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VIRGIN CALLS FOR LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Hockey to resist stake in Qantas

SID MAHER
STEVE CREEDY

SENIOR ministers are resisting pressure to inject taxpayer funds into Qantas to prop up the national carrier, as its rivalry with Virgin Australia erupts into open warfare.

Joe Hockey told *The Weekend Australian* last night that “of course, the government is very, very reluctant to own an airline”, and Transport Minister Warren Truss ruled out providing taxpayer relief to bankroll an air war between the two carriers.

The Treasurer risks being caught in the crossfire after kick-starting a debate on the future of Qantas, which is complaining that Virgin Australia is operating at below cost to undermine its domestic operations.

Virgin Australia boss John Borghetti called on the federal government yesterday to give his airline the same assistance as

Mr Borghetti also hit back at his bigger rival’s determination to maintain its 65 per cent domestic market share as anti-competitive and reiterated his demand for an inquiry into Qantas’s market domination.

“In our view, this is a strategy that prevents competition, including the possibility of new entrants,” Mr Borghetti said in an open letter to the government.

“We strongly believe that a level playing field should include a full and proper investigation of this 65 per cent ‘line in the sand’ policy and ask the Australian government to divert attention to this important issue that is crippling competition and is not sustainable financially for anyone in aviation in this country.”

Qantas is expected to seek from the federal government the same kind of guarantee it gave to banks during the global financial crisis, to help protect the airline from a downgrade of its investment-grade credit rating. A downgrade would mean the airline would pay more for debt and this would impact on its cashflow.

Qantas has argued that the aviation playing field is not level in Australia because Virgin is backed by government-owned or controlled airlines capable of pumping money into its coffers.

Mr Borghetti warned that a level playing field should mean

Fears on GrainCorp signal

ANNABEL HEPWORTH
JARED OWENS

BUSINESS is urging the Coalition to take steps to ensure foreign investors do not get the “wrong signal” amid fears the surprise decision to block the \$3 billion US takeover of GrainCorp could undermine the government’s promise that the nation was “once more open for business”.

Joe Hockey’s decision to block US food giant Archer Daniels Midland from taking over the grain-handling company avoids a damaging rift with the Nationals.

It also sent the company’s share price tumbling to close at \$8.72, down \$2.48 or 22 per cent on Thursday’s closing price.

GrainCorp chairman Don would have “enduring implications” for Australian agriculture while business groups lined up to caution that global investors could get a confused signal about Australia’s openness to foreign investment.

Corporate heavyweight Don Argus told *The Weekend Australian* that, while he was sure there were good reasons for the Treasurer’s decision, “it should make us all think about how we are going to attract

overseas capital” that the nation would need “for quite some time”.

“We just can’t think that we can just close ourselves off from the capital markets,” said the former BHP Billiton chairman and National Australia Bank chief.

“We can’t. If we do then we just become a branch office country. And that would be sad if that happens.”

Former Business Council of Australia president Graham Bradley said it would be disappointing if the decision on GrainCorp “encourages noisy activist groups who are ideologically opposed to foreign investment perse to make noisy protests around every foreign investment opportunity when we do need to encourage and foster significant foreign investment”.

secretary Paul Howes said Mr Hockey had “buckled to agrarian socialists” on GrainCorp, capping a horror day for regional jobs that included the loss of 1500 positions at Rio Tinto’s alumina refinery at Gove.

The GrainCorp decision was “a message to the rest of

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INSIDE

JOE Hockey has fallen at the first hurdle by caving in to the demands of his agrarian socialist mates



JUDITH SLOAN P4

that any measures given by the government to Qantas were also offered to Virgin.

“Virgin Australia has succeeded against the odds, in a very difficult marketplace, with a major and dominant competitor three times its size that appears intent on flushing it out of the market,” he said.

“If any government support was given to the dominant player, we would expect the same level of support.”

