his actions.

Mr McCurdy believes the State Government has backtracked on its original plan referring to advice he had received from opposition education spok-

person Nick Wakeling.

Last week he tabled a petition in the Victorian Parliament with 561 signatures on the assumption that carols were banned.

Mr McCurdy has also rejected claims that such petitions had contributed to "Islam-phobia".

But a spokesman for the minister claimed Mr McCurdy's petition was "a

shameful attempt to drive a wedge in our community".

"Victorian school children can sing any Christmas carol they want at their school - from Away in a Manger, Silent Night, and Oh Come All Ye Faithful, to Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer and Jingle Bells," the spokesperson said.

"The guidance given to Victorian principals was clear stating

that schools can put up Christmas decorations or pictures of Santa, sing carols or decorate Christmas trees on school grounds.

"However, if an outside provider like Access Ministries or a volunteer group, wishes to come to a school and sing religious songs this is considered Special Religious Instruction and must be done before school, after school, or

during lunch time."

Mr Wakeling said he still wanted the matter clarified.

"These new instructions have caused significant confusion among Victorian communities," he said.

"(Premier) Daniel Andrews must act swiftly to stop this confusion and issue new instructions that make it clear that schools can perform traditional Christmas carols without restrictions."

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CHANGEVER: Outgoing Carevan Wangaratta committee president Peter Vaughan with new president Michelle Kennedy.
PHOTO: Shane Douthie

New president for local Carevan

AFTER four years as president of the Wangaratta Carevan Peter Vaughan has handed over the reins to Michelle Kennedy.

Mr Vaughan said he made the decision to step down for personal reasons, and it was the toughest he had ever made.

"Carevan turned into a passion for me but I know it is in good hands with Michelle," he said.

"What I've taken away from the experience is that Wangaratta is a very community focused town with so many people wanting to

help others without reward for themselves.

"There are so many people to thank for their support... past and present committee members, the volunteers and all the people who have regularly donated food and money.

"It astounds me that people can be so generous."

Mr Vaughan said that while the client and volunteer base numbers may waiver, depending on demand, the organisation's structure had 'firmed up' and it was now a 'well-oiled machine' delivering its core business -

wholesome free meals three times a week to those people within our local community who may be either homeless or due to family and financial pressures are struggling to provide food for themselves and often their families.

Ms Kennedy said she was excited about her new role and praised her predecessor's contribution to the organisation.

Anyone who would like to become a volunteer with Carevan can visit www.carevanwangeratta.org.au or email volunteering@carevanwangeratta.org.au.

Lake Benalla walk to help in fight against MND

THOUSANDS of people are expected to walk and run around Lake Benalla on Sunday, to help rally behind local families who have been affected by Motor Neurone Disease (MND).

The event was started in 2008 after Benalla and

Wangaratta businessman and sportsman Michael Rodgers (deceased) was diagnosed with MND, and it has raised \$380,000 for research into the presently incurable disease.

The lake walk commences at 10.30am.

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