



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 19 February 2025**

**By authority of the Victorian Government Printer**



## **Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,  
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,  
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O'Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

#### **Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

#### **Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition**

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

#### **Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

#### **Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

#### **Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>7</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Berham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>9</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>5,6</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>11</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>10</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,

Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

#### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**The SPEAKER (09:33):** General business, notices of motion 15 and 32 to 40 and orders of the day 5 and 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

#### **Notices of motion**

##### **Notice given.**

#### *Petitions*

#### **Maroondah Hospital**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) presented a petition bearing 151 signatures:

##### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly community support for the Victorian Government to **rebuild Maroondah Hospital** to address its dated infrastructure and inadequate facilities. Maroondah Hospital is a very busy hospital, that is under extreme pressure to cater to patients from all over the Eastern Suburbs. They lack the up-to-date facilities, which have been promised over the past two election periods by the Victorian Government and deserve to be supported completely.

##### **Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Victorian Government to **fulfill their election promises of 2018 and 2022**, and finally deliver on the **\$1.05 billion promise given to our community, by rebuilding Maroondah Hospital from the ground up**. Funding needs to be allocated in the 2025/2026 State Budget so that the rebuild can start soon – not in ten years’ time.

##### **Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

#### **Leakes Road–Western Freeway interchange**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) presented a petition bearing 2020 signatures:

##### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to address the critical safety issues at the Leakes Road interchange on the Western Highway. We understand the Victorian Government is currently undertaking the work for a Business Case to upgrade the Western Highway, including the upgrade of the Leakes Road interchange. However, the safety risk is critical now, and something must be done in the interim to improve the safety of this dangerous interchange. Issue Overview: 1. High Accident Rate: Increased collisions and near-misses at this interchange pose serious risks to all road users. Reports from locals of traffic accidents are a daily occurrence. 2. Lack of Traffic Signals: Currently there are no traffic lights, leading to congestion, confusion, and unsafe driving conditions. 3. Congestion: The interchange lacks proper infrastructure for traffic flow in peak times. This causes congestion, which increases driver frustration and results in more risky driving behaviours.

##### **Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to 1. Create an Immediate Plan for Road Safety: We request the immediate development of a road safety plan for this intersection, which includes both temporary and permanent fixes to road safety. 2. Upgrade to Permanent/Temporary Traffic Signals: We request that temporary traffic controls be installed at this intersection immediately, to reduce risky driver behaviour and curb the number of accidents. A long-term upgrade, with community consultation, in alignment with the Western Highway Upgrade and current/future

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community needs is also required. We urge the Assembly to act swiftly to improve safety at this crucial intersection.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### Mount Arapiles rock climbing

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) presented a petition bearing 10,373 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the Allan Labor Government's devastating decision to close large portions of rock-climbing areas in Mt Arapiles (Dyurrite), and its failure to consult with the climbing community and local residents impacted by this decision.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to engage in transparent and expanded consultation with all stakeholders, and demands that established climbing routes and The Pines campground are not removed until such consultation occurs.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### Coburg High School

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) presented a petition bearing 387 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the urgent funding required to fund Coburg High School's (CHS) Instrumental Music program. CHS boasts a thriving instrumental music program with over 200 talented students. This program is highly valued by the wider school community, as evidenced by the strong attendance (and long waiting lists for tickets) at musical events throughout the year. In 2022, the Victorian Government School Music Programs Evaluation Final Report was released. This identified a lack of transparency and significant funding inequities for Instrumental Music across Victoria, particularly the North-West Victoria Region (of which CHS is a part). Despite increased funding in 2023 (an extra \$22,812, to make a total of \$79,725), CHS has continued to miss out on fair funding that reflects its growing need, with a funding shortfall well in excess of \$100,000 per year.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Victorian Government to ensure CHS is allocated its full and fair allocation of Instrumental Music funding for the 2025 school year and beyond – without any staggered implementation – as a matter of urgency.

### *Documents*

### Documents

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024 – Ordered to be published

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 1.

### *Bills*

**Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024**

#### *Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (09:36): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024 without amendment.

***Members statements*****Will Taylor Memorial Cup**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (09:37): I rise today to acknowledge the inaugural Will Taylor Memorial Cup. Will Taylor lost his life last year, as we all know, in a senseless tragedy in our district of Ashwood, but on Saturday 8 February his family and the local clubs that he played for came together for an event that brought our community together to celebrate his life and honour and remember his legacy and his involvement with community sport.

Will was passionate about soccer, playing with both the Ashburton United Soccer Club and the Mount Waverley City Soccer Club. This event was a fitting tribute to his memory, showcasing the spirit of the game he loved and the incredible impact he had on those around him. It not only celebrated Will's love for the game but also raised crucial funds for Team Sports 4 All, who help to support children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds so they too can experience the joy and benefits of playing team sports, just like Will.

I would like to thank Nick, Denise and Anthony Taylor for allowing us all in the community to be a part of such a special day which created a legacy and which may be the only possible positive aspect of the senseless tragedy last year. To the players, coaches and supporters from both clubs who came together in the spirit of committee sport, we thank you. The community got together as one.

**ADHD services**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:39): I rise today to speak on the inadequacies that many adults in our community are currently facing when it comes to accessing both an ADHD assessment and treatment following diagnosis. The public mental health system is unable to provide ADHD assessments for most people. This means that, for those seeking assessments, their only option is to access this service through private clinics. With many private clinics already at capacity, many psychiatrists are unable to accept new ADHD referrals. On the rare occasion there may be an available appointment for an assessment, people are forced to wait around eight months for that appointment. The financial barrier is also a hurdle – with the cost-of-living crisis affecting so many, many simply cannot afford the out-of-pocket costs associated with an assessment, medication or the ongoing psychiatric appointments required to access repeated scripts.

I recognise that the 2023 Senate inquiry into the assessment and support services for people with ADHD was a great first step and highlighted in depth much of what I have spoken about today. The recommendations from that report offer a way forward to address the inadequacies to make access easier and remove barriers many are facing. I urge the state government to continue to work with the federal government to make improvements within this space.

**Northcote electorate community sport**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (09:40): I rise to celebrate all things community sport in the Northcote electorate. It has been a big start to the year, kicking off with the annual Indigenous cricket round at Bill Lawry Oval. This event brought cricketers together to celebrate First Nations culture through sport. A huge shout-out to Northcote Cricket Club for making it such a special day.

I also had the absolute joy of joining the Queer Sporting Alliance for their national sports tournament at Narrandjeri Stadium, the largest LGBTIQA+ sports event in Australia. Hats off to president Stella Lesic, executive director Bindy Cohen and everyone involved.

February saw me deliver a very questionable first pitch with the Fitzroy Baseball Club at Merri Park. Big thanks to John King and Tony Wyatt for their ongoing dedication to this proud club.

Last week I joined Northcote Junior Football Club at McDonell Park for their fantastic welcome day. Construction has just started there on a project to build better paths, seating and a spectator stand. A heartfelt thank you to president Kellie Burns for her collaboration on this.

February also brought us the first ever Greek Community Cup women's final at John Cain Memorial Park. Congratulations to the Greek community of Melbourne and hosts Northcote City Football Club for creating a tradition that champions multicultural women's sport. I also spoke with president Michael Skliros and vice-president John Catanzariti about our half-a-million-dollar project to deliver more female-friendly facilities here.

Finally, a big cheer for the Red Tag Fly Fishers. They have just secured \$74,000 to plan a dedicated fly-fishing precinct at Yarra Bend Park. Northcote loves sport.

**NCD Swimming Sports**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:41): Sixteen students from Charlton College travelled to St Arnaud this week to represent at the NCD Swimming Sports. Special congratulations to Stella, who was crowned under-15 girls age champion, and Heidi, who claimed the title of under-16 girls age champion. Such an amazing achievement gives more weight to the need to maintain and renew public swimming pools throughout Victoria, especially in small towns like Charlton. I will be swimming in all Buloke Shire Council pools on 25 February, so perhaps I will see you in Charlton, ladies.

**Sunraysia Softball Association**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:42): On Saturday I went along to the Sunraysia Softball Association life members day at the old aero ovals in Mildura, where I was able to throw the first pitch, which was not questionable at all – it was straight, fast and straight over the plate. This association has been through many iterations, but it was lovely to see so many enjoying the day and the game against Berri, which Sunraysia won 8–6.

**Electric Light Theatre**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:42): I also need to shout out to Electric Light Theatre, who celebrated their 40th anniversary last weekend. I was lucky enough to catch the matinee show, and it was absolutely brilliant. Unfortunately, apparently I am too old to join and perform with the group on stage, but it was lovely to go along.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM**: I do not know how that could be, but apparently it is. And it would be even lovelier if our performing arts and theatre groups in Mildura had a permanent place to call home, a place like a hall or a theatre like many other towns upstream, like Swan Hill, have. I see you, I hear you every time I go along, and I will work with you to find a solution to this.

**Robinvale Basketball Association**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:43): Also, the Robinvale basketball all stars was last Friday night. *(Time expired)*

**South Melbourne Primary School**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (09:43): We have world-class state schools in Victoria, don't we? They are absolutely fantastic, and I am really proud that South Melbourne Primary School in particular – but not only, because all our state schools are fantastic – got a shout-out on the telly; yes, they did. A special shout-out to principal Noel Creece. He is so passionate and so caring. He was talking all about the science of learning and evidence-based teaching. What did they get the shout-out for? Outstanding NAPLAN results. They can really see the improvement that has come through their school by applying systematic synthetic phonics in every classroom. This has been the turning point for that school but also a real 'team' focus in the school, and it is so wonderful. They are getting – actually all students in Victoria are getting – literacy skills for life.

And I should say that we are making best practice common practice in our Education State, with new resources to support student literacy and systematic synthetic phonics in every classroom. The

Minister for Education did announce just in December \$5 million in funding for primary schools to fast-track the transition to the mandated Victorian reading approach a year earlier. We can see with South Melbourne Primary, with those outstanding results, all the more reason to fast-track systematic synthetic phonics in every classroom.

**Melba Highway**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:44): Traffic chaos has unfolded following the government's decision to fully close the Melba Highway for landslip repairs on Monday. Vehicles are being detoured to local roads, which are unsuitable for the volume of traffic and the sizes and types of vehicles. Roads are too narrow and steep and have too many tight bends for trucks, caravans, some trailers and horse floats. Within hours of the closure the situation became greatly concerning, and the fears and predictions of locals were realised. Reports backed up by photos showed vehicles almost being run off the roads, caravans and trucks stuck as they were too large to navigate the tight bends, cars actually run off the roads, too many near misses and horses falling in floats. B-doubles should not be on the detour roads, but they are and they are going too fast past the Chum Creek Primary School on the Healesville-Kinglake Road, posing great safety concerns. Everyone said it was only a matter of time before someone was killed, and yesterday, a day and a half later, there was a fatality on the treacherous Heidelberg-Kinglake Road. The government needs to improve urgently the traffic management or find a better solution or these problems will continue.

**Badger Creek hall**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:46): Badger Creek hall marked its centenary in grand style on Saturday, complete with birthday cake, all-day activities and a bush dance. Great crowds were there all day, and I was delighted to present the keys to Badger Creek to local historian and long-time volunteer Kevin Mason. Congratulations to everyone involved in making the event a resounding success. Kathleen, Adam, Kevin, you have all done a wonderful job.

**Ripon electorate**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (09:46): It has been a little while since I have spoken in this place. My son Liam Allan Lynch was born prematurely on 8 September last year and was kept healthy and well by the incredible midwives, doctors and special care nursery team at Bendigo Health. It meant I took a little time away to learn how to be a mum and to soak in the newborn phase, but my work as the member for Ripon never stopped, and I kept fighting for my community every single day, even from my hospital bed.

The local wins across Ripon did not cease either, including millions of dollars secured for new key worker housing in Ararat and Beaufort; millions more for school improvements in St Arnaud, Creswick, Haddon, Talbot, Miners Rest and Clunes; a completed new kinder for St Arnaud; reduced speed limits for Waubra and Eddington; more than \$600,000 for new CFA tankers and equipment; a new truck for the Wedderburn SES; a new bus extension to Lucas; school bus route improvements for Miners Rest; \$100,000 for a new Beaufort men's shed; a brand new ambulance station for Avoca; a new mosque for Ararat; 60 kilometres of mountain bike trails in Creswick; new drinking water for Elmhurst; and the reopening of bushfire-impacted areas of Mount Cole and Mount Buangor. I could not be prouder to raise the voices of rural and regional Victorians in this place, and I look forward to more of it to come.

**Housing**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:47): Thirty years ago a public housing resident in my community went into her Brighton East home and the department approved her setting up an above-ground pool. Twenty-seven years later the department has ordered that the pool be removed without explanation. The retired resident uses the pool for therapeutic benefits due to medical conditions. For years the resident has been fighting the decision and recently said to me, 'It's become a lengthy process and put more pressure on me and my health.' Despite representations to the minister, the government

has coldly told the public housing tenant that they cannot have pools full stop. Why should public housing tenants, especially ones who have had a discreet facility in their home for 30 years, be disadvantaged because they live in social housing?

**Brighton Life Saving Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:48): The Brighton Life Saving Club are wonderful community leaders. Recently the club held their second annual pink patrol breakfast. The day was established to celebrate the amazing role women and girls have played in making the club and the broader lifesaving community what it is today. Thank you to club president Sam Dimopoulos for his leadership.

**Bayside Against Crime rally**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:48): Hundreds of Bayside residents rallied at a community walk along Hampton Street in Hampton, calling for action to make our streets safe again. Bayside knows that the state Labor government has ignored the crime crisis and refused to act. Residents at the rally called for tougher action on fixing the catch-and-release bail system and an increase to police resources in our community and want offenders to face consequences for their actions. This government is ignoring crime.

**Ernie Metcalf**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (09:49): Today I acknowledge the upcoming retirement of Ernie Metcalf, the CEO of Distinctive Options in Sunbury. Since taking up the role nine years ago Ernie has been tireless in his efforts and has well and truly transformed the work of Distinctive Options. He and I caught up last week, and on behalf of our community I took the opportunity to thank Ernie for all of the work that he has done. We wish him all the best on his next chapter in life. Ernie, thank you. You have been a wonderful servant of our community, and we greatly appreciate your work.

**Sunbury Neighbourhood House**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (09:50): On another matter, it was great to join members of the Repair Cafe at the Sunbury Neighbourhood House on Saturday repairing local items. I believe over 700 items have been repaired on behalf of the community. I want to acknowledge every single person that has played a great role in that service. And on the Sunbury Neighbourhood House, I also take the opportunity to thank Hope Jenkins, who has done a power of work both within the local community and supporting members of Sunbury and the wider community each and every day. These are two people who are outstanding servants of our community, and I want to take the opportunity to thank them and acknowledge their work.

**AGL Loy Yang Traralgon Junior International**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (09:50): During January the Traralgon junior international tennis tournament was held. It has been going for over 30 years. We even had Lord Ian Botham in attendance there one of the evenings – it was great to catch up with him. Both the male and female doubles players that won in Traralgon went on to win their respective titles at the Australian Open later in the month. What we are looking for now, and I will be speaking and reaching out to the respective ministers, is upgrades to the change rooms. The courts are unbelievable. Craig Tiley and Tennis Australia are fully backing Susie and the team down in Traralgon to continue this tournament, but we do need some help with upgrades to the facility with the change rooms, showers, toilets and massage facilities for our international tennis players that come down.

**Kokoda Track**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (09:51): It is that time again for Kokoda. We are going again in July. The Marsh/Tierney Scholarship, which is in my seat of Morwell, is open to all year 11 students. We have put the call out to the students to put in their resume as such. We need to raise \$7000, so

anyone wanting to jump on board, we are taking over 40 students this year to Kokoda. It is hard, but it is a life-changing effort for these students.

**Community connectors program**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (09:52): Last week I was delighted to help launch the community connectors program at Frankston station, with the initial rollout successful in engaging over 120 people at the station. Eight million visitors pass through Frankston station each year, making it an incredibly busy hub. The community connectors program is now providing on-the-ground support for people facing mental health challenges, social isolation and financial hardship, helping reduce antisocial behaviour and trespassing incidents while keeping public spaces supportive and inclusive for our Frankston community. Together with Metro Trains Melbourne, South East Community Links and the Frankston City Council, we are making Frankston station and Young Street a more inclusive and vibrant public space.

**Frankston electorate health services**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (09:52): I was so excited to turn up to the Langwarrin ambulance station and officially open it with the member for Hastings last week. This world-class ambulance station will support our paramedics to do what they do best and give the residents in Melbourne's south-east and the Mornington Peninsula confidence that the best care is just around the corner. Of course this complements our ever-growing health precinct in Frankston, including the incredible Frankston Hospital, a huge undertaking that some of those opposite said we could not do and we would not do. Well, saying g'day to the 850 workers onsite last week, taking the lift up and seeing the view over Frankston from the new helipad – that was amazing. It was great to see other colleagues in areas that will be serviced by this hospital. It is an amazing undertaking. I thank everyone who has worked on this project and those who will see it to fruition very soon.

**Police conduct**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (09:53): I will never forget the sound of explosions detonating in the crowd at Land Forces anti-war protests last year. The media and the Premier were very quick; they piled on and blamed anti-war protesters for violence. But a new report from legal observers at Melbourne Activist Legal Support says otherwise. It confirms that Victoria Police used potentially lethal chemical, projectile and explosive weapons at close range on people who were posing no threat. It shows that the police's dangerous crowd control tactics started the conflicts that led to arrests. But this is not the first time, because Victoria Police is currently the subject of a class action. Yesterday the courts heard that in 2019 a climate activist was hit while he was unarmed and posing no threat with excruciatingly painful OC spray by a police officer who later remarked: 'He needed that.' The right to protest is internationally recognised, but Victoria Police and the Premier are cracking down on protests. They are desperately trying to deter, to silence and to punish. Protest has always existed, and it always will, because protest works. And if it did not, they would not be trying to ban it.