WE could be left with the worst of all worlds: a weakened GrainCorp and an inefficient export infrastructure



HENRY ERGAS P13

While Qantas has lobbied government ministers over its complaints about Virgin, senior government sources said the airline was yet to put a firm proposal to the government on any plan for the future. The government also believes that it will be

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From Gove’s sorrow, we must mine hope



AMOS AIKMAN

Veteran land rights activist Garrwuy Yunupingu near his community of Ski Beach, with Rio Tinto’s soon-to-close refinery in the background

Rio ends talks to salvage refinery

How *The Australian* on Tuesday broke the story of Rio’s impending decision

EXCLUSIVE

AMOS AIKMAN
NORTHERN CORRESPONDENT

FOR a lifetime Garrwuy Yunupingu has wrestled with the destruction, the riches and the rights of bauxite mining and refining in Arnhem Land.

It’s a battle that made Mr Yunupingu a national figure, helped to create the land rights movement in northern Australia, brought prosperity to the region and now, he says, is delivering sorrow and disappointment.

Speaking after mining giant Rio

Tinto revealed plans to mothball its refinery on the Gove Peninsula with the loss of 1500 jobs, Mr Yunupingu said “no good” would sliver of opportunity remained for his people through bauxite mining. “I still can’t believe it,” he said. “I’m sad and disappointed.”

Aboriginal opposition to bauxite mining at Gove in the 1960s and 70s sparked a struggle that ultimately led to the creation of the Aboriginal land rights movement; Mr Yunupingu was central to that fight.

In an exclusive interview yesterday, he said times had moved on, and he urged his people to embrace modernity rather than look

back. “Things are different now, and the new generation has to look differently,” he said. “If change affects them, then they

He said the refinery had provided a “good example” for indigenous people to follow, and urged them to take up the reins and develop businesses such as mining on Aboriginal land themselves. Only about 5 per cent, or 70, of the plant’s employees are indigenous, including contractors.

Bauxite production at Gove was feted as a nation-building project when it began in the 1960s. While it fostered some of the most affluent non-Aboriginal suburbs in northern Australia, many of the

region’s indigenous people remain impoverished.

At this year’s Garma festival, Mr Yunupingu told Tony Abbott it rekindle the land rights battle by taking back control of economic development. Gumatj Corporation, the organisation representing Mr Yunupingu’s clan, is now developing its own bauxite mining company.

“If the mining is done by Aboriginal people in the future, that would be good,” he said. “I’m excited about what we can do if we

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Slumdog waste a path to wealth

EXCLUSIVE

CHERYL JONES

IN the slums of Mumbai, there are tens of thousands of people known as ragpickers who sift through the piles of refuse and rubbish, finding the scraps that could be sold to eke out a living.

In the city’s Dharavi slum, hundreds of thousands are estimated to be involved in the recycling industry in some way, through collecting and sending plastics and aluminium to the thousands of single-room workshops where they are sorted and processed.

Now a breakthrough technology, developed in Sydney,



Veena Sahajwalla

could provide a new avenue for some of the city’s poorest to escape poverty and make higher returns by recycling waste glass into metal alloys.

Australian technology using glass and plastic from old cars as a source of raw materials to make “green” alloys could help transform the lives of slum dwellers in

India. It will be showcased in India next week when University of NSW engineer Veena Sahajwalla travels will join NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell, during his trade mission, to present her work to industry and government leaders.

The technology could also help ease a looming environmental problem there as the number of cars in India increases.

“In the slums, there are people picking through rubbish piles,” said Professor Sahajwalla, last year’s winner of *The Australian’s* Innovation Challenge.

“If there is a trade around collecting broken glass, this (technology) would create an opportunity for them.”

Professor Sahajwalla is visiting

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EXCLUSIVE: Asylum-seekers head home

ROWAN CALLICK

ABOUT 80 asylum-seekers — including Sri Lankans and Iranians — sent to Papua New Guinea have already returned home after being found to be “economic migrants” rather than refugees.

PNG Prime Minister Peter O’Neill told *The Weekend Australian* that so far the repatriation process had been voluntary.

“Processing in Manus is slowly taking place, but we are finding a

large number of them are economic migrants, and as such many of them are now willing to leave the centre and return to their country of origin,” he said.

