

Australia's ex-environment minister dies

Australia's first federal environment minister, Peter Howson, died in a Melbourne hospital on Sunday, aged 89.

Mr Howson, elected to parliament in 1955, served as minister for air for four years under Robert Menzies and Harold Holt before he was dumped by John Gorton in a cabinet reshuffle in 1968.

William McMahon appointed

him as minister for the environment, aborigines and the arts, the first portfolio of its type, in March 1971.

He lost his Victorian seat of Casey when the McMahon government was swept from office in December 1972.

He also served on the management board of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital for 31

years from 1951, serving as its president from 1956 to 1964 and as its chairman from 1980 to 1982.

He is credited with helping to expand and rebuild the hospital, raising funds for its reconstruction in the 1960s, establishing new fields of research and treatment and playing a key role in achieving royal patronage for the hospital from Queen Elizabeth in 1963.



Liati sticks by story: court

Angela Liati is adamant she lunched with an American woman who claimed to be driving former Federal Court judge Marcus Einfeld's car, but admits she may have got her dates wrong, a Sydney court has heard.

Mr Einfeld's silver Lexus was caught by a speed camera on the afternoon of January 8, 2006.

He told a magistrate he had lent his car to American Professor Theresa Brennan, but police later discovered she died almost three years earlier in February 2003.

Mr Einfeld later pleaded guilty to the speed camera offence.

Before police discovered Prof Brennan's death, Liati went to Mr Einfeld's lawyers, telling them she was in his car with a friend called Theahresa Brennan - who she met on a meditation retreat in 2005 - on the day in question.

Liati says the pair spent the afternoon in Sydney's north, shopping in Mosman, having lunch at Balmoral and buying a pair of jeans in Chatswood.

The 56-year-old has pleaded not guilty in the NSW District Court to making a false statement on August 23, 2006, with



Marcus Einfeld never intended to rely on a statement written by Angela Liati (L), a jury was told.

intent to pervert the course of justice.

Crown prosecutor Lou Lungo says police checks turned up no evidence of Liati or a Ms Brennan attending any meditation retreats in NSW.

He said credit card statements also showed Liati was at a surf shop in Bondi Junction in Sydney's east at the time she claimed to be with Ms Brennan.

On Tuesday, the jury was shown a video of the police interview of Liati in which she is presented with the evidence placing her at a different place to her statement.

"I've obviously got the wrong date," she says in the video.

The interviewing officer then accuses her of lying.

"What you say in your statement could not have happened ... effectively what that means is that your story is not probable and not possible," he said.

"I don't believe you are telling the truth and I'd like to give you the chance now to come forward and be honest."

However, Liati denied she was being untruthful.

"I don't know. She may have used another name, he may have lent it to her another day and he may have lent it to someone else another day. I don't know," Liati replies.

Under cross-examination in court, one of the interviewing officers said police searches for a Theahresa Brennan - and all other possible spellings - came up with no results.

"All my inquiries tell me she doesn't exist," Detective Sergeant Troy Stenberg told the court.

"There was no lady in any car. It was all a lie."

But Ms Liati remained resolute the events did happen as she described, although it may not have been on January 8.

"I do know that it was in early January," Liati, who is defending herself, told the court.

"(The jeans) were on sale."

The trial before Judge Michael Finnane continued on Wednesday.

5 teenagers convicted over boy's killing

THESSALONIKI, Greece: A Greek court has convicted five teenagers of killing an 11-year-old boy three years ago and dumping his body in a river in northern Greece.

The body of Alex Mechisvili was not found despite an extensive search in the northern Greek city of Veroia.

A juvenile court on Monday found the five defendants guilty of involuntary homicide and causing insult to a dead body. Three defendants were ordered to serve in a juvenile prison until they turn 18, while the others were placed under mandatory supervision programs.

All five defendants are aged 14 and 15. According to court testimony, the 11-year-old boy died after falling down a flight of stairs, before his body was hidden in a construction site and later dumped in a nearby river.

Cyprus stops weapons-laden ship

Cypriot government authorities said yesterday that they were inspecting the cargo of a Cyprus-flagged ship that docked at the southern port of Limassol following reports by Israeli media that the vessel was loaded with illegal weapons for Hamas rulers in Gaza.

"We are investigating what is being transported, which is why we have to handle this issue very seriously," President Dimitris Christofias told reporters. Christofias stressed that the issue was a "problem" for the island. "We don't want to create any greater problems, because it is a problem for us when we are obliged to receive a Cyprus-flagged ship carrying that which it is carrying, which is in contravention of (United Nations) Security Council resolutions," Christofias said. Reuters quoted one source as saying that authorities were probing an apparent violation of UN Resolution 1747, which prohibits the transfer of munitions and related materials from Iran.

Christofias's concern was shared by several government

officials, including Parliament Speaker Marios Karoyian, who described the incident as "a sensitive matter that needs to be handled very carefully." Karoyian's emphasis on the need for caution was echoed by Foreign Minister Marcos Kyprianou, who said, "The Cyprus government will handle this issue responsibly, taking all external factors into account."

According to a report in Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the Russian-owned ship, the Monchegorsk, allegedly had been carrying a shipment of Iranian arms to Gaza and was detained last week by Cyprus following requests by the US and Israeli authorities. Haaretz claimed the arms were destined for Islamist Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip or for Lebanese Islamist guerrilla group Hezbollah.

Local media in Cyprus said the vessel was docked off the port of Limassol and that a search was under way. Cypriot officials did not determine what kind of weapons were found nor how many.