**Mulgrave electorate small businesses**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (09:55): I rise today to talk about some of the great local businesses within the Mulgrave electorate. Over the past week I have been visiting a number of terrific small businesses within my community, discussing the investments being made locally through the Springvale Asian Business Association as well as the small business support that is being provided through Business Victoria. I met with Jenny from Absolute Space Fengshui, Eleyas from ELY grocery and Wajida from Bebeautybee. I was also fortunate to visit the new business opened by Chris called Phong Phu. Small business is the backbone of our local economies, and I am glad to see that business is thriving locally in Springvale.

**Mulgrave Cricket Club**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (09:55): Also, congratulations go to the Mulgrave Cricket Club for reaching the Eastern Cricket Association T20 grand final and winning against Ashburton Willows last night. During my recent visit I had the chance to see the new cricket nets and wickets made possible by the Victorian government's \$750,000 contribution.

**Jordan Hill**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (09:56): Finally, a big shout-out to Jordan Hill from the Parkfield Cricket Club in my electorate, in Noble Park. Jordan took a triple hat-trick over the weekend, playing against Melton in the shield 2 of the Cricket Victoria women's development league. Jordan ended her bowling for the match with figures of seven wickets for 11 runs off 6.4 overs. For those who do not know, a triple hat-trick is taking five wickets in five balls.

**Albury Wodonga Health**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (09:56): On 15 December 2023 it almost rained in the north-east. Mary-Anne – that is not her real name – remembers because on that Wednesday 431 days ago she was put on the category 2 surgery list at Albury Wodonga Health. 431 days is the average wait on the category 2 waiting list. Hopefully she is being prepped for surgery now. It should have been 90 days, but instead it has been 431 days of living in pain – 431 days if she is lucky. So many wait for far longer.

If Rutherglen's Mary-Anne suffered a life-threatening episode because of the delayed surgery, there would be just a one in five chance of an ambulance getting to her in time. Of the 190 people in Indigo shire with a code 1 ambulance emergency in late 2024, 147 could not be reached in the 15-minute critical window. That is a 77 per cent strike rate – a deficiency.

Today I will ask another Mary-Anne to explain why the desperately needed modular surgical units and step-down beds at Albury Wodonga Health remain in limbo. The lack of beds is why ambulances are ramped and surgeries delayed. Just like Alice in Wonderland, you will never meet Mary-Anne, but the numbers are real. For so many the numbers are real. When is the government going to get real with us?

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members to use correct titles when they are referring to other members in the chamber.

**Glen Waverley electorate multicultural events**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (09:58): The Glen Waverley district is a vibrant community, enriched by its diversity and multiculturalism. These past few weeks I have been delighted to join my community in celebrating the Year of the Snake, a year associated with wisdom, charm, elegance and transformation. It has been wonderful celebrating the Chinese New Year with the following organisations.

Mrs Li and her team at the Monash Senior Chinese Volunteers Service Centre and president Michael Miao and members of the Chinese Association of Monash treated me to an incredible display of traditional dance and performances showcasing the talent which stems from a deep connection to their cultural roots. Furthermore I attended the Federation of Chinese Associations celebrations with president Derek Chen. This event was run under the theme of 'Reflect, respect and celebrate'. I thank Xiao Yinqi and the team at the Chinese Seniors Education and Skills Development Association for inviting me to their wonderful event celebrating traditional Chinese cultural dance and song, and I thank them for a delicious lunch. I thank president Alan Yang and his team at the Australian–Shanghai general chamber of commerce for their event launching the Shanghai Youth Club.

It was a pleasure to attend the 2025 Glen Waverley Lunar New Year and Lantern Festival in the heart of my electorate, a proud showcase of the best of the Chinese community in the Glen Waverley district. A big thank you goes to Cecilia Hsieh and her team for putting on a great event. This celebration all

culminates in the first celebration of Chinese New Year here in Parliament today. I hope everyone can pop by at lunchtime. I will be hosting an event showcasing the Cloud Concert Youth Orchestra and celebrating the Year of the Snake. Xīn nián kuài lè, gōng xǐ fā cái.

**Monbulk electorate student leaders**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:59): School is back and that means a new cohort of student leaders have been taking up the mantle across the Monbulk district. I have had the absolute pleasure of presenting leadership badges in the past week to the fantastic new student leaders at Monbulk Primary School and Macclesfield Primary School. At Monbulk Primary School I would like to extend my congratulations to Olivia, Jack, Mackenzie, Hudson, Savannah, Harvey, Eliza and Angus; and at Macclesfield Primary School congratulations go to Alex, Hemi, Noah, Abel, Logan, Cooper, Alice, Nina, Scarlett, Lawson, Eric, Kris, Patrick, Jensen, Indigo, Abigail, Elize, Harrison, Jayden, Isabelle, Krystal and Ainslee. Congratulations to all. I look forward to doing the same at Emerald Primary School later this week.

**Worrell Reserve skate park and youth plaza**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:00): Did you know that Australia has the highest per capita number of skate parks of any country in the world? I had the privilege of opening the new skate park and youth plaza in Worrell Reserve two weeks ago in Emerald, and it is one for the books. Community consultation and careful design has resulted in a truly impressive skate park. I had the great fortune to meet Renton Millar, who is a former international world cup vert champion and Olympic judge, who said to me, 'You couldn't ask for more in a skate park.' This is a destination skate park, already attracting interstate skaters and international ones, right here in the hills. The new facilities include an enclosed bowl, hips, corners, mini ramp, quarter pipe and more, and there is a multi-use ball court. That is thanks to our investment and Cardinia shire.

**Carole Marple**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:01): Vale, Carole Marple. Carole was a dedicated unionist and ALP member before becoming the first member for Altona in 1992. She had a strong work ethic and a passion for social justice, equality for women and fairness for workers. But she was also known for her campaign ute, which was full of balloons. That was effective, because in the two elections in Indi between 1980 and 1983 she achieved an 11 per cent primary swing towards Labor. She was an advocate for the environment, a member of the noxious weeds board and instrumental in the development of Landcare. In her first speech she said:

I believe a society is only as rich as the poorest of our fellow travellers and that we will be judged on our time here by whether we put people first and how we treated those among us who do not have all the skills needed to survive in a modern world.

She was especially proud to be the first representative of Altona, saying:

One of our best kept secrets is that Altona is a bayside suburb. The water that laps our shores also laps the shores of Brighton.

She knew her place in the world. Carole will be deeply missed by all those who she helped, and she will be fondly remembered by the member for Kororoit and Point Cook ALP branch members, especially president John Ballestrino. My condolences to Luke, Kate, Marion, Tony, Patrick, Sophie, Lewis, Shannon and Peggy, and thank you to her grandson Lewis for providing ALP branch members and me with the story of Carole's life. Vale.

**Bass electorate community awards**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:02): Congratulatory letters are on the way for these exquisite selfless selves living amongst us for their amazing service and local achievements that glisten bright. Lang Lang awards went to Brian Candy, Mathew Wise, Rosemary Kruizinga and Alan Light. Wonthaggi Rotary Club awarded Don Paproth, Lisa Sartori and Marcus Satchell, Alan and Robyn

Bolding, Barbara Luke and Peter Dell. Koo Wee Rup awards were aplenty, with Mary Wilson as Citizen of the Year. Students from local schools leading by example and making positive contributions imbued with kindness, passion and drive were also celebrated. Thank you Emily James, Hunter Stockdale, Koah Kelly, Liara Kauri, Harley Stivey, Isla Hughes, Billy Herrington, Evie Dennis, Reuben Kempson-Dubay, Makayla Flenier, Mackenzie Farmer and Keely Milner.

**Bass electorate vocational education and training**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:03): It was wonderful to have the Minister for Skills and TAFE Gayle Tierney visit my electorate, with a lot happening in the skills space. The vocational major is incredibly popular at Bass Coast College, and we welcome the Minister for Education to visit, meet students and see the career pathways forming that can lead to good local jobs. Bass Coast Health is partnering with TAFE Gippsland on a training pilot, and I am very pleased that Chisholm is accepting enrolments in five free TAFE courses for face-to-face learning. Bass Coast Adult Learning is an energy hub with courses on offer, recognised also with statewide awards. There is still more to do, and our government is committed to making a fit-for-purpose network of skills opportunities in the Bass Coast.

**Yuwa Diwas**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:04): Thank you to the Vivekananda Society of Australia and the Hindu Council of Australia for hosting such a special Yuwa Diwas 2025, a celebration of the youth and talents of young people, which commemorated the 163rd anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda, who did so much to share the ancient tenets of Hinduism with the world. I was thrilled to join the member for Broadmeadows at this special celebration of young people in our community who showcased their amazing talents through music, dance and debating competitions.

**Hume City Football Club**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:04): The 2025 season has kicked off in style at Hume City FC under the leadership of new president and legend of Australian football Ersan Güllüm. It was a thrilling match at Nasiol Stadium last Friday when Hume's Welsh wizard Lloyd Isgrove jagged a very late brace to knock off Dandenong Thunder and snatch the points in front of a massive local crowd. Under Ersan's leadership and the dedicated team of coaches and volunteers he has put together, the club is in great hands and has such exciting plans for football in the north.

**BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:05): What a privilege to meet His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, at the Swagat Sabha this weekend, where many thousands gathered for the Celebrate Peace Aksharbrahma in the Pacific, a joyful celebration of peace, unity and mutual respect within Australia's multicultural community.

**Victorian Mosque Open Day**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:05): It was mosque open day on the weekend, and I was delighted to attend the ICMG mosque in Meadow Heights. I want to thank Imam Hasan, Ramazan Ötkün and all of those associated with Islamic Community Millî Görüş for making me so welcome.

**Kangan Institute, Broadmeadows campus**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:05): It was so exciting to officially open the magnificent Kangan Institute's centre of excellence in health and community care with the Premier and Minister Tierney, an incredible investment in Broadmeadows and more opportunities for locals to get into jobs that are in demand and deeply rewarding through our free TAFE program.

**Early Learning Victoria Wimbi**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:06): The Premier was also in our electorate on Monday for the opening of the Wimbi early learning centre at Moomba Park Primary with Minister Blandthorn, one of the first of Labor's 50 government owned and run affordable early childcare centres, allowing more local families easy access to our free kinder programs.

**Vinnies Broadmeadows**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:06): On Thursday I got a sneak peek at the new Vinnies store opening soon right next to my office in Broadmeadows. Thanks to all the volunteers doing a wonderful job. It was great to have a cuppa and yarn with Joe Perri from the Fawkner Residents Association.

***If Everyone Cared Enough***

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:06): On National Sorry Day I had the incredible privilege of attending the book relaunch of *If Everyone Cared Enough* by proud Yorta Yorta woman and fierce advocate Margaret Tucker MBA, whose children and grandchildren have now ensured the story is published in her very own words. We got to know so much about her through the stories they shared, along with long-term neighbours from Osway Street in Broadmeadows. It is through listening to stories of each other that we truly learn and understand each other.

**Victorian Mosque Open Day**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:07): The open mosque day on Sunday offered us another opportunity to deepen our understanding and respect for each other. I thank the ICMG mosque, which I attended with the member for Greenvale, and the Fawkner masjid for welcoming us so warmly. It is a wonderful opportunity to share each other's culture and faith.

**Narre Warren North electorate sports clubs**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:07): I want to say a big congratulations to the Narre North Cricket Club and the Narre Magic Basketball Club for receiving the sports club grant. This funding will go towards new on-field uniforms and equipment, a great addition to the upcoming season.

***Statements on parliamentary committee reports*****Electoral Matters Committee*****Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election***

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:07): It gives me pleasure to rise to contribute this morning on parliamentary committee reports, and the report that I will be speaking on this morning is the 2022 election review inquiry, of course undertaken by the Electoral Matters Committee. Before I begin I would just like to acknowledge in particular the former members of that committee that contributed to this report, in particular the former chair the member for Kororoit and the former deputy chair the member for Narracan, and also give a special mention to a former member of this committee, the member for Pakenham, who by all accounts in the conversations I have had contributed significantly to this inquiry and should be congratulated as well on her work on this report and indeed on the Electoral Matters Committee.

The 2022 Victorian state election saw, I think we would all agree, some of the worst behaviour that we have witnessed in any election ever. In this place we make the decision to run for Parliament, to run for office, and the vast majority of us have got pretty thick skin. But some of the behaviour, in particular at polling booths, was abhorrent – intimidatory tactics both to candidates and, I think most concerning, to voters as well. When you have people from multicultural communities and people from our disabled communities coming in to vote and they are taken aback and literally scared to go in and

exercise their democratic right, then I think we have a problem, and a problem that needs addressing. That was most certainly within the terms of reference of this report.

The report handed down several recommendations, including the adjustment of election timelines just to ease the pressure on both political parties and indeed independents nominating and contesting elections, the shortening of nomination periods and also the improvement of voting processes. There were also recommendations around the composition of Victoria's upper house – not just the composition but how members are elected to the upper house as well, with a particular focus on group voting tickets. I will note that there is a further inquiry that is being undertaken presently into that issue, so I will not speak on it so as not to cut across the inquiry that is being undertaken right now by the Electoral Matters Committee.

Another key component of this inquiry and indeed this report was the Victorian Electoral Commission's performance during the 2022 election, and I will note the Leader of the House just referred to this very committee another quite small and narrow inquiry into the Werribee and Prahran by-elections, which will also examine the VEC's performance. We are incredibly lucky in Australia and in Victoria to have an independent electoral commission. It is a fundamental pillar of our democracy and one that needs to be – I do not want to say protected, because no-one in this place is suggesting that we do not have a VEC. But it needs to perform at its very best, so making sure that the performance of that independent commission is front and centre when we do these election reviews is incredibly important, and this report is no different on that. There has been a government response to this report, and I note that there is further work to do on these issues.

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

#### *Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates*

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (10:12): I rise to make a contribution on the *Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates* by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, tabled on 31 October last year. I have previously addressed this report, but today I wish to draw your attention to one particular finding and the corresponding recommendation that the committee makes in its report relating to building upgrades at schools across Victoria, something that I know is very important to all members in this house. Finding 29 in the report states that:

Department of Education completed the first five-year cycle of the *Rolling Facilities Evaluation* program in 2023. It has not reported on the findings or outcomes of these assessments.

This finding goes to the very heart of the lack of transparency and accountability with so many school communities in this state. So many school communities in this state raise with me the very, very poor facilities and maintenance at their schools and the lack of attention from this government – and the minister is walking through the chamber – and of course the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA). They tell me how much they struggle to understand why their capital upgrades, their refurbishments and their maintenance are continuously deferred and ignored under this government. I am sure you are aware that in last year's budget there were 29 unfunded school upgrades. Twenty-nine schools had been promised upgrades by this government on the eve of the 2022 election yet are still waiting for that funding to complete those projects before the 2026 election.

Looking at the breakdown of those commitments made before the 2022 election, it is very interesting data, when you cut it up, on where those commitments were made and where that funding has flowed. Of the schools Labor made commitments to in 2022, 70 per cent were in Labor seats and only 26 per cent were in coalition seats. But interestingly 80 per cent of those schools in Labor seats have received funding while only 41 per cent of coalition seats have seen that funding flow through since the election. That is absolutely appalling. This government claims to govern for all Victorians, but money is being funnelled only into Labor seats where school communities need those upgrades when there is need right across this state. If I look at some of the 29 schools on the list that are desperately awaiting these upgrades, we have Gardenvale Primary School in the member for Brighton's seat, we have Broadford

Primary School in Euroa and we have Manorvale Primary School in Werribee – I hope to see that commitment flow through very quickly in the coming weeks with the new member in Werribee. These schools are in desperate need of upgrades, yet under this government and this minister time and time again they are missing out.

If we go back to the finding in this report around providing transparency when it comes to publishing the information about these condition assessment reports of schools, the VSBA and the government assure us that they are prioritising works in accordance with need. But the committee found, for anyone who is interested to read the report, that in 2017 the Victorian government agreed to publish demand and condition information annually to provide transparency about how investment priorities are made for new and existing schools. However, this is yet to be implemented.

At the end of 2023, because of the lack of transparency in publishing this information, I put an FOI into the Department of Education to produce a full list of the maintenance scores of schools in this state. Of course it was rejected by the Department of Education and the minister on the grounds that it was not in the public interest. First and foremost, they claimed cabinet-in-confidence, and then they claimed that it was a working document, but the Victorian information commissioner rejected that outright and said that this list should be published in full because it is in the public interest that Victorian taxpayers know how their funding of maintenance upgrades is being spent and prioritised in this state. Did I receive that list? No. The minister is taking us to VCAT instead, spending money on expensive lawyers to fight the release of this information about where schools in this state desperately need upgrades. Maybe the minister should spend less time taking us to court, spend less time making calls to shore up the votes of his colleagues and actually deliver for Victorian schools in this state.

### Environment and Planning Committee

#### *Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply*

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:17): I might speak on a committee report. The committee report that I have chosen to speak on is the Environment and Planning Committee's *Securing the Victorian Food Supply*. I will not go into the processes of FOI, because that was not covered by the report, nor were the processes of FOI covered in the report on the budget. But anyway, I will continue. This report was delivered in November 2024. My chamber neighbour and chair of the committee the member for Wendouree highly recommended this report, and I highly recommend it to others in this place. What was the point of the report? It was to consider the context of urban sprawl and the impact of population growth on our farming industries. The chair's foreword begins by saying:

Securing the Victorian food supply is an existential issue for our state ...

Nothing could be truer. Ensuring ongoing food supply for Victoria from Victoria is an existential question for us. The community that I represent in Werribee South is an extraordinary growing area in this state. From just 0.02 per cent of the landmass of Victoria we produce 10 per cent of Victoria's vegetables, so the broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, fennel and artichokes that we may enjoy in our lunch today have most likely come from Werribee South, just 30 kilometres down the road.

**Sarah Connolly** interjected.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** The member for Laverton is such a big supporter of our farming communities and our broader south-west. Why do we know that farmers do essential work? Because just on the way in this morning on the radio we heard about the supply of bananas across the state. Many customers entering supermarkets and greengrocers over the next few days and weeks will find that there is a shortage of bananas or an increase in cost because of the floods up in Queensland. The diversity of our farms, our farm workers and our growing regions is important, particularly in our peri-urban areas, which are under threat as identified in this report. This report does identify that productive farmland is on the fringe of Melbourne, like the community that I represent. There are challenges to being in peri-urban areas, including the dumping of rubbish and trespassing. I witness this almost

every day in the community that I represent, and I encourage Wyndham City Council to take a more proactive role in making sure that our farmland is protected from dumping. The report says:

The ongoing loss of farmland around urban centres where most Victorians live also has implications for the resilience of our food supply.

I am proud to say that the green wedge that covers the area of Werribee South is firmly in place. I have eyeballed the minister alongside farmers to confirm that this is the case. I say to those land developers who are land banking or seeking to make a profit from turning farmland into housing: do not bother. Do not bother with this government – unlike the previous government, where Matthew Guy opened up precinct structure plans adjoining this land for more housing alongside our precious farmland. We do not intend to do so; we intend to protect our farmers. Farmers have a friend in the Labor Party – peri-urban farmers have friends in the Labor Party who will protect their ongoing and viable businesses. I do note, Deputy Speaker, that I will refer to members by their electorate – the member for Bulleen – and I apologise for my disrespect to the member on that part of the process.

Why is it important? The supply chains of peri-urban farms are much more convenient and much more approachable for our communities and protect the supply chains, unlike some major supermarkets who seek their food from faraway lands. The focus of this inquiry must be commended. It included a recommendation for a minister for food and a Victorian food system strategy. As they say, it is:

... needed to reorient agricultural governance and policy on securing the state's food supply.

I am limited in the time that I have left, but I do want members to read this report, including the recommendations around protecting farmland on the fringes of Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat and considering green wedges for those parts of Victoria – those growing, wonderful communities. There was no minority report to this report, because it was such an excellent report, as recommended by my chamber neighbour. I thank the member for Wendouree, chair; the member for Morwell as deputy chair; and the members for Bass, Monbulk, Ripon, Croydon and Warrandyte for their efforts. I look forward to speaking on this report again.

### Electoral Matters Committee

#### *Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election*

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (10:22): The report I want to talk on is the Electoral Matters Committee review of the 2022 election, and particularly I want to focus on two of the recommendations that came out of the four major areas they want to see reform in. The first one is shortening the time period for pre-poll from 12 to seven days, closing the electoral roll earlier and bringing forward the close of nominations. For those of us that man polling booths, one of the challenges for the Victorian Electoral Commission is that because they only take short-term leases on polling booth sites, particularly the pre-poll sites, sometimes it is quite challenging not only for those manning the booth but particularly for those that actually go to vote at these booths.

The most recent example in Echuca was where there was a polling booth right on the busiest roundabout in the town and no parking available unless you went across the road to Dan Murphy's, which some people may find attractive but most people do not necessarily. And then particularly for those that had mobility challenges, they had to cross two busy streets to get to the polling booth. It was dangerous for those people to come and do the pre-poll. Could I add to that recommendation actually that some detailed work be done on the positioning of pre-poll booths so there is some parking and there is the opportunity to get there without having to cross too many busy roads. I think it would make for a much more pleasant experience for everyone. Also there is the fact that when the electoral office staff draw the chalk line on the concrete out the front they are effectively almost standing on the roadway and the same for the people that are coming in. So I think there are some opportunities there to reform the experience for voters and for those that man the booths.

The other issue I want to talk on is the eliminating of group voting tickets in the upper house, and I want to focus on the Northern Victoria Region in particular. My understanding is that our Westminster

voting system is set up to reflect the majority of voters' views as to who they elect there. If I look at the result in the upper house in the northern region, the Animal Justice Party was elected on 1.53 per cent of the vote. I do not necessarily think having a member of Parliament that came in with such a low percentage of the vote is reflective of the majority. It is reflective of the fact that Glenn Druery has worked out how to game the system and charges people for that ability to game the system to get someone elected, which I think is a separate issue, one that IBAC might want to have a look at at some particular time in the future.

What you find is not only was the Animal Justice member of Parliament elected on 1.53 per cent of the vote but with the support of the Labor Party that person was made chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, a committee that does a number of inquiries. Again, with the support of the Labor Party, the chair of that committee, who was elected with 1.53 per cent of the vote, was able to conduct own-motion investigations by that committee into industries that are very important to northern Victoria. They had an inquiry into the operation of the pig industry with the defined aim of actually closing down the pig industry here in Victoria. Someone that was elected with 1.53 per cent of the vote, enabled further by the Labor Party to chair a committee, wanted to close down one of the major industries in northern Victoria. Sixty per cent of the pigs that are produced in Victoria come out of my electorate. That created huge uncertainty for that particular industry there.

Might I say that through that particular process this member of Parliament, who was elected with 1.53 per cent of the vote, was working with a known terrorist group, the Farm Transparency Project, and I do not use the word 'terrorist' lightly. If you look at the definition of 'terrorist', it is a person who uses unlawful violence and intimidation, especially against civilians – that is, pig producers – in the pursuit of a political gain. So we have a person that was elected with 1.53 per cent of the vote supporting a terrorist group to try and close down lawful businesses here in Victoria, particularly the abattoirs at Benalla, the Sinclair abattoirs. They chained themselves to the chamber which the pigs go into, which caused so much stress to Colin Sinclair and his family and caused so much cost to Colin Sinclair and his family in defending a civil court case around this issue.

I do not believe the group voting tickets delivering the outcome they have is actually reflective of the community views in my electorate, who want to have that lawful industry, who want to have bacon for breakfast, who might want to actually have roast pork that does not come from interstate or overseas, because we have a person elected with a very small percentage of the vote that wants to close it down.

### Environment and Planning Committee

#### *Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply*

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:27): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply and to be able to follow my very good friend and my very close neighbour the member for Point Cook, who I know has talked so passionately here in this place time and time again since being elected in 2022 about Werribee South and the food that is grown there. I am sure the member for Point Cook will not mind me saying for him, as a proud vegetarian, I am sure that he and his family each and every single day have food on their plates at home on their dinner table that is grown in Werribee South.

It is fantastic to be able to rise to speak on the inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply. The goal of this inquiry was to examine the challenges facing Victoria's agriculture and food supply as we deal with a growing population and an expanding city. It is a perfect opportunity to talk about the tremendous and awesome growth that is happening in Melbourne's outer west, and right next door is one of the largest food supplies and food bowls. In Queensland, where I spent quite a few years living, we called it the salad bowl. The dirt was as red as anything and could grow anything, and a lot of the food grown there in south-east Queensland was in fact grown right next door to where I was living. The same thing as was happening up there in Redland Bay all those years ago is happening in

Wyndham, and that is that more and more houses and precinct structure plans are coming through and are getting closer and closer and creeping closer and closer towards where our food supply is being grown and coming from. It is incredibly important to have an inquiry to look at not only the impact of that on food supply from a security perspective but, as the member for Point Cook spoke about, the importance of simple things such as rubbish being dumped in those farmlands where we are growing some of Victoria's best food so that it does not continue, and I join him in calling on Wyndham City Council to do a better job of picking up the rubbish, which the community is tired of seeing scattered across its local community. To think that it is in the farmland where their food is grown and produced is just appalling.

We know that here in Victoria the agricultural sector plays such an important role in our state's economy, accounting for over \$10.8 billion and about 2 per cent of the state's gross state product. Just as our government looks at how we are going to create more housing, better housing, more sustainable housing and how we are going to build the infrastructure to support a growing population, we also have to consider, most importantly, how we are going to continue to feed them. The question is more serious than perhaps it sounds, especially as we balance the expansion of Melbourne and outer-regional cities and towns into areas which were traditionally considered viable agricultural land. I know that Werribee South is but one of many examples, but it is important to talk about Werribee South, because the report tells us that this agricultural land adjacent to Melbourne, like the farms we see a stone's throw from here in the city and the CBD, where we are now, has serious implications for the resilience of our food supply and in fact is more vulnerable to disruption, as opposed to farmland further afield in regional Victoria and rural Victoria.

The report makes a total of 29 findings and an additional 33 recommendations. It recommends a whole-of-government, whole-of-food-system response to the multifaceted challenges facing Victorian farmers, and this strategy must recognise that farmers are at the heart of Victoria's food system and that an agricultural sector that produces healthy and nutritious food is central to the health and, importantly, the wellbeing of Victorians that this sector feeds.

I do want to acknowledge and credit the work of the members on the Environment and Planning Committee – I used to be one of them – including my very good friend the member for Wendouree, who chairs this committee. I know this would have been a topic that is very close to her heart. I also want to acknowledge the work of the committee secretariat. As the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee chair, I know that a tremendous amount of work is done by the secretariat staff. This is a really great report, and many, many hours would have gone into the preparation of it. I recommend that everyone have a read of it, and I am happy to commend it to the house.

### Integrity and Oversight Committee

#### *Inquiry into the Operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (10:33): Sometime soon I expect we will see the government's response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report recommending an overhaul of Victoria's freedom-of-information laws. The IOC spent most of last year sifting through 69 often detailed submissions and hearing evidence during six days of public hearings to examine the many failings of our current FOI system and to consider alternatives. Our 40-year-old FOI system requires users to request information that is freely available, often, in other states. Victoria has about a thousand government agencies which are subject to FOI, and many of them, particularly hospitals and the police, are burdened by the sheer number of requests, which totalled in a recent year over 48,000 requests, mostly for personal information like medical records. FOI officers often have to consult third parties who have provided information before releasing it to the people who have requested it. The burden of that work, the poor state of many official records and the lack of alternative release pathways often leads to long delays, making that information unavailable when it is needed, such as for court cases.

Witnesses to the inquiry described a defensive culture within government agencies, a culture of delaying and withholding information. They told us that reforming the legislation will only be part of

the solution. Departmental and agency leaderships must foster a new culture favouring transparency. FOI fees can also add up and act as a deterrent to those seeking information, so the committee recommends a new right-to-information system which releases information proactively.

Departmental and agency websites should contain much of the information that Victorians currently use FOI to obtain. Application fees should be abolished, and charges should be limited to just the cost of copying and delivering information. There should be a presumption of disclosure with limited exceptions, which should only apply if they protect a legitimate interest and if the harm caused by releasing the information would outweigh the public interest in doing so. Cabinet documents should only be exempt if they were prepared for the dominant purpose of submission to cabinet. Personally, I would prefer to see more cabinet documents released when in the public interest as is done in New Zealand and Queensland. Personal information should be available by an informal release mechanism. The administrative burden of redacting sensitive information obtained from a third party can be reduced or even eliminated by storing that information in a way that allows it to be quarantined. Some modern medical record systems allow this. People should not have to pay for their personal information, and fees should be limited to reasonable costs of copying and delivering information.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the secretariat and particularly thank Holly Brennan, who finished up recently, not just for her work on this report but also her impressive contribution to the work of the IOC. I thank the 69 individuals and organisations who made submissions, particularly the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, and I thank my fellow committee members for their contributions as well.

With Donald Trump energising right-wing movements around the world, we need to protect democracy and its institutions more than we ever have. Maladministration thrives in secrecy, but open government allows public scrutiny to keep self-interest in check. We have no idea who will be in government in five or 10 years time, but we can legislate to ensure that they are subject to greater transparency. I look forward to a favourable government response to our recommendations and to legislative reform in this term of Parliament. Victorians should not have to battle with a freedom-of-information system that has a reputation for being impenetrable to obtain personal information or to obtain information that is in the public interest.

***Bills*****Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025***Statement of compatibility*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:38): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the **Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025**.

In my opinion, the **Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025**, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios Act 2015 (the Act) to introduce new and modify existing nurse to patient ratios and midwife to patient ratios that the operators of certain publicly funded health facilities must comply.

**Human Rights Issues**

**Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

The Bill promotes the following human rights protected by the Charter:

- The right to life (section 9 of the Charter); and
- The right to protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter).

**Right to life (section 9 of the Charter)**

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Clause 7 introduces a new nurse to occupied bed ratio for intensive care units in certain hospitals and also introduces requirements for team leaders and intensive care unit liaison nurses in those units. The introduction of these requirements will ensure the delivery of high-quality care in intensive care units.

Clauses 6 will improve nurse to patient ratios that apply to emergency departments by requiring one nurse for each resuscitation bed on the morning shift. Clauses 8 and 9 improve nurse to patient ratios that apply to the night shift in coronary care units and high dependency units of relevant hospitals. Clauses 11 to 13 improve nurse to patient and midwife to patient ratios that apply to the night shift in antenatal and postnatal wards of prescribed hospitals. The improvement to the ratios in these areas of specialty will ensure safe and quality patient care and as a result, will promote the right to life of the patients receiving care in these specialty settings.

**The protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter)**

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that the families are the fundamental group unit of society and that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State.

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to protection as is in their best interests, in recognition of a child's special vulnerability because of their age.

Clauses 11 to 13 of the Bill improve nurse and midwife to patient care in antenatal and postnatal wards of prescribed hospitals. These improved ratios will ensure that babies, mothers and pregnant women receive a high quality of care by improving opportunities for dedicated patient care and as a result will promote the protection of families and children.

**Other potential rights invoked**

**The right to equality (section 8 of the Charter)**

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The new and modified nurse and midwife to patient ratios in clauses 6 to 13 will distinguish between patients in different hospital settings. This may invoke the protected attributes of 'disability' and 'pregnancy' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and therefore engage the right to equality and non-discrimination.

However, distinguishing the level of care owed to a patient based on their setting in a hospital is reasonable and justified because patients with different illnesses and conditions require varying levels of care depending upon their clinical acuity and the associated treatment necessary to appropriately manage their illness or condition.

For the reasons outlined it is my view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**Mary-Anne Thomas MP**  
**Minister for Health**

*Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:38): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

This Bill delivers on the Government's commitment to further strengthen and protect nurse to patient and midwife to patient ratios and – in doing so – to improve the safety and quality of patient care for all Victorians

as well as workload arrangements for our nurses and midwives. This reflects the fact that safety is – and always will be – our highest priority.

Our nursing and midwifery workforce is at the heart of our Victorian public health system and continues to be the most trusted profession in Australia. There are over 50,000 nurses and midwives in our public health system committed to providing patient-centred, empathetic and individualised care.

Since its introduction in 2015, the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act in 2015 (Safe Patient Care Act) has successfully protected minimum workload arrangements – creating a safe, supportive and productive environment for nurses, midwives and patients.

The Government has already delivered two phases of improvements to the Safe Patient Care Act in 2019 and 2020. As a result of these amendments, an additional 1,100 nurses and midwives have been employed over the five years of implementation within general medical/surgical wards and specialist areas of palliative care, haematology, oncology, acute stroke, aged care, rehabilitation, emergency and maternity services.

This Bill proposes a third phase of amendments, delivering the Government’s election commitment to create better staffing and stronger ratios in Intensive Care Units (ICUs), High Dependency Units (HDUs), Coronary Care Units (CCUs) and Emergency Departments. It also provides more support for hardworking midwives to improve the quality of care for parents and their babies.

The Bill advances the intent of the Safe Patient Care Act and demonstrates the Government’s focus on safe and high-quality patient care in five key ways.

First, the Bill introduces staffing ratios into ICUs through the establishment of a 1:1 ratio for ICUs on all shifts in Level 1 and Level 2 ICUs.

Second, the Bill improves staffing ratios in resuscitation bays in Level 1 hospitals with Emergency Departments on morning shift by prescribing one nurse for each resuscitation cubicle on a morning shift in hospitals specified in Schedule 3 Part 1 of the Act.

Third, the Bill improves staffing ratios in postnatal and antenatal wards by enshrining a 1:4 midwifery ratio on night shift in prescribed health services. Maternity Capability Level 5 and 6, as well as Level 4 services that are part of a larger multicampus metropolitan health service will be prescribed for this purpose.

Fourth, the Bill introduces an in-charge nurse on night shift in standalone High Dependency Units and Coronary Care Units. An increase in overnight rostered nursing staff will help reduce clinical risk, improve patient safety and ensure patient and staff wellbeing.

Finally, an in-charge nurse, a team leader and liaison nurse will be introduced in addition to the specified ratios on shifts in Level 1 and Level 2 ICUs to provide essential support to staff, patients and their families.

The Bill also updates the list of hospitals in the Schedules to the Act to ensure they reflect current nomenclature.

A staged implementation process will occur to enable health services to plan and prepare for these improvements. The improvements will be phased in at 25% of the additional staffing implemented from the day after Royal Assent, 75% from 1 December 2025 and 100% from 1 July 2026.

Together these ratio improvements in the Safe Patient Care Act will contribute to the 457 additional nursing and midwifery FTE in the public health system committed at the 2022 State election.

This Bill provides the opportunity to further improve the workplace conditions for our hardworking nurses and midwives, and to make a substantial and positive impact on the provision of safe and high-quality care for all patients in Victorian public hospitals now and into the future.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:38): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 5 March.**

## Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (10:40): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025:

#### **Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

#### **Overview**

The Bill will adopt the primary and residual versions of the *Help to Buy Act 2024* (Cth) (the **Commonwealth Act**) and refer the necessary legislative powers of the Victorian Parliament to the Commonwealth Parliament to the extent necessary to enable the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme to operate in Victoria.

The Bill will enable the Commonwealth, through Housing Australia, to establish and administer the Help to Buy scheme in Victoria. The Help to Buy scheme is a shared equity scheme, which involves the provision of financial assistance to individuals from the Commonwealth, through Housing Australia, to assist those individuals to purchase a home. The Commonwealth Act will confer powers on Housing Australia to enter into shared equity arrangements for the purposes of the Help to Buy scheme, and is scheduled to the Bill.

The Bill also makes certain consequential amendments to the *Duties Act 2000*, the *Land Tax Act 2005*, and the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000*.

#### **Human Rights Issues**

For the following reasons, and having taken into account all relevant factors, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable and able to be justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

The Charter does not apply to Commonwealth laws, so will not apply to the Commonwealth Act. I note a human rights assessment has been tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament, which found the Commonwealth Act is compatible with human rights and freedoms, and promotes the protection of human rights.

The Bill also makes consequential amendments to Victorian legislation, and in my view, compatibility with human rights should be an integral part of the consideration of the adoption of any Commonwealth law by the Victorian Parliament that will impact on Victorians, so the government has carefully considered the human rights impacts of the Bill.

The following rights under the Charter are relevant to the Bill: right to privacy (section 13), protection of families and children (section 17), and property rights (section 20).

#### **Right to privacy (section 13 of the Charter)**

Section 13 of the Charter states that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

The Charter recognises that the right to privacy is only affected if the interference is unlawful or arbitrary. Section 13 therefore permits lawful and non-arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy. An interference will generally be lawful where it is precise and appropriately prescribed in law; it will generally be arbitrary only where it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to some legitimate aim being sought. The Charter recognises that while an interference with privacy will engage the rights contained in section 13, it may still constitute a reasonable limitation on those rights.

The Bill amends section 50 of the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* (FHOG Act). This amendment enables a person subject to a duty of confidentiality under the FHOG Act to disclose certain information to the Chief Executive Officer of Housing Australia for the purpose of confirming whether an applicant or participant in the Help to Buy Scheme is an applicant or participant in a home buyer scheme under the FHOG Act.

Housing Australia requires this information to determine that person's eligibility to participate in the Help to Buy scheme.

To the extent that the disclosure of information under the Bill may result in an interference with a person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary. The provisions that permit the disclosure of information are clearly set out in the Bill and are directly required for the purpose of ensuring that individuals are not approved to participate in both a Victorian home buyer scheme and the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme.

Protection of families and children (section 17)

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child.

This right is promoted by the Bill as it will support the establishment of a Commonwealth shared equity program that will create additional access to housing for Victorian low and middle-income households and families, including children.

Property rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law which authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

The Bill, and the Commonwealth Act, will generally support individuals to purchase homes in Victoria via the Help to Buy scheme. However, once they own a home, the Commonwealth Act could enable their property rights to be impacted where there has been non-compliance with participation arrangements, and other related matters to the Help to Buy scheme. However, any deprivation of property in this context would be in accordance with law, and the law will be accessible, clear, certain and precise, so that individuals may regulate their conduct while participating in the Help to Buy scheme.

**The. Hon Danny Pearson**  
**Minister for Finance**

*Second reading*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (10:40): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

I am pleased to introduce this Bill, which will adopt the Commonwealth's *Help to Buy Act 2024* to enable the Commonwealth to deliver its shared equity scheme, Help to Buy, in Victoria. It also provides an amendment reference to the Commonwealth Parliament to enable future changes to Help to Buy so it does not become static legislation and can evolve over time.

The Help to Buy scheme will support around 10,000 low to middle income Victorian households over four years to fulfil their dream of becoming homeowners. For a two per cent deposit, Help to Buy will enable eligible Victorians to get into the housing market. The Commonwealth will contribute up to 30 per cent for an existing home, or up to 40 per cent of a new home, of the purchase price in return for a proportionate interest in the property. Victorians will benefit from a smaller deposit, lower mortgage repayments and avoiding the cost of Lenders Mortgage Insurance.

Our Government has long recognised the issue of housing affordability in Victoria, and more broadly in Australia. It is the reason this Government created the Victorian Homebuyer Fund in 2021 and announced our Government's vision to deliver 800,000 dwellings over 10 years in Victoria's Housing Statement in 2023. We have more recently announced a number of measures to assist more people into housing, such as allowing homeowners to build small second homes without a planning permit, introducing a new temporary off-the-plan land transfer duty concession and plans for 50 new activity centres around public transport hubs.

The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has been tremendously successful in reducing the capital outlay for many Victorians looking to purchase a home. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has supported over 13,500 Victorians to become homeowners so far, with another 2,300 approved to purchase. In the *2024–25 Budget*, the Government expanded the Victorian Homebuyer Fund again with a final \$700 million investment to bring the total investment to \$2.8 billion.

It is now time to pass the mantle onto the Commonwealth to support Victorians into homeownership and I welcome the Commonwealth establishing Help to Buy. Victoria is proud to enable access to Help to Buy in Victoria through adopting the Commonwealth's legislation.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:40): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 5 March.**

**Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:41): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I have this opinion for the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* (the **Road Safety Act**) to repeal provisions of that Act relating to vehicle sharing schemes and to make further provision for offences involving electric scooters, including by providing for traffic infringement notices to be issued.

The Bill also amends the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* (the **Transport Compliance Act**) to insert provisions relating to vehicle sharing schemes, including the approval of vehicle sharing scheme operators, authorising agreements to operate a vehicle sharing scheme, and related offences.

**Human rights issues**

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- the right to privacy and reputation (section 13 of the Charter);
- the right to freedom of expression (section 15); and
- the fair hearing right (section 24(1)).

**Applications for vehicle sharing scheme operator approvals**

Clause 8 of the Bill inserts into the Transport Compliance Act new Part VIA, which provides for:

1. a person to apply to the Secretary for approval to be an 'approved category A scheme operator' (ie, of a category A vehicle (eg, an electric scooter) sharing scheme) (new section 206; the Secretary's determination of a person's application being made under new section 207A);
2. an approved category A scheme operator to apply to the Secretary for renewal of their approval (new section 207C);
3. the Secretary to revoke an approved category A scheme operator's approval, if the Secretary is satisfied of specified matters (new section 207D), and a requirement that notification of such a decision be published on the Department's Internet site (new section 207F);
4. a requirement that the Secretary maintain a register of approved category A scheme operators (new section 207G); and
5. an approved category A scheme operator, or a person who proposes to operate a category B vehicle sharing scheme, to enter into an agreement with a municipal council to operate a relevant vehicle sharing scheme within the municipal district of that council (new section 207L).

These amendments are relevant to the rights to fair hearing (section 24(1)), privacy (section 13) and freedom of expression (section 15).

*Fair hearing*

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. A ‘civil proceeding’ is not limited to a proceeding decided by judicial decision-makers; it may encompass the decision-making procedures of administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. While recognising that Charter rights should be interpreted broadly, the terms ‘proceeding’ and ‘party’ suggest that section 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties.

In my view, the administrative decisions provided for in clause 8 of the Bill do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, so as to engage section 24(1) of the Charter. Further, it is understood that, unless a decision determines existing rights, the fair hearing right in section 24(1) is unlikely to apply. In the context of this Bill, decisions determining existing rights would be limited to the revocation of an approved category A scheme operator’s approval under new section 207D.

If, however, a broad reading of section 24(1) were adopted and it was understood that the fair hearing right was engaged by this Bill, this right would not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision. The entire decision-making process, including the availability of review, must be examined to determine whether the right in section 24(1) is limited. In my view, section 24(1) is not limited because of the following key procedural fairness safeguards provided for in the Bill:

- if the Secretary refuses to approve an applicant to be an approved category A scheme operator, or refuses to renew an approval, or revokes an approval, the written notice for the decision must include a statement of reasons and must inform the applicant that they may seek review of the decision (new sections 207A(5), 207C(4) and 207D(4));
- further, before the Secretary makes a decision to revoke an approved category A scheme operator’s approval, the Secretary must give written notice (new section 207E);
- a person may apply for internal review of each of the Secretary’s decisions outlined above (see paragraphs 1, 2, and 3) – ie, to refuse to approve, refuse to renew, or revoke the person’s approval to be an approved category A scheme operator (new section 207H);
- the Secretary must appoint a delegate, who did not make the original decision, to determine the application for internal review (new section 207J); and
- if the original decision is affirmed at the conclusion of the internal review, a person may apply to the Tribunal for review of that decision to affirm it (new section 207K).

*Privacy and reputation, and freedom of expression*

Section 13(a) of the Charter prohibits unlawful or arbitrary interferences with a person’s privacy. Arbitrary interferences are those that are capricious, unpredictable or unjust, as well as unreasonable because they are not proportionate to a legitimate aim sought. An interference with privacy can still be arbitrary even though it is lawful.

Section 13(b) of the Charter prohibits unlawful attacks on a person’s reputation.

Finally, section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (including freedom from being compelled to provide information).

New section 206(2) of the Bill provides that applications must include certain details about the person applying for approval (or renewal, pursuant to new section 207C(4)), and any prescribed information. Further, new section 207G requires the Secretary to maintain a register of approved category A scheme operators, including prescribed information in respect of those operators, which must be available for inspection on the Department’s Internet site.

By requiring applicants to provide certain information in their applications for approval to be an approved category A scheme operator, and by requiring the Secretary to publish on the Department’s Internet site certain information, the Bill may engage sections 13 and 15(2) of the Charter, to the extent that these provisions affect natural persons. I note that these provisions will largely apply to companies.

To the extent that these requirements do interfere with the right to privacy, any interference would be in accordance with law and proportionate to the legitimate aim of determining that an applicant is a fit and proper person. Further, the exact extent and nature of any interference will be determined by the content of any future regulations, which will be subject to the requirement on the Minister to produce a Human Rights Certificate,

certifying its compatibility with the Charter. The Secretary's power to request further information under new section 207 is necessary to facilitate the proper discharge of assessing applications, and is limited in scope to relevant information. Further, the Secretary will be obliged to act compatibly with an applicant's right to privacy when exercising their functions under the Bill, including when requesting information.

Finally, new section 207F of the Bill requires the Secretary to ensure that notification of a decision to revoke approval is published on the Department's Internet site. I do not consider that this requirement would engage the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter, and the right not to have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked in section 13(b). This is because such a notification would not include personal information of a private nature and would serve the legitimate and important purpose of making it known to the public that a vehicle scheme operator has had their approval revoked.

**The Hon Gabrielle Williams MP**  
**Minister for Public and Active Transport**

*Second reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The use of e-scooters provided under sharing schemes has proven to be popular in Victoria, with Melbournians, in particular, taking up the devices in high numbers. E-scooters made available via sharing schemes are a useful and popular mode of transport for people wanting to travel short distances. They help to ease congestion, are an affordable mode of transport and provide first and last mile access to public transport.

With a view to ensure the safety of e-scooter riders, pedestrians and other road users, the Victorian Government undertook a trial of the use of e-scooters throughout Victoria under certain conditions. This trial commenced in December 2021 in Ballarat and, from 1 February 2022, in select Melbourne council areas. E-scooter riders using these devices as part of the trial were required to follow the Road Rules, which include requirements for the wearing of helmets, restrictions on speed and requirements for where the e-scooters are able to be lawfully ridden.

On 19 July 2024, the Allan Labor Government announced that the trial would conclude in October 2024, permanently allowing sharing scheme and private e-scooters to operate across Victoria. The Government also announced that new legislation will be introduced in 2025 setting out new requirements for e-scooter share hire operators applying to councils to operate in their municipalities, with minimum standards to be enforced through a pre-approval scheme. This Bill fulfills that commitment.

The e-scooter trial shows us that e-scooters provide the community with a low cost and emission-reducing form of alternative transportation. Many Victorians have used them to successfully make millions of trips over the past three years. While e-scooters have become a staple form of transport, they are still new devices to many in the community. The Government has observed that compliance with the rules for the use of e-scooters could be improved. To support better enforcement of these rules, the Bill also enables Protective Service Officers (PSOs) to issue infringements for certain e-scooter offences.

The Bill makes important changes to deliver on the Government's commitment to improving e-scooter safety and compliance and provide greater certainty to councils and sharing scheme operators which will make e-scooter use safer and enable the better management of parking and amenity issues.

**Pre-approval requirement for share hire e-scooter operators**

The Bill will provide local governments with better support to select vehicle sharing schemes within their local government areas by introducing a pre-approval requirement for prospective vehicle sharing scheme operators and imposing improved safety and technology standards on those operators. The Bill amends the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* to introduce a new regulatory framework for operators of vehicle sharing schemes. The regulatory model will initially cover e-scooter sharing schemes, with powers to prescribe other vehicle types as new vehicle types are provided as part of vehicle sharing schemes.

These measures are intended to improve safety and accessibility of e-scooters, and improve amenity in public spaces. Whilst e-scooters provide many benefits in terms of transport and mobility, there have been issues with e-scooters, hired as part of a sharing scheme, being ridden on footpaths or parked in a way that blocks access, introduces tripping hazards, or otherwise creating an impact on the use or amenity of public spaces.

The sharing scheme standards will address these issues by requiring operators of sharing scheme to implement systems, technologies and other safety measures.

The pre-approval process will be overseen by the Department of Transport and Planning. Operators will apply to the Secretary to the Department and provide evidence that the operators can comply with the scheme standards and that they are a fit and proper person.

The sharing scheme standards, which will be prescribed in regulations following the passage of the Bill, may include the following matters:

- Helmet use and verification, including measures to ensure that a helmet is made available to a hirer of an e-scooter and to verify that riders are wearing a helmet.
- Zone management, including capabilities to detect the location of sharing scheme vehicles and to slow or stop devices based on the location of the vehicle.
- Parking management, including measures to ensure that vehicles are parked appropriately at the end of a hire.
- Footpath detection, including requirements for sharing scheme vehicles to be fitted with technology to detect footpaths and take appropriate actions, such as playing an audio warning, or slowing or stopping the vehicle, when the vehicle is detected being ridden on a footpath.
- the detection of intoxicated riders and verification that riders are not otherwise impaired, including “cognitive reaction testing”.
- vehicle requirements, including vehicle identification, speakers for audio warnings and alerts, topple detection and other safety features.

The existing legislative provisions relating to the regulation of vehicle sharing scheme operators are set out in the *Road Safety Act 1986*. This includes the requirement for sharing scheme operators to enter into agreements with local councils before they commence operations in that local government area. These provisions will be repealed from the *Road Safety Act 1986* and re-enacted in the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* to form a comprehensive approach to regulating vehicle sharing scheme operations.

#### **Enabling Protective Service Officers to issue infringements for certain e-scooter offences**

The Bill will also provide the ability for PSOs to issue traffic infringement notices for e-scooter related offences. Currently, only police officers are able to enforce offences under the Road Rules that relate to e-scooters by issuing infringement notices to riders who are in breach of the Road Rules. This change is consistent with existing powers that PSOs have under the *Road Safety Act 1986* to issue parking infringement notices and traffic infringement notices to motorists that occur in the vicinity of designated places PSOs have been assigned to protect. As e-scooters often provide the first and last mile connection to public transport services, providing PSOs with these additional powers will serve to improve enforcement capability within existing resources, and, in turn, support improved compliance by e-scooter riders with safety rules.

#### **Conclusion**

The Bill represents the Government’s continued commitment to improve transport options for the community but also its commitment to ensure that they are safe, accessible and improve the amenity of the community.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:42): I move:**

That this debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 5 March.**

**Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Lily D’Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:42):** I rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This bill, like a number of bills that we have spoken about in this place, seemingly does some good things. It seemingly does some good things, and it would seem

to be fixing issues that exist. The guise, if you listen to the minister and the government, is that this bill is about fixing problems that exist in the energy system, but it does not. What this bill actually does is sneakily try to bring through amendments, under the guise of a more generic bill, which do not fix the problems we have in the energy system and which remove proper accountability measures for the government. What is worse, and this is an issue that we have seen for the life of this government and frankly is a cornerstone of this minister, the Minister for Energy and Resources, is the removal of the private sector, the pushing away of the private sector, from the energy system. I heard one of the government members say 'Thank God' when it was said, which just confirms the type of attitude this government has to –

Steve McGhie interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** The member continues to attack energy providers who get energy into people's homes. I started, when speaking about this bill, by saying that this bill tries to sneakily bring through changes that frankly do not fix issues that exist but attack the private sector in the work that they do. It turns out it was not just sneaky, because members of this chamber have confirmed it and the sector knows it. So it is important to put on the record at the start that this is a furtherance of the government's ideological agenda to ban gas in this state. This is another step in that process of banning gas in people's homes and in access for businesses to gas. We know the absolutely diabolical effect that Labor's gas ban, which we as a coalition do not support and will never support, will have on this state.

I will briefly mention what this bill supposedly does, and then we will get into more detail. It makes a number of amendments to the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 under the guise of the government saying that these changes are required because of the shift in the way our energy system operates in this state – a move from a centralised system, which we have talked about in this chamber around a number of legislative reforms over recent years, to a, for want of a better term, grid-like model. We have gone from a centralised system towards a grid-like model. So it does make sense that there are changes needed in the way that we operate the oversight of that because of those changes. Some of the changes the coalition does not oppose. We talk about a deterrence needing to be put in place in the way that energy is provided and operators perform. That makes sense, because if you are changing how energy is generated and the type of provider that generates it, you need to make sure that there is a safeguard and a framework around that. We have seen a small number of examples where things have gone wrong and people have done the wrong thing, so having a framework is important. That is why it is important to note that the coalition does not oppose certain frameworks of safety.

But the bill also does things like remove the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee from the system, which is a practical example of what we were talking about earlier – the government removing expert advice because of course this government thinks it knows best. Why would you remove an independent set of experts from providing advice on where things could be done differently or better? The coalition strongly opposes the government's attempt to remove the committees from the process, because I think it underlines exactly where this government goes wrong – this government, which thinks that the bureaucrats or the department or the minister know better than the independent experts. On that particular measure the coalition does not support what the government is proposing.

There are a number of other issues, including, for example, Energy Safe's corporate plan being moved from one year to three years. Clearly it is concerning to see any measure – and the coalition again has concerns with this one – in which accountability is reduced. Why would you propose a system whereby there is less transparent reporting? Transparent reporting should be the cornerstone of a good democratic government. The amendment to remove accountability in the way that it currently exists is another element about which the coalition has concerns.

I note the importance of and the need for ongoing accountability in the energy space, because if you just look at the *Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report*, which was tabled in November last year, at the end of the year we saw a 5.4 per cent increase in total state emissions. If we let the government do what they want to do – that is, reduce accountability in this space – we would see less truth being told in terms of their performance, because we know that there are performance issues. We know that the government's management of this transition is flawed. We have heard very little about the government's emissions increase, which was reported in November last year. The government has spent 10 years talking about their emissions reduction, and yet this report, which was tabled in November – for the record, the *Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report* – shows a 5.4 per cent increase in emissions. If you overlay that type of reporting on this bill and the requirement to delay reporting from one year to three years, what won't we know as a community? It is important to recognise that this, frankly, removes accountability other than potentially private side conversations with the minister rather than full public transparency which all Victorians deserve.

The bill does a number of other things too, including allowing the minister to enter into lease agreements. It changes arrangements for and clarifies lease agreements. Again, it is an issue that is not fully transparent, so the coalition will be proposing a number of amendments that deal with issues that have been raised and to deal with that matter. The lease arrangements of the minister power is another concern that the coalition has with this bill. Having noted the three concerns thus far, which I will speak to in more detail, under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**James NEWBURY:** If I may reiterate the concerns that are framed in those amendments, firstly, the bill's removal and cutting of the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee – we will seek to amend the legislation to ensure that the committees are not disbanded and that their advice remains ongoing, because those committees provide independent expert advice. One of the hallmarks of having the Minister for Energy and Resources manage the energy system is centralisation and being a minister who knows better than everybody else. Given what we have seen in terms of outcomes, clearly that is not the case. We certainly do not support the disbanding of those committees, and we will be seeking to amend the bill to ensure that they continue.

You cannot scrap a committee because you do not like the advice they deliver, and that is actually what this comes down to on one of these particular committees. The minister does not like the advice the committee provided. That is not a reason to stop the advice being given, because experts do know better, I would submit, than the minister. Simply not liking the advice is not a reason to disband a committee. That is the first amendment.

The Energy Safe requirement for annual corporate plans, which I touched on before, the tabling of those and the annual nature of that reporting, is being sought to be amended by the government. We do not support that. We support ongoing transparency. We see no reason as a coalition for it not to be published annually. We see absolutely no reason to go around proper measures of transparency, so our second amendment goes to that particular issue.

And finally, our third issue raised in the amendments goes to the new lease arrangements on unreserved Crown land. We would seek to add a transparency measure in relation to that power which would require the publishing of the agreements that are entered into. That is not unreasonable. Again it is a transparency measure.

If you look at all three of the amendments that the coalition is seeking to move, all of them go to the heart of ongoing transparency, all of them go to stopping the government from not being transparent and in the strongest case, in relation to the committee, stopping the government from cutting a committee where the minister does not like the advice from independent experts. Across all three measures there is a strong theme. Though this house will not have a process to deal with each

amendment separately, because the government, as I understand it, has refused to take this bill into consideration in detail, we do hope that the other place may consider these amendments too.

It is disappointing, I should note, that the government has refused to take this bill into consideration in detail. Frankly, it is not overly surprising given that in this term of Parliament only one bill has been taken by the government into consideration in detail. The government would have the option of providing a fixed time for consideration in detail, so you certainly could not argue that it is too time onerous. There could be a small allotment of time which would allow the house to consider each of the amendments on their merits, and you could do that in a time-reasonable way. But in this term we have seen one instance. I believe in the last term there was one instance as well, which is an extremely, extremely small proportion in terms of the presumably couple of hundred bills that we would deal with over a term for less than 1 per cent of them, half of 1 per cent, to be taken into consideration. The coalition had hoped that on this bill there would be an opportunity to take it into consideration, but that was not the case.

I spoke earlier not only about transparency but this bill being a furtherance to the government's ideological gas ban. We know this government wants to ban gas, and we know that it is coming at the expense of security of gas supply and security of energy supply for current Victorians, for future Victorians and for future generations.

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** The minister is saying energy bills are too high. I completely agree, Minister. No-one else pays my energy bills; I pay my energy bills. Can you believe that the minister has admitted that energy bills are too high? Of course they are too high.

**Steve Dimopoulos:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton, as always, has misrepresented me.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order, Minister, it is a matter for debate.

**James NEWBURY:** The tape will show what the minister said, Deputy Speaker. Earlier we had one member confirm that energy providers should somehow not be in the energy system – in fact the quote was 'Thank God the government is pushing them out' – and another minister complained about energy bills being too high. Well, I tell you what –

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** Who else pays the energy bills in my house? Me. Of course I pay them. We have the minister confirming the problem that we are talking about over and over on this side of the place, what Victorians are talking about over and over. Mismanagement of the energy system leads to higher bills. That is what has happened. I am trying to educate the minister as to why energy bills are higher. I think the minister does not understand that mismanagement of the energy system has caused bills to increase in the way he is complaining about. It is as if he has come into this place and suddenly energy bills have got higher by magic – that they just somehow got more expensive by magic. No, they got more expensive because this government for 10 years has mismanaged the system. You hear the same thing when it comes to the management of our economy. We have got too much debt and we are paying too much interest on it, and somehow the government have not worked out it is their financial vandalism that has caused it. It is extraordinary that we had the minister himself come into this place and complain about the cost of energy without accepting any responsibility as a government for causing it. How completely extraordinary.

We know that this government, when they see there is a political problem, pretend to do something about it. We heard before Christmas the Premier talk about gas – only once. Only once have we heard the Premier talk about gas: 'Gas isn't so bad.' The Premier dipped her toe into the water. 'Gas isn't too bad. I don't hate gas,' the Premier said, just the once, at the same time as introducing a bill into this place to ban gas in homes. Can you believe it? The Premier came out, realised there was a political

problem and said, 'I don't hate gas. Don't go after me.' She recognised, because the polling was telling her – not because it actually is needed, only because the polls tell her – that she cannot hate gas. So the Premier said she does not hate gas and then introduced a bill into this Parliament to ban gas in homes. Victorians have seen through it. Victorians know this government is banning gas, and Victorians know that the alternate government, the opposition, do not want to ban gas. We do not want to ban gas, and we will not. We will not ban gas. We will reverse Labor's gas ban, and Victorians know that. Victorians know that we will reverse Labor's gas ban.

This government now, for a second time, in the second sitting week of the year, has a bill that has been brought into this place that furthers Labor's ideological gas ban. Since the Premier came out and pretended that she cared about gas, which Victorians need and rely on, the government has since introduced two bills into this chamber – two bills in the two sitting weeks thereafter – the first one banning gas in homes and this one increasing the penalties around gas. Anything this government says to you, Victorians, about gas is fake. It is totally and utterly fake. In the last sitting week they banned gas in your homes, and in this they are increasing penalties around gas. That is what they are doing.

At the start of this contribution I talked about the government introducing a bill which would seemingly do some good things, but they have tried to sneak a number of measures into this bill which we fundamentally disagree with. So not only have we circulated amendments to the bill, but we certainly cannot support it in its current form, and we will not support it in its current form. It does not mean that every single thing in this bill we disagree with. For example, the bushfire mitigation we think is a reasonable measure. The changes in plan arrangements on that measure we support. We think they are eminently reasonable. But as I said, the government has tried to put through a few things that make sense but sneak through a raft of others which we cannot support, and so we have circulated amendments to the bill.

It is worth pointing out as we talk about energy supply and security around energy supply, which is in many ways a core component of the bill, the energy supply issues that have been raised over recent days, which we still have not heard a statement from the government on in relation to the fundamental issues of supply when they talk about the proposed renewable project at the Port of Hastings. On the weekend we saw reports of documents, minutes and other paperwork surrounding the extraordinary events last year where this government had proposed, in partnership obviously with industry, a project at the Port of Hastings, and the federal government – the federal Labor government – said no for environmental reasons. She said no, the federal minister for the environment. For the recollection of the house, we remember the Minister for Environment at the time not coming out and speaking to the Victorian community about why that failure occurred, going missing for several days, and another minister not knowing basic details around the proposal. The Premier, embarrassingly – to be fair to the Premier, I do not think it was her fault; I think she was badly briefed and was getting basic details wrong – stated at the time that the government had provided the federal government with everything they needed, and instead we found out that there were issues in relation to work the Minister for Planning had done, which was a discrepancy with the Premier. But also then the Minister for Environment, when he finally found his way out, said that he would need to review the decision by the federal environment minister because it had not yet been released. That would have been on a public website for a week. That is very, very embarrassing. You had two ministers and the Premier not understanding the project.

What has happened over recent days is a series of documents have been released, which is very, very concerning, because they suggest that the behaviour of the state government was 'not appropriate'. That is a direct quote from the secretary of the federal environment department – that it would not be appropriate to push for or co-design a project with the state government that somehow seemed to bypass or work around federal law. That is why the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources David Davis in the other place referred those matters to the independent anti-corruption agency, IBAC, because when you have the secretary of a federal department saying that a state government's behaviour is 'not appropriate' that should ring alarm bells.

I can understand, though they should not have done it, why the government was so incredibly embarrassed that they tried to强arm the federal government. I can understand the motive, but good sense should have said, ‘We are a good government and therefore we would not seek to somehow bypass federal law. Of course we won’t do that.’ But they have been caught behaving inappropriately, and that is why this issue has been referred to IBAC. There are serious questions that need to be answered not only about the behaviour but also as this goes to the core of energy supply. If we cannot get projects like these off the ground because the government has not worked out how to work through with industry ways to get things right, how do we have secure energy supply? We do not. We know that when it comes to wind energy there is a legislative target, but there ain’t no way this state is going to reach it. I think we all know that to be true.

When it comes to this bill, the coalition has circulated amendments. They go to issues around transparency. Frankly, they go to issues around ministerial behaviour. Those amendments, I would hope, not only in this place but in the other place, can be considered very seriously because we cannot support the bill while it is in the form that it currently is. We hope that the Parliament looks closely at those amendments, which are very reasonable and would add to a more robust system.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (11:12): I am very pleased to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. We know that there has been a considerable focus, a proactive focus, on working symbiotically with Energy Safe Victoria to ensure that the protections we have in place for workers and for consumers – well, consumers can be workers, but you know – and for industry alike are keeping pace with the transition. That is why we have been steadily and consistently bringing through these important reforms to keep workers and the community safe.

I did want to address a couple of the issues flagged by the opposition just now and then I will get to more of the central tenets of this bill and the really, really important reforms. Firstly, concerns were raised by the opposition about abolishing the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee. I did want to say that the rationale behind it is that it is best practice across the globe to keep making regulations with the policymaker, which is the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, separate from the regulator. The statutory obligation is burdensome on Energy Safe Victoria’s resources when they are not the ones, we think matter-of-factly, who are holding the pen literally. DEECA and the minister are still obligated – this is important when looking at the issue of transparency, because that was a repeated comment from the opposition – to conduct a regulatory impact statement to remake regulations, which means independent advice is still sought. We obviously take the issue of transparency very seriously, so we are reducing red tape where we can, not as a compromise but rather for pragmatic reasons that are substantiated when we look at best practice and also for the fact that there is still a cemented element in process for getting independent advice. Independent advice is still sought. That was a slightly longwinded way of explaining that, but certainly we are talking about some fairly serious matters, so we do want to make sure that the record is correct as it stands.

Further to the objection raised by the opposition regarding the removal of the Victorian Electrolysis Committee – I hope I said that correctly – it was Energy Safe Victoria, who are independent, who were the ones who requested it. It is not like this was just plucked from, I do not know, outer space. ‘We’ll just dump that in there, and we’ll just sort of capriciously remove a committee’ – no. There was actually a specific suggestion coming from an independent body. I do want to also validate that decision and the rationale for that being included as part of these reforms. I hope that goes some way to providing some comfort for the opposition with regard to that issue.

There were some concerns – I actually nearly fell over – raised by the opposition about emissions reduction. I did not think that they cared about that whatsoever, because they use every opportunity they can to rebut the purpose or the rationale for having renewable energy or making any kind of transition. It is no wonder that there was so much discussion on gas, because they use anything to avoid talking about the transition to a cleaner energy future. I just think that needs to be on the record.

The most recent report, in 2024, reports on 2021–22 financial year emissions. That is the most recent year for which data is available, just to be really clear about that. Emissions went up by 5.4 per cent from the year previous. This was due to wetter climatic conditions, which caused the land and forest sector to release more emissions, a short-term element that will even out over time in dry years, and to transport emissions rising a bit as the COVID lockdowns ended. We do have to factor in the actual behaviours and habits of human beings. I think when you look at that from the scientific and evidentiary elements, then you can see and draw a conclusion, rather than saying, ‘This happened. It must be that things aren’t working.’ That is not correct. We know that we were in a different position during that period when the pandemic was here.

I should say Victoria’s emissions are already within the range of our 2025 emissions reduction target. Isn’t that fundamentally what counts? We set a target, and we are already within the range of that target. Victoria continues to decarbonise rapidly, much to the chagrin of those opposite, because they certainly are not pursuing a cleaner energy future, but we know on this side that that is of the highest priority. It is also about saving money for consumers and businesses alike. It is emissions reduction but also a cheaper energy future.

I did just want to get back to the core elements of the bill. I should say fundamentally it is, as I was saying from the outset, about making sure we keep up with our transitioning energy system. We committed over \$7 million to deliver this in the 2023 budget. It is fundamentally to help us keep up with new energy safety risks that are being introduced by changes in industrial and residential technology, business models and consumer behaviour. The bill is going to amend a number of acts, including the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to introduce a new entry power – really important – for Energy Safe officers, who will be able to enter premises with a magistrate-issued warrant. This will allow officers to investigate safety risks, monitor compliance and take enforcement actions, with safeguards ensuring proper oversight. I do not believe that there was a contrary argument from the opposition to this particular element – I would certainly hope not – so I am very glad that at least that element is being supported by those opposite. Current powers do not allow inspectors to enter residential premises without the occupier’s consent, even in situations where the circumstances may pose a risk to public safety. So we can see there is a clear imperative to bring forward this particular power, expanding the tools available to Energy Safe Victoria and the courts to enforce compliance. These include powers to stop unsafe work and to suspend an electrical contractor registration or an electrical worker licence where it is in the public interest to do so. I am absolutely certain that the community will see why these particular reforms are really, really important if we are to keep everybody safe.

The bill will also increase a range of maximum penalties to better reflect the gravity of relevant safety risks and to increase deterrence given the potential consequences of noncompliance. I think it goes without saying when we are talking anything electrical that there are inherent gifts with electricity – of course the lights that we have in front of us, which is a fundamental – but also there are safety elements that go with those.

Another thing I do want to just speak to quickly when we are talking about penalties is that another key element of the penalties includes introducing new section 148B(2) to the Electricity Safety Act 1998, which provides that the court may make an adverse publicity order and require wind farms to publicly disclose their offences, penalties and corrective actions. You can see that is a pretty stringent requirement, but it also exemplifies the seriousness with which we take compliance with safety in Victoria. The bill also triples penalties for noncompliance with an improvement notice from a maximum of 80 to 240 penalty units for a natural person and from 400 to 1200 penalty units for a body corporate. I am just giving some examples of how this is increasing powers for Energy Safe Victoria but also compliance, because we know obviously we are leading an energy revolution, a cleaner energy revolution, in this state. It is fundamental, it is really important, but the corollary of that is making sure that we keep pace with that in terms of our safety requirements, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I am very pleased that with these incremental but symbiotic reforms in terms of making sure that we are ahead of the situation we are anticipating the kinds of risks that are likely to occur and therefore making sure that the community and the business sector alike can be reassured we are on the right track.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (11:22): I rise today to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. Just 10 minutes to cover all of the issues that this bill presents to my electorate certainly is not nearly long enough. The issues that my electorate is facing in relation to energy supply, access to energy and hosting a large amount of infrastructure are significant. It is something that is impacting on our ability to have confidence in our businesses, including our agricultural sector going into the future. There are question marks over our manufacturing and production industries being able to access cheap and reliable energy to support their businesses to be maintained in rural and regional Victoria. We also have concerns around increasing energy bills. Whether they are gas bills or electricity bills, those costs keep going up and up and up, and they are costing Victorian households more and more money. They are paying the price for Labor's inability to deliver cheap and reliable energy to every household and every business in Victoria.

As we have heard from previous speakers, this is around Labor's intention to have a transition to renewables, and I would like to make it clear that no-one is fighting the transition to renewables. It is the pace at which Labor is forcing this along that is pushing up prices, because so many energy sources are immediately banned as not being within their ideology and not being acceptable, and therefore supply is reduced, which pushes up the cost. It is the very simple supply-and-demand formula that we all learned in school; however, it is not being applied at the moment.

In relation to gas, we have got a gas monopoly in my part of the state, where there is only one supplier of gas to the area, which is related to one retailer. We cannot get a pay-on-time discount, we cannot get an e-bill discount and we cannot even negotiate for lower prices. I refer to Krause Bricks in Stawell and other businesses that are heavy energy users that cannot go in and negotiate cheaper prices and speak to different retailers, because there is only one. It is something that I have raised with the Minister for Energy and Resources on numerous occasions, and nothing has been done to unlock this monopoly. We always hear from Labor that one side of politics is supporting big business. In my experience there is only one side of politics that does so, and that is Labor. Labor are not fighting to decrease energy bills for Victorians, and it is absolutely them being in bed with some of these big energy retailers that is causing bills to go up, because they are saying we cannot use coal, we cannot use gas and we cannot use nuclear; we can only use renewables. They will not do anything to unlock the monopoly and unlock the limited supply in the interim before they have sufficient renewables to meet the demands of every single Victorian and keep our energy bills down.

I would like to briefly touch on an aspect of this legislation which is to abolish the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee. This committee has put in a number of recommendations to the government in relation to how electrical line clearances should be managed. This abolition is something that somehow is being pitched by the government as being a good thing, but this group has been doing an incredible amount of advocacy and has not been heard in relation to clearances around electrical lines, which help to maintain tree canopies in our communities.

We know most Victorians, whether they live in the city or they live in the country, appreciate a tree-lined street. However, Victoria has gone down the pathway of cutting down significant trees or cutting down half of a tree in order to have massive electrical line clearances. This is not in line with the recommendations of the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee. It is not in line with other jurisdictions; for example, South Australia accepts that the soft, leafy foliage – not the hard branches but the soft foliage – can go up against powerlines and this has no risk of creating bushfires. Bushfires do not start on powerlines in towns. In fact there is evidence that backs up that the number of bushfires which have been started by electrical lines in built-up areas is actually zero. This is not a bushfire mitigation strategy; this is actually an attempt by Labor to abolish the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and to get rid of a voice that is fighting hard to make sure we have evidence-

based decision-making in the Victorian government, that actually is looking at that balance and making sure that we are not starting fires and that we are maintaining our important tree canopies in the communities, because that is what they want.

In my electorate of Lowan I have had so many complaints about tree-lapping companies that come in to manage electrical line clearances. Frequently they are Queensland companies; they are not even Victorian businesses. They come in and hack down half a tree. The trees actually look terrible and they also make the trees unstable, because often there is not an arborist involved in how these trees are cut – they are not trimmed; they are cut. We need to do better when we manage our trees. We can have a balance, but it is wrong for Labor to come out and say, ‘No, we don’t want to listen to this committee anymore, because they’re telling us we’re doing a bad job,’ when they are actually fighting for safe powerlines and to make sure we have got beautiful tree canopies in our communities. Rather than listening to whoever is telling them they should be abolishing this committee, they should sit down with this committee and listen to them. They are sensible people who know there is a line in there where we can do better in managing our powerlines but also in managing our tree canopies in our communities.

Other aspects of the bill relate to many energy issues in my region. We talk about the government’s fast-tracking of large-scale battery projects, where communities do not have their say, and this includes our vital CFA volunteers, who have had no say, no education and no input around what will happen if a fire breaks out around either high-voltage powerlines, like VNI West, or batteries. I will particularly point out Joel Joel battery. Joel Joel is in an agricultural area; it is aligned to the VNI West footprint and Bulgana terminal station. This land has been purchased by a power company, and it was within a matter of weeks that approval of a battery was processed by this government without any consultation with the community, without even talking to the local council about this, and there is nothing back in return for this. It is exactly the same with VNI West. We have heard just this week that Transmission Company Victoria have now been approved to go forward on the next step of compulsory access to properties, and my people are frustrated because their voice has not been heard by the government. They are raising legitimate concerns. All they want to know is that the agricultural sector in Victoria is protected, and at no stage have they ever felt like their voice has been heard by the Victorian Labor government. This has created enormous divides within our communities. It is harmful – it has harmed the concept of how we can actually get to a point where we have the infrastructure we need in regional Victoria. I will pitch in again: the most sensible and logical outcome is plan B by Bruce Mountain, which is to upgrade the existing lines in the first instance, because we have the easements; we have got an established line through that region. The lines are aged, they are brittle, and they travel in the wrong direction. Upgrade what we have got, because it is going to fail in the future in any case.

I urge the government to do better. If we are going to host all of these renewable projects with large-scale powerlines to supply energy to Melbourne – and let us face it, if you are a farmer along VNI West, you cannot have a Tesla because you cannot have the power to support a battery system on your property to charge a Tesla – we want something back. We are sick of being taken advantage of and hosting the worst roads in the state, of having health systems which are being gradually shut down by Labor and of having schools which have had no investment for 10 years. When we look at any system around what we get for hosting this large-scale energy infrastructure, we get nothing, and that is not even a conversation that Labor are willing to have. We just want a fair deal. You want to make sure you have energy supply for Melbourne? Give us our roads, give us our public transport access, give us access to good-quality health care close to home, support our kids to have a great education and support more childcare workers so that all parents can make sure their children have the best possible start to life. Whatever it is, Labor cannot manage access to clean, reliable and cost-efficient energy in Victoria, and at every single stage Victorians are paying the price.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (11:32): It gives me great pleasure to rise this morning and make a contribution in support of our legislation, the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy

Safety) Bill 2025. This bill is designed to fortify Victoria's already robust framework, ensuring it can adapt to and safely manage the rapid advancements in energy production and technology. It is incredibly important as we see those advancements in production and technology that our framework and our regulatory framework adapts to just to have that in its purview.

On the topic of changing energy production, it is incredibly important that we do this in this state, because in the state of Victoria we have the most ambitious renewable energy targets anywhere in Australia and indeed some of the most ambitious anywhere in the world – 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035. That is a mixture of several different energy sources. Solar, whether that be large solar projects or indeed whether that be rooftop solar, is of course an incredibly popular source of energy production in my electorate of Tarneit. In fact my electorate of Tarneit, I believe – the member for Cranbourne here might argue with me – has the largest uptake of those solar rebates to be able to put those solar panels on the roof of your home and indeed reduce your energy costs. So as we move to these renewable energy targets and as we undertake this transition fundamentally from coal-fired power and gas in Victoria, then we need to adapt our framework and our regulatory framework in line with that.

Fundamentally we are doing this – we have these renewable energy targets and we are moving to a renewable energy future – to support Victorian families with the rising cost of energy. We know coal-fired power, for instance, has become inefficient. The coal-fired power stations in Morwell have become inefficient, and it is becoming incredibly expensive to produce energy. They are becoming incredibly expensive, and what we know is that solar power, solar energy, is by far and away the cheapest way to produce energy, followed by other renewable sources.

As I came in here I listened to the member for Brighton's contribution, half of which he spent talking about gas. Frankly, it was trash, like utter dross. For the benefit of all Victorians watching this, there is no ban on gas in Victoria. There is no piece of legislation banning offshore exploration for gas in Victoria; there is not. There are restrictions now around appliances in new homes, and there are also incredibly generous rebates that can be sourced for all Victorians to change their appliances from gas to electric, whether that be your hot-water service, whether that be your heating or cooling. Those rebates make it the same price to change over your gas appliances as it would be to change an electric appliance. Once again, the reason we do that is to support Victorians with the cost of living.

As I said, there is no ban on offshore exploration for gas in Victoria, but what we fundamentally have to recognise is that there are diminishing gas reserves in Victoria. The Otway Basin has provided not just Victoria but southern Australia with a really steady gas supply for eons. If you are firing up a gas heater in Geelong or in the west of Victoria, chances are that gas has come from the Otway Basin. Just as an example of diminishing gas supplies, recently Beach Energy, who are the operators of the gas plant down there in Port Campbell, had to go to shareholders about their most recent exploration, their most recent project, and explain the diminishing gas reserves that were in that well. I think there was about 50 per cent of the gas that they expected in there. We sit here and we talk about supply and demand, and I think energy is a pretty solid example of supply and demand. Gas has gone up because we have diminishing reserves, not because of this fake ban that the Labor government has put on gas. There is no ban on offshore exploration for gas – none.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Frankly, to the member for Polwarth sitting there sort of talking to himself, as he does from time to time, if the Liberals plan is to increase gas supply significantly in Victoria, fundamentally – and you would know something about this, Acting Speaker Marchant – they are going to have to start fracking again. That is what they will have to do. I say to the member for Polwarth – and I know how popular it will be in his electorate –

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT:** You go to those communities, member for Polwarth, and you explain to them that your plan for an energy future in Victoria is to go and frack their communities. Fundamentally that is what you will have to do, because we are running out of gas in the Otway Basin. Recent projects show that.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Recent projects show that, member for Polwarth. If your plan is to go and frack Victoria again, how about you just be up-front about it? Go and talk to your communities out there in western Victoria and tell them that that is what you are going to do.

I spoke about a fundamental reason for getting homes off gas: to help with the cost of living. There are rebates available to make it incredibly cost-effective to shift your gas appliances to electric appliances, and we know at the moment that electricity is cheaper than gas. But fundamentally another reason for it is because of diminishing gas supplies. We need to be able to shore those supplies up for the manufacturing sector, for industry, to make sure that our manufacturing sector and Victorian industry have competitive power prices. When you look at the balance sheet of one of those businesses, what they are paying for energy is incredibly important – far more important than what they are paying for wages in fact. That is another really important reason to get homes off gas – to make sure we have got a steady supply there.

This amendment acquits a commitment that we made at the 2022 Victorian election, and that was to deliver reforms to Victoria's electricity and gas network safety regulations to make sure that they keep up with our transitioning energy sector, which I have already gone through and I will not go to again. That commitment was acquitted in the 2023 budget and was \$7 million. The bill follows on from our commitment, builds on reform initiated in the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 and also responds to the latest developments in the sector.

We are transitioning in Victoria to a clean energy future. We are doing so because it is good for the hip pocket of Victorians and of working Victorians. What it also does is shore up a diminishing gas supply for Victoria's manufacturing sector and for Victorian industry to make sure that they have the power prices that they need to be competitive with interstate and indeed international rivals. I commend it to the house.

**Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (11:42):** I rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and to make some comments around that bill. I have listened to a number of the other speakers, which has been fascinating, and a number of the comments particularly in relation to gas, which is what I want to centre my remarks on on this piece of legislation.

There is no doubt that certainly since World War II Victoria has had a great reliance on gas for a reason, because we have had a lot of it and we still do, but when you do not issue exploration licences for a decade you are going to run out. I notice that someone who has been very vocal on this, my colleague the member for Polwarth, has said a number of times that when you do not fill your car up with petrol you are going to run out. If you do not visit a service station, of course you are going to run out, and it is the same circumstance with gas in Victoria today. We are blessed with that as an abundant resource which is obviously a lot cleaner than lignite brown coal, which is what we powered our economy off for the best part of the 20th century and then into the 21st in terms of the majority of bulk supply, through the Latrobe Valley. We have great supplies of natural gas, and that has been used quite profoundly by all governments and used at a very cheap rate, which has powered and built the Victorian economy since World War II. There is no doubt about that. And it is, as I said before, a lot cleaner than brown or black coal, even pure black coal, which we have lots of in places like Moranbah in Queensland and the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Burning gas is certainly a lot cleaner than burning black coal.

But what we have had in the last decade is a government that has really played politics with energy. When you play politics with energy, you do not just play politics for the short term; you play politics

for the long term. Now what we are seeing are the long-term effects of a government that has played politics with energy, because we are running out of electricity supplies and we are going to be importing gas in the next four to five years. We will run out because the exploration licences have not been issued by this government.

I know there are probably a lot of people in this chamber with arts degrees who are telling us what the reality is about gas supply in Victoria. I might add I am one of them. So do not take my point of view; go and take the point of view of the CEO of Cooper Energy Jane Norman. This is someone who has a bachelor of science in chemistry and pure mathematics, a bachelor of engineering with honours in chemical engineering and a postgraduate diploma in management and economics of natural gas. So I think if you want to take someone's advice on whether or not we have got gas, we should probably listen to someone who knows. I hear all the time those opposite saying we have got to listen to experts. Well, there is one. Okay, so what does this expert say? She says straight out Victoria does not have a gas shortage; Victoria has:

... enough gas resources to meet current demand for at least 25 years.

So I just say: who do you take the advice of? Do you take the advice, with great respect, of a government minister who is obviously trying to either garner preferences or hang on to her own seat and a government that is 10 years old – look, you can argue whatever you want on reality – or do you take advice from someone who has had a career in an industry around gas storage and supply, who comes out and says we have got enough supply for 25 years? She is no dummy – in fact quite the contrary; she is one of the most qualified people in this field. Why would we not be taking this person's advice, the CEO of Cooper Energy? How about we take Noel Newell, the CEO of 3D Energi ConocoPhillips, who has had 30 years in oil and gas at Petrofina and BHP Billiton. He has said Victoria has enough supply for at least 40 years, that there is no issue with gas supply in Victoria and that the issue is the issuing of licences. These people are experts in their field. These people have a career and a lifetime of experience that we should be listening to. These people are saying that Victoria is going to run out of gas unless we issue licences and that the biggest hindrance to gas supply in Victoria is not supply but the government playing politics with energy. It is straightforward.

These people are experts, and they are not alone. Many people in these fields have been saying for some time: use the resource Victoria has, stop making excuses, stop playing politics, stop coming out with government cheat sheet one liners and sounding witty. Get on with the job of what a government should be doing, and that is providing a much cleaner energy source for Victorians, of which we have a lot, into our homes, and do it straightaway, because you are going to run out and we are going to have to import it, and the cost of importing it is going to be a hell of a lot more.

I will go back to what a lot of people have talked about in this debate, or no doubt will – I can see the speaking list is very great. They talk about cost of living. Well, when you constrict supply in a growing market, you are going to force that price through the roof. Our population grows by 180,000 every year. We have got a growing market, we are going to constrict supply on both industry and residential demand for gas and we are going to have to import it because the government has played politics for a decade. So what we are facing is an existential crisis around the cost of gas because the government has played politics with it for the best part of a decade.

We get these mixed messages from the government, which the member for Brighton pointed out before. Is the government in Victoria for gas or against gas? With respect, it was not too long ago that we saw on our TVs the Premier coming out, and I do not know why, because they have had literally eight years of saying 'Gas is evil, gas is evil.' Labor hit 22 per cent primary in the polls and the Premier was out there saying 'Oh, actually, we're not going to ban it,' mainly because the Deputy Premier had said they were not going to ban it two weeks before, and we know the Deputy Premier and the Premier are at loggerheads on everything because one wants the other's job, and that will probably resolve itself in July. But what we are seeing is a completely different point of view from the Premier today to what we had for the last eight years. So industry is getting completely mixed messages from a

government that appears to be at war with itself and the energy sector. If you have got a gas road map that says gas is evil but then the Premier runs out and says, ‘Actually, it’s not,’ but then you run into Parliament and, like this bill does, provide huge penalties on tradies for doing their job if they were to repair a gas appliance, what message are you sending to Victorians? Let us come back to that.

This is supposedly the party of workers. Why would the government seek to penalise tradesmen who go into homes and replace gas appliances because, pardon the pun, they are cooked? The appliance might need to be replaced after 20 or 30 years in a home and an old couple might say they need to replace their gas appliance. They cannot do it. The government has banned it. You need to transition to electricity. What if the home was built in 1945 and is in the middle suburbs of Melbourne, let us say in a suburb like Niddrie? A couple in Niddrie want to change their gas appliance because it is in an older home, but they cannot do that because the government’s gas policy does not allow the tradie to fix it. In fact it penalises the tradie if they do fix it. The tradie will lose their licence. The tradie will incur fines. What kind of insanity have we got to in the state of Victoria where the government is going to penalise tradespeople simply for doing their job and replacing gas appliances? Gas should be part of our future. Victoria has enough gas. We should be using our gas supplies, not demonising gas. It is the government that is at fault here for not issuing exploration licences. Use our gas resources. Stop playing politics with energy.

But again the government is obsessed, for the sake of votes, with saying ‘We must transition off gas – gas is evil’ because they want to win Greens seats or they do not want to do anything before the federal election because it might upset Albanese’s ability to form a minority government should that be necessary.

It all comes down to one thing: the government is playing politics first and putting Victoria’s future second. I think Victorians are now waking up to that, whether it is on gas, whether it is on transport, whether it is on finances. We know the Premier, according to her own colleagues around this building in the last week, told cabinet, ‘I’d rather be in debt and in government than go into surplus and lose office.’ That tells you everything about the attitude, doesn’t it? Number one, that people from cabinet would run around telling everyone in this building that comment, and number two, that that is the comment of the government of the day. We would rather destroy the state’s finances and hang on than actually do the right thing by the state of Victoria. Joan Kirner did not have that attitude. In fact going into 1992 Joan Kirner, to her great credit, was trying her hardest to fix the place up. But that is not where we are today.