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison said plans were under way to build a “removal centre” at the processing centre on Manus Island to house those whose claims to be refugees had failed and were due to be flown out.

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THE WEEKEND

NOVEMBER 10 - DECEMBER 01, 2013

AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE



THE DESERTED MOTHERS' CLUB

WHEN CHILDREN BECOME STRANGERS

By Kate Legge

PHILLIP ADAMS

Coca-colonial cringe



We hold these truths to be self-evident. It's time to hear our own voices, see our own landscape and dream our own dreams." The first words of a one-page report I wrote for Prime Minister Gorton that would persuade him to back the revival of our defunct film industry. It made three recommendations that were progressively implemented, mostly on Whitlam's watch: 1) an experimental film fund to find talent; 2) a film school to train the best and brightest; and 3) a film bank to fund their first major films. Let history show it worked like a charm. During the Whitlam years Australian movies stormed the barricades and the world's film festivals.

Though Australia can claim to have made the first feature film – and hundreds during the silent era – American and British interests had put us out of business. Local films were vanishingly rare and, when made, were denied an opening on our own cinema screens. With local drama as stuffed as cinema, our actors could live and die without playing an Australian. They became vocal chameleons – they could do all sorts of Brit and

US accents, but they could not do ours. And our film and TV audiences were far more familiar with the streets of Los Angeles and London than with those of Melbourne and Sydney.

Boldly plagiarised from a rather famous US document, "we hold these truths to be self-evident" was a nudge-nudge at what I saw as Australia's biggest cultural problem, even greater than the famous "cringe" – our total domination by US coca-colonisation.

Even our vernacular was vanishing as we devoured America's popular culture at the cost of our own.

And if you bought the music, the fast food and the fashions, you finished up buying the politics, from law and order to drug laws and foreign policy.

For a while our local film industry was a buffer zone as we celebrated our heroes and history rather than theirs. But having spent much of my life on that crusade, I now concede total and utter failure. In the early '70s the share of the Australian box office for local feature films was only around four per cent, and it's not much

different today. We show a healthy interest in local fiction, and our painters paint our landscapes, not America's. But our actors are, once more, vocal chameleons and, like our most talented directors and techs, earn their money in the US and its Sydney diaspora. Factor in TV programming – free-to-air and pay – and Australian politics and policies groan beneath the weight of American influence, while our slang is on the verge of extinction. We eat their Macs, wear their jeans and pack venues for US performers. For all practical purposes we are the 51st state – and the process, which began here after the US Civil War – is complete.

Amazon, Google, YouTube *et al* are the latest, greatest examples of "soft power" – taking up the momentum of the US film and TV industries to reduce us to cultural mimicry. I'm not denying there aren't exhilarations in this new world order, but still feel a deep regret that we've surrendered our politics and creative imaginings to a foreign power. As I wrote in the '70s, "we've dragged the Trojan Horse of US culture into our very lounge rooms". Now our smartphones, tablets and

I feel a deep regret that we've surrendered to a foreign power

earphones add to a coca-colonisation no one could have anticipated. And, yes, the price includes dashing off to insane military

encounters from Afghanistan to Iraq.

Republicans who see our identity problem confused and compromised by vestigial links to the British monarchy miss the point. Our problem is with a US republic that calls the shots. Physically as well as metaphorically. I acknowledge the US has been a great cultural benefactor. Like you, I measure my life with American music, movies and literature. But it's a pity about ours.

ROAD TEST: STRIKE ALPHA CRADLE



What is it? A range of mobile phone cradles for the car. **Hold the phone! What else?** It doesn't just allow hands-free talking; it also charges the phone, and boosts the signal. **What type of phone does it hold?** I tried the iPhone 5/5S model, but there are specific models for a wide range of smartphones. Or you can choose a universal cradle that allows you to swap between different types of phones.

Can you install it yourself? You can if you buy the DIY pack, which attaches to a windscreen mount and includes a charger that plugs into the vehicle's cigarette lighter. The professional pack connects to the car's electronics, so don't try that at home. The cradles can all integrate with the car's music system and work with any Bluetooth car kit.

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