I look at this bill with great shock. I know that my colleague has circulated some amendments, which I absolutely support and I hope the government will. I know they will not, but I wish they would. At the end of the day, gas is important to the state of Victoria, bringing down energy prices is even more important to the state of Victoria and the two things are not exclusive; they can work together. If we use one, we can help the other. Victorians would support anything that can help with cost-of-living relief which is not just empty words of politics.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (11:52): I am delighted to rise today to speak in support of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. There has been so much happening in the energy portfolio, and I commend the minister for the work done in bringing this bill forward here today. It is an important bill focusing on energy safety – safety for workers and safety for others in the community during the energy transition. We have spoken many times before on this transition and just how important it is for Victoria.

It is true that the transition is an important initiative for my community. The cost of living and cheaper power are extremely important for our community in Clarinda. They are issues that my constituents raise with me on a consistent basis. The cost of living, from utility bills and everyday bills to balancing the family budget, is consistently front of mind for families in Clarinda and across the state. This is particularly so in the City of Greater Dandenong, which is right up there in terms of being Victoria’s most socially disadvantaged local government area. Given this pressure in my community, across our

state and across the country, it makes absolute sense that that is where our focus is: cheap, clean and reliable power.

Renewable energy is the cheapest form of the new-build energy generation available. Thanks to our record investment in it, Victoria consistently has the lowest wholesale electricity price in the market, which means lower bills for Victorian families and businesses. So it was really welcome news last week that the Australian Energy Market Commission in its November 2024 price trends report forecast that the Victorian retail price will fall by 9 per cent over the next decade and remain lower than all other states. This is great news for my constituents in Clarinda and for all our constituents in the state of Victoria. Victorian households on the default offer pay on average \$311 less for their electricity than a household in New South Wales, South Australia or south-east Queensland, while small businesses pay \$1331 less. Victorians can continue to make sure they are on the best deal by using the free and independent Victorian Energy Compare website to shop around for a lower priced offer. Those who use the website typically save around \$220 by switching. We will continue to make that a priority – cost of living and utilising our renewables to reduce bills and cost-of-living pressures – because that is so important for those doing it tough. For those on fixed income support, for pensioners and for those doing it tough, every little bit helps. We know that, so this focus is really important.

The Allan Labor government has been delivering real and meaningful help: free kinder and free TAFE. There are so many more initiatives, such as the \$400 school saving bonus, taking bold action on housing and announcing a plan to cap fuel price rises. We will always stand by Victorians and provide real support where it is needed most – in big ways and small ways, because every bit adds up – particularly on our energy bills.

While the transition continues, it is important that we have the appropriate energy safety framework in place, including a strong and flexible regulator, namely Energy Safe Victoria, and that this framework supports regulation and enforcement activities to maintain safety for the Victorian community during the energy transition, and that is what this bill will achieve.

Just in terms of the current framework, we have the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 and regulations made under these acts. This framework supports safety in the energy sector and protects people and property from risks associated with electricity and gas incidents, including bushfires. Energy Safe Victoria monitors and enforces compliance with the energy safety framework.

However, as we have noted, Victoria's energy sector is transforming, with significant growth in renewable energy and storage and the transition from a few large-scale facilities towards distributed energy resources. These changes, along with the rising number and variety of electrical appliances such as electric space and water heating and induction cooktops, along with rooftop solar, household batteries and electric scooters and other vehicles within our community, have exposed gaps in the energy safety framework. So legislative reform is needed to respond to these contemporary energy safety risks and provide Energy Safe with a range of strong and flexible powers to enable it to promote and enforce compliance with the regulatory framework, and that is what we have before us today.

I would just like to point out a few key changes here in this bill. The first is an amendment to the Electricity Safety Act 1998 to introduce a new entry power for Energy Safe to investigate safety issues; to improve provisions relating to entries, bushfire mitigation plans and regulation making; to expand the enforcement powers of Energy Safe and the court, including by increasing penalties for a range of offences; and to abolish the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and, most importantly, the Victorian Electrolysis Committee. These are important changes to make sure that we have a strong and flexible regulator that is equipped with the necessary powers to support regulation and enforcement activities to make sure that we have the utmost safety for all Victorians and the Victorian community.

There are similar powers in the amendments to the Gas Safety Act 1997 – a new entry power and improved provisions relating to entries and regulation making and expanding the enforcement powers of Energy Safe and the court, including by increasing penalties for a range of offences as well as a new entry power under the Pipelines Act 2005 and the provisions permitting the court to issue an adverse publicity order. Already there are strong new entry powers under several acts.

As I have mentioned, the energy transition is an important initiative for Victoria and an important initiative for my community. Cheap, clean, reliable and safe power – that is good news for household bills and good news for families and businesses in Clarinda and most importantly across Victoria. That is something that this government is focused on delivering. We can see that with this bill here today – it is another step in that transition journey. I commend the minister for her work and for bringing this bill forward, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:01): I am rising to make a contribution on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. It is a little bit hard to work out the real purposes, although they are outlined in the explanatory memorandum and the bill itself, and to work out exactly why we are here to do this. I think it is under the guise of energy safety. We do know that if there are energy failures they do put people's lives and properties at risk – any failure in the system, whether that is a failure of supply or a breakdown in supply or a risk that something bad happens, like powerlines and bushfires. From what I understand, the minister is looking for some longer term protections. I think we all know, because it has been said in here, particularly by the relevant minister, that the government has really got a goal of banning gas, regardless of what people say. The government has gone very hard on this, probably a little bit too soon, and gas supply is indeed very short. I want to just highlight to the house an article that was produced by Tony Wood of the Grattan Institute in December last year. It states:

The simple fact that Victoria is running out of gas and there is currently no solution must rank as one of Australia's worst energy policy failures.

This policy failure sits fairly and squarely with the state Labor government. This is not me and this is not the coalition saying this; this is the respected Grattan Institute. I will go on further from this release. It states:

For several years, the Australian Energy Market Operator has been calling for urgent investment. Yet, the silence from governments and industry has been deafening. This is not good enough.

He does go on to talk about the failing supply of gas being a root cause. I think that is something that the government really has to look at with opening exploration licences. People are not going to explore unless there is a benefit in there, so why go and do all of this work, all this investment if you are not going to get anything as part of the end game?

We do know that there is gas out there. We are constantly hearing that that is the case. But the government has been very remiss. We can see the problem now that they have gotten into by not having this exploration take place. We do need to mitigate safety concerns in this space. When we are looking at what is being amended here, we have the key areas: the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005. They are all key components of energy in Victoria, and the acts are all relevant at different times. Also there are some consequential amendments and an amendment to the Land Act 1958 as well.

The coalition has had a bit of trouble obtaining clear answers from the government. We asked questions and they were unable to explain some of the areas. I can talk about this in a little bit more detail later. Why are increased powers necessary beyond pointing to the need for harmonisation – I mean, really? – and new rules to deal with the distributed nature of electricity generation?

Before I go into some of the detail of the bill and areas that we have issues with – as has been said, we are putting forward a number of textual amendments and have expressed our opposition to the bill – the government has this anti-gas bent, banning gas in new homes. We see gas as an important part of

the transition to lower emission energy. It is so important at the moment in manufacturing and agriculture. If you think of a glass manufacturer, for example, they have to have gas furnaces operating 24 hours of the day to keep the glass molten, and if it hardens, it is a huge risk to their business and to the continuity of being able to make the glass. We know that when there are buildings that need to be built they need glass, so we desperately need to have a gas supply in Victoria so we are not importing it and paying through the roof.

I heard the member for Tarneit before, and there is a real scare campaign here. He was going on about fracking. I just want to give him some of the facts, because when they were in government prior to the Libs in 2010, 73 licences for unconventional gas exploration were issued by Labor, and 23 for hydraulic fracturing, which is the fracking operations, were issued without public consultation. The Labor Party members in this chamber need to understand that fracking has only ever been approved and undertaken by Labor governments. I always dislike it immensely when they try and rewrite history, but I think that is important.

An issue that I do want to focus on is the abolition of the consultative committees. The Victorian Electrolysis Committee and the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee have experts on them, industry experts and their statutory committees. I think disbanding and removing industry expertise from decision-making is fraught with danger. This shift to centralised control is really unacceptable because we need proper transparency and we need an evidence base for our decision-making, that expert advice, and we support having expert advice.

With regard to bushfire mitigation and thinking about bushfires and where they start, too often they start from lightning strikes, but we have had failures around electrical wires in the past. As a result we have had class actions, certainly through Black Saturday, and an enormous amount of change has happened with electrical safety, the brunt of that being borne by the major power providers. We have areas in and around the city that are subject to the same tree clearing as some parts of rural Victoria. I do note that sometimes when they are clearing around powerlines there are enormous hack jobs of the trees, and people get really upset about such hack jobs. But in and around the city tree canopy is exceptionally important, because while the planet is heating, we need to cool. There is a big issue in these areas where they are subject to the same level of clearing as some of the more rural areas. I think that this is a problem because we need tree canopy. They are being cleared at a rate of knots because of high-density housing – people putting up a number of apartments on a block that may have had two or three large trees on it. That has changed very much. I think putting in one size fits all is not always the right thing to do. And it is the same in towns. Bushfires do not start in the main street of a town. Bushfires will start on Crown land or on farmland, not where it is really quite built up. I am really quite disappointed with some of the work that the government are doing there.

The bill would move tabling of the annual corporate plan to every three years. This is something that is quite clearly outlined in the textual amendments. I think that if you have got a corporate plan, you will have measures that need to be implemented on an annual basis. You will have targets and milestones that you want to achieve as part of that three years. Any good government and governance arrangements would see that they are doing this and being transparent. If they are doing this, they should be publishing annual updates, because we would like to see greater transparency.

I also have some concerns about the increased burden on contractors and small businesses. This bill proposes significant penalty increases for electrical and plumbing contractors – the tradies – with fines rising to \$48,000 for individuals and \$240,000 for corporations. These excessive penalties could disproportionately harm small businesses and tradies because of inadvertent mistakes. Tradies do not go out there with the intent to make mistakes and errors. Sometimes people may not be competent, but at other times they may in fact make a small mistake. This is quite a remarkable penalty.

There will be expanded enforcement powers with the potential for abuse as well. This bill will grant enforcement officers the power to suspend contractors and workers on the spot. The way to appeal that is through VCAT. Goodness me, what do we know about VCAT? How long a piece of string is

is how long you can wait to get there. It could be a prolonged period of time, which could put these small business owners under extreme financial hardship. VCAT does have big problems, big backlogs, and having this as the only available option for these small business owners, for these tradies, I do not think is the right idea. There is some confusion over the regulatory overlap between Energy Safe Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria that I think could be sorted out as well.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (12:11): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. I always take the opportunity, if possible, to speak on energy in this place. It was a big part of the journey for me to come to this place and be the member for Bellarine, considering that I, alongside hundreds of thousands of people across Victoria, many years ago stood together to speak about protecting our agriculture, protecting our land, protecting our waterways and protecting our community's health against fracking. I will always take the opportunity to talk about that process. There was an inquiry into unconventional gas, which I was very heavily involved in, and then I sat on an advisory panel about conventional gas, which was established to understand what resources were part of Victoria's future. We had the lead scientist chair that advisory group, and it was an excellent process to be involved in for me to better understand energy and particularly gas for this state, so I come with a bit of background knowledge in this space.

Sometimes I get a bit itchy sitting in this chair listening to debate when I hear things that are simply not true or simply are rewriting history in this space. I will always take the opportunity to talk to that and to call that out. Talking about that point, a few years ago when we were fighting for a ban on fracking in this state, which was a nation first in this country to have a ban, to have a Labor government put in a ban on fracking to protect our agriculture and our environment from that process, there was debate and talk about if it is not gas, then what does our future look like. Communities – and I know from doing this role and representing the Bellarine community – wanted to see a clean energy future. It meant having cleaner energy and cheaper energy. We all know that means renewables – that is, our wind and solar. The minister just this week talked about the record amount of solar that people have installed on their homes. I am just going to check my notes, but solar homes have had another record year, with more than 78,000 solar panels, hot-water systems and batteries installed in 2024. That is the largest year on record. This is about having people have control over their energy and their energy bills but also being part of the solution going forward, being part of the solution of a clean energy future. Now 30 per cent of Victorian homes have installed solar.

That is what is making a real difference. That is what makes a difference to our state and to those who are really concerned about our future. I am really proud of all the ambitious targets that this government has set over its decade of being in government, and smashing them as well. We do not just talk about them; we actually deliver on these on these projects, and we have a clear vision for this state to transition to a clean and green energy sector, and I am really proud to be to be supporting this bill today, which ultimately talks about the safety of our energy system.

As we embrace new technologies and as new technologies roll out, as we address them we need to make sure our legislation keeps pace with that technology, and a top priority for us is to have a workforce that is safe, and for our wider community as well. This bill is about having that robust energy safety framework to make sure that we are updating our legislation and keeping workers and community safe. At the last election we said we would do this work. We said that we would make a commitment to doing an energy safety review to deliver these reforms, and we are doing that. So that was about making sure we were keeping up with that transition that I have talked about.

In speaking on this bill, I remember before, in 2023, I also spoke about an energy safety bill, and like I said, I will always take the opportunity to talk about energy in this place. We made some amendments, just some really commonsense amendments, to the Victorian energy safety legislation, and that was in line with advice that we had got, working in consultation with our renewable energy companies and modernising our legislation.

I will just talk a little bit about the Bellarine, and the Bellarine community often come to me and talk about their priorities going forward, but interestingly – I am sure it was last year – we had a guest speaker come to the Bellarine organised by several community groups. They asked Tim Forcey to come along and speak about the transition to electrifying their homes. Nearly a hundred people turned up to that forum on the night to understand more with a thirst for information and a thirst for understanding what steps they could take to (1) reduce their bills but (2) have a cleaner energy home. Some of those constituents that came along to that forum had done a whole lot to their homes; they had transitioned their homes to electric and wanted to know what next. A lot of them were talking about batteries, and they had a thirst to have knowledge around batteries. Others were just starting the process; they were just starting to gather that information about what they could do and what actions they could take to electrify their homes. And of course we talked about the offerings that we have – the very generous offerings of rebates to do that work. This government has been very clear and very ambitious in letting our communities know that there is help available if they would like to do that transition.

I have listened very carefully to the debate today, and I just want to raise a few issues that I have heard and go to some of those. Firstly, the member for Brighton did talk a little bit about offshore wind in his speech, and I just want to clarify a few things. Minister Horne and the Minister for Energy and Resources have been working with the Commonwealth on the environment protection and biodiversity conservation determination and what those next steps look like. The Port of Hastings have recommenced their environment effects statement process, and the technical reference group has been established. Since the Commonwealth decision on that referral, Minister Horne's department has made modifications to the project design and directly addressed the issues flagged by the Commonwealth government. This means that we will resubmit the referral in due course. This is a standard practice, and it outlines what is in and out of the scope for formal discussions between government departments.

This is clearly demonstrated, let us be clear, in the letters between the Commonwealth government and the department. This is part of government process. This is the way major projects unfold. And it is not surprising to hear that the other side and other members in the other place, Liberal members of the opposition, do not understand these government processes. They have not delivered projects in the last 30 years. The ministers are working hand in hand with each other, both state and federal, to ensure processes are followed and that projects continue to be on track.

This bill is not just about legislation. This is about safeguarding our future energy in our state, the future of our state, and this is about ensuring that we can continue that transition and accelerate to a cleaner, more sustainable energy system and that safety, as always, remains our top priority. It is about having energy safety laws that are modern and strengthened, and it is about having an affordable energy system as well. These are not just ambitious targets that we set. It is our responsibility as a government. With this bill we are delivering the things and agendas that we have set for this state. I know that that has a lot of support in my electorate of the Bellarine, which is why people are so thirsty to electrify their homes and to have that support. I commend this bill to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (12:21): I rise today to talk on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, and it does give me great pleasure to be able to stand up and talk about our energy make-up into the future. I think as we talk to constituents right around the place, we are all in agreeance that renewables are going to play a major role moving forward. What we are being sold at the moment from the Labor government is the fact that these renewables, straightaway and then again in time, are going to be able to bring the price of our electricity and gas bills down. That is failing at the moment, so we need to ascertain when that will happen. Talking to people that are actually putting renewable infrastructure into production and getting it up and going off the ground, to get to about 32 to 35 per cent of renewables, which I think we are probably at now in Victoria, is the low-hanging fruit. It is the easiest way to get there and the cheapest way to get there – to get to that number around 35 per cent. Then it gets harder and more expensive as we roll on. So collectively in here we need to make sure that we can move through that and bring on some of these cost-saving

effects for mums and dads that are in their homes for their cost of living and to bring their power prices down.

This particular part of the legislation I was very interested to see also brings in a bit of an attack on the poor old tradie and the poor old plumber that are going around trying to fix and create longevity in gas appliances at the moment. Into the future, they could be fined for doing this. And they are not small fines, they are large fines. It just does not seem right that as they are going about their daily business to help people in their homes to be able to cook and clean and shower they are going to be fined for actually fixing some gas appliances. It is as simple as that. That is what is going to be happening.

As we transition out, we are starting to close our coal-fired power stations. I just did a little number before. We are about 1200 days away from Yallourn power station closing. That is going to pull out about 22 per cent of Victoria's energy content that goes into the grid. It is going to pull that out. So we need to be making sure that we have a diverse energy grid made up of renewables, and we seem to be getting further and further away from bringing on our wind turbines out at sea and also onshore and connecting them to our power grid.

This timeline for shutting the coal-fired power stations down and relying on whatever our mix is going to be into the future gets shorter and shorter daily. We need to make sure that the people of Victoria are informed and we need to make sure that they know exactly what is going on. I have heard in the chamber today about the take-up of rooftop solar and batteries and so forth and how there are subsidies from government, both federal and state, that can get these panels onto our roofs. But I want to know what happens in 20 years time at the end of life of these solar panels and the end of life of these batteries – who pays for them to be replaced? Is it then thrown on the home owner, who has to work out how we recycle these panels and how we recycle batteries? At the moment there is not a great industry, and that is something that really needs to be looked at moving forward – where we are going to recycle them – because for the mums and dads that have done the right thing and put the solar panels on the roof, why should it be left up to them to pay to get rid of them? And are they going to be subsidised to put better and newer panels onto the roof? Are they going to be able to afford that? These are questions that I get asked all the time. Take out what we are doing now, where are we going to be in those 15 to 20 years when that needs to happen? Who is going to pay for it, and how much of an impost is it going to be on the mums and dads in their homes at the moment?

We need jobs. We need jobs in the Latrobe Valley because our bread and butter is obviously creating power in coal-fired power stations, which are shutting. We have just had issues with our Opal manufacturers, who have gone back to work now. But that is an unintended consequence of shutting the timber industry, which was relied on heavily through the Latrobe Valley and East Gippsland. It made it harder for Opal to sustain what they want to do and obviously puts pressure on the people that live and breathe in the Latrobe Valley. We are finishing up all these jobs, and I ask Minister D'Ambrosio all the time where the new jobs are in the Latrobe Valley for the people that I represent who do a great job at the moment, and have for the last 100 years, making sure that Victoria's power supply is strong and always there. Where are the jobs for these people to transition into now and also for the next generation into the future and the generation after that? For 100 years we have generated power – the power stations are there – and we will continue to do it for the next 100 years whatever that make-up is going to be.

I am not sure if people in here have driven past some of these solar farms and battery farms that are starting to litter the countryside around regional Victoria. People that live near them or drive past them are just shocked by the sheer size of them. We do need them to be this size, because the one thing that is not going to diminish is our appetite for a power supply into the future. It is not going to diminish at all; it is going to get more and more. At night-time when I drive around I look at sports, whether it be football or basketball, soccer or theatre. Are these people all going to need batteries at all of these locations through country Victoria to be able to train at night if they are playing football or to put on their shows if we are moving into renewables and relying on everything being electric and batteries powering us through the night? At the moment with our coal-fired power stations we have sustainable

base load power 24/7. If you go and turn a light switch on, it is going to be there. And by the sound of it, hopefully with what the government is proposing here, it is still going to be there. But are these community batteries at, for argument's sake, the Morwell football club going to be available for our community groups to access and use? How long are they going to last for? As I say, we are looking for a 20-year timeframe to replace all of this stuff.

There are ways and means that that can happen, which may not have been thought of yet, but we need to be able to recycle these batteries and we need to be able to recycle these solar panels. Where is that going to happen? The bigger question is: what cost is it going to be to the Victorian public? We have moved, as I said, along the track of going to renewables and we are all in agreement that we need to have renewables in the mix, but it is time now for the government and Minister D'Ambrosio to give us a blueprint of when it is all going to be coming online. Give me a blueprint that I can take back to the people of the Latrobe Valley of what jobs are coming to the valley. We see solar farms and battery farms being let go and talked about in other parts of regional Victoria. We need to make sure that we get our fair share down in the Latrobe Valley – that we have the jobs and the security. There are a lot of questions that remain unanswered. We are ready to go, but what happens into the future? I think the government need to be able to talk to the people of Victoria about what costs they are going to incur. It is my job to stand in here and highlight that situation. I hope the member for Mordialloc may be able to answer some of my questions as he gets up.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (12:31): The 'Mor' seats – Mordialloc and Morwell – are a little bit different, but I think we will bring the same energy and passion on behalf of our constituents to this bill debate. It is great to follow the member for Morwell who passionately advocates for his patch and his residents and his community, and I acknowledge his interest in this area around an important transition in energy policy in our state and the constituency he represents, and it is something that all Victorians should focus on as well. As part of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, there is discussion around some of the safety improvements as technology changes exponentially from decades before and around how we have the worker safety regime in place to support that transition into the future.

I have been in and out listening to debate on the bill, and I am really interested in some of the contributions from Liberal and Nationals members across there. I know some people listen to it quite closely, but I have failed to hear the word 'nuclear'. I have failed to hear that word in the energy transition, and I do not know if the member for Brighton in energy safety discussions – and I am sure he did 30 minutes of the best work we have seen – discussed the transition that Victoria is on and whether there is any reference to nuclear in this. The member for Morwell in his debate made some really important points around the transition to renewables, the impact on his community, the representation of working people and how they will make a crust into the future. The gaping hole in that narrative is the federal overlay that we find ourselves in right now. When we think of the energy safety framework, what does it mean for our constituents with a transition that suggests that that is about 20 years on the horizon and it will be done on the back of nuclear? I still have not heard one member on that side talk about their position on this, including the Leader of the Opposition. I had hoped that in the 30-minute bill speech, with the gravitas and the wide breadth that the member for Brighton and Shadow Treasurer had, that in some of his contribution there might have been some active commentary around what energy safety provisions and transition to renewables look like and what the nuclear mix looks like on the edge of a federal election. But we live in hope – one day. I do not think if I go through the *Hansard* search there might be a reference there.

This is an important conversation, though, on this bill around the safety and outcomes for working people, because we have seen – particularly some of the timeframe amendments for AusNet and Powercor – those who have followed impacts on community and the horrific outcomes of Black Saturday and the impacts on communities that were felt. Some of those reporting and mitigation plans and requirements now are always front and centre in the minds of Victorians, as are the safety outcomes more broadly when mitigating disasters that have huge-scale consequences for our

constituencies and still have significant impacts, causing trauma to those communities at a visceral level to this day. Some of those timeframe specifications and changes I am really glad to see, and making sure of the administrative outcomes is appropriate as well.

I am really glad to see in this bill that we build on some of the election commitments we made around a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation. It is worth reflecting on the journey that we have taken to this point. We have already been able to deliver on those legislative reforms that saw the passing of the previous bill in 2023. That modernisation, framework and contribution has been really significant. This bill builds again on that, and it helps to keep up with some of these innovations and changes as well.

Something I am really interested about is the environmental protection outcomes, and some of the changes to the Land Act 1958 are really important. Some of the dialogue from some on the opposition benches has been curious around environment effects statements (EES) and outcomes. We do not erode away those processes, but it is practical and it is reasonable to have leasing arrangements or land obligation arrangements that run parallel to those processes. Environment effects statements can be arduous and extensive – and so they should be – sometimes with important federal oversight from the Commonwealth. We do not want that to be a barrier to consideration of innovation and investment in large-scale output in wind, solar and a range of other types of transmission and transition of energy policy as well.

Some might narrate concerns around that, but I think that actually is a smokescreen for then trying to find every way to oppose the transition to renewables. You see such a breadth and diversity of views on that side. Federally you could not be more extreme. The member for Brighton puts himself up as a champion of renewables, and then you have got all the way on the spectrum the likes of Barnaby Joyce or the former Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who brought a lump of coal in. You try to be everything to everyone, and then you are nothing to no-one. We see some of that behaviour. I know he has pushed out the teals a bit, and the Goldstein contest is a bit of an interesting one.

We need more than just the politics of the day or the populist moment of the day. We need more embedded policy outcomes. We have seen such policy inertia federally, which has meant that some of the renewable energy targets that are part of some of the international targets of the Australian government have actually been largely on the back of state government innovation and action. It has not been widespread policy change that has led to great outcomes. Let us not forget the National Energy Guarantee and how that absolutely imploded the federal debate that saw the end of the legacy of the former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. There are really contested and politicised debates right within that segment as well. When we talk about transition and we talk about those outcomes, and when we have an argument around why you would not have an arrangement where an EES process is required but the leasing requirements or outcomes of the land are not dealt with, it is a bit unconscionable. It is a blocker then to innovation and investment in and outcomes of renewable energy in that transition.

We are on a significant journey. My worry for Victoria and for our nation is the huge gap, which has been played out by the CSIRO and by energy experts around our nation, between federal policy on nuclear and how that is narrated and the renewable energy transition policy that the federal Labor Albanese government has. That has not been answered in some of the policy discussions from those opposite, and it continues to be a nice, convenient 20-year abrogation of work into the future, rather than dealing with how this transition and how these outcomes happen.

Our legacy as a government speaks for itself. In investing in renewable energy, when we think about some of the massive investments that have been made, since 2014 59 projects providing 4471 megawatts of new capacity have come online. That is an extraordinary contribution when we think of the scale of what that means and what that means as a demonstration of Victoria's ambition and Victoria's transition into the future. We are seeing the SEC and the work that has come online and

the ambitions to create an investment pipeline in the future and tens of thousands of jobs going forward – some 59,000 jobs is the aspiration around there. It has been absolutely amazing.

Of course that includes the SEC's very own recent project in Plumpton, one of the world's largest battery energy storage projects in the world, and that will provide enough power for 200,000 homes. There was a lot of talk about the SEC at that time, and there was a lot of talk about what the projects are. I am keen to know if those opposite would, in their opposition to the SEC, scrap projects like we see at Plumpton. Would they take away those innovations, the investment that has been made, the offsets and the response to these climate challenges and the lowering of our reliance on heavy fossil fuels into the future? Would they oppose those projects or scrap them? We know the Leader of the Opposition has said, 'That's it, do away with the SEC.' It would be all done. They would take away that critical investment, that critical leadership, because he cannot just be a 'see ball, hit ball' populist. You cannot do that. You cannot just front up and read a headline and then make your policy call on the run. Are you going to scrap these projects when you say that when you come in you will not support the SEC? This would be scrapping projects and innovations like we see at Plumpton.

It goes without saying that some of these investments need the best safety regulations and regimes we have seen in our state and our nation. As a party that supports working people – and I give a big shout-out to organisations like the Electrical Trades Union and the work they do on behalf of their members – safety is paramount, and supporting their workforce is absolutely paramount. We have got tens of thousands of tradies who did not have a job years ago coming on because they see in Victoria a pipeline of investment and jobs for the future. They will be able to make a crust and also build their state. That is one of the best elements of our renewable energy transition, and this bill is a large part of that.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:41): I rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This is a bill that is meant to be about energy safety, but it is not. When we had the bill briefing – and I thank the minister for the opportunity to be briefed on the bill – there was the question posed: what actually precipitated this bill coming into the Parliament? That question actually could not be answered. But this is a bill that has been made under the guise of safety, and that is an area of issue and concern in my part of the world, so I will be focusing on energy safety particularly. But it is quite a concerning bill, and that is why we have put forward some amendments. It is always concerning when you see a government that is not interested in democracy and wants to remove accountability, and with the removal of two committees, which is what this bill does among other things, you ask yourself: why would the government be reducing the amount of advice that they can get from community? I think the answer is, as we have seen right across the changes we have seen over the last 10 years of this very tired and depleted government, that they do not like advice – and if they do not like the advice, they get rid of the adviser – and they do not want to hear something that does not suit their narrative. So there are many safety concerns.

What we have seen across particularly South-West Coast is a community that has been ridden roughshod over, particularly when it comes to the journey through to renewables. Can I just make a statement at the outset that we are not against renewables, but in western Victoria over the last 30 years of this journey – particularly the last 10 under the now Allan Labor government and, prior to that, the Andrews Labor government – when wind turbines were proposed for our region, the community did not feel like and have never felt like they have actually had the voice they wanted to have to be sure that some of their concerns were allayed. Here we are 25 years on from the very first wind farm in Victoria, the Codrington wind farm, which began operating in 2001, located near Port Fairy in South-West Coast. We are seeing it come to the end of its life, and discussions are underway and the community are being informed that it will be decommissioned in 2027, removing the 14 wind farms. We have seen some of the issues that many, many community members, particularly farmers, have been raising for the last 25 years coming to fruition, and finally their voices are being heard. They were vilified and made out to be anti-renewable activists. But we have seen just in the last few weeks, on 4 February, a turbine blade at the Berrybank wind farm detach and fall to the ground. That happened in the night. Many of our wind farms are right next to the roads, so the concern of blades coming off

has been raised for a very long time, and sure enough that is what we have seen, to the point that farmers are being warned that they should be wearing hard hats in their paddocks when they go out and move their stock and do their farming.

As I keep saying, these farmers, these loud voices, particularly around the Hawkesdale area where we had many opposing wind farms, were made out to be vilified even in their own community. The Codrington farm is particularly worrying, because if you drive on the Princes Highway now between Warrnambool and Portland, what you see are wind turbines with oil absolutely stained all over the shafts. I have got many photos on my phone of the blackened shafts of these windmills, because oil is just pouring out. It is bad enough to think about what that will be doing to the soil if it can be degrading the soil when there is oil spilling, but imagine if the wind turbines in the offshore project that this government – the Labor federal government – is proposing are built and at the end-of-life stage we see oil spilling into the ocean. That would be completely unacceptable, and the people in Warrnambool and Port Fairy who express concern about the offshore wind farm should have a right to be listened to and not just ignored or vilified because they are seen as anti-environmentalist or against renewable energy.

We have a situation which has been talked about for many years which is actually playing out. ‘What happens when these turbines catch fire?’ has been a question for the last 25 years. We have had two fires in the last two years, one in Yambuk in August 2023 and one in June last year at the Cape Nelson State Park. These ones were not as high as the new ones; they were about 80 metres, because they were the first ones. So here we had a situation in winter, thank goodness, where the turbine caught fire because there had not been the maintenance on the nacelle that was needed, with oil spilling out – and that is a fire risk – and that played out in the middle of winter. But if it happens this weekend when we have the heat again of February, or into March, and then we have the north winds and these fires occur, all that the CFA volunteers can do is sit at the bottom and hope that when things fall down they can put them out. That is not going to be good enough when the blades are throwing flames perhaps 200 metres down the paddock and we have got CFA volunteers chasing fires because we have got the typical north winds that happen on a really hot day in south-west Victoria.

All the questions that people have been asking are playing out. At the end of last year we asked the question of the Minister for Emergency Services in the Parliament, so late 2024: tell us which turbines are fitted with suppression equipment, tell us what you issued government when you said these permits were issued years ago that were going to be the mitigation factors put in place to make sure that there was maintenance done at the end of life so that we do not have these fire risk situations. But unfortunately none of these questions have been answered by the minister, and they are reasonable and fair questions from the people of South-West Coast and right across western Victoria, who have got more than their fair share of the saturation of the landscape from these wind towers that they live amongst. People in Melbourne are not living amongst them; south-west Victorians are, and they have every right to have these questions answered. Now we have got fires, we have got oil spilling and we have got another wind farm proposed offshore which many, many, many people have said they disagree with. I am on the record as saying I am very concerned about the whale migration pathway and the whale nursery that exists in this area, but no environmentalist and no scientist around the world can tell me what the effects will be. So the government are really remiss in their responsibility to listen to the community.

Then you look at the gas aspect of this bill – a safety aspect, they say, but again, they cannot purport to explain why. We in south-west Victoria have a lot of manufacturing, and the manufacturing, such as dairy processing and meat manufacturing, is quite energy intensive. Gas is vital, particularly for dairy processing. This is a government that wants to ban gas, yet it has not done its due diligence to make sure there is enough energy to be able to take its place to head towards the renewable transition of electrification. They want to tell people that they cannot cook with gas, they cannot replace their gas cooker with another gas cooker, and they say it will be cheaper. There is not a person who has gone through this exercise that has found it cheaper at this point that I have been able to find, and there is not a person who has found it more effective. So the Liberal–Nationals will repeal this in

government, as we know people need choice and we know this government have not done their due diligence to transition responsibly. Consequently emissions have not gone down like this government have been crowing for the last 10 years will happen. In fact emissions have gone up, so how has this been an environmental benefit? It has been a disaster for the government, because not only have emissions gone up, prices have gone up.

Every time a person who is worried about the cost-of-living crisis goes to the supermarket and they buy their 2 litres of milk, they should think about the cost of that processing, which needed energy to be able to process it. That is why food is expensive. Energy sits at the base of everything we need in our daily lives, and that is why we are seeing such incredibly high prices. And of course we have got reliability of energy being available going down, because we are not going to have enough energy. So how has this been a success for the government? It has not. It has been an abject fail. Whether it is a housing crisis, a health crisis or an education crisis, in every sector this government has had a hand in we are just seeing abject fails. But the energy crisis is probably the most concerning, because we need to be able to turn those lights on, we need to be able to produce food and we need to keep people safe. To do that we should be putting in place a reliable energy source that we can depend on, that we can afford, and unfortunately for Victoria what we are now seeing is every expert agreeing that this government has failed, because we will not have enough energy. It is more expensive than it needs to be in Victoria, where we should have the cheapest, most reliable energy of anywhere in the world. The Allan Labor government are in charge of the biggest failure yet, the energy system.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:51): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. I do not know what it must be like hopping up in this place and just speaking untruths as a part of your contribution. The absolute truth of the matter is that greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by some 31.3 per cent in this state since 2005.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Gary MAAS:** You have had your turn, member for Brighton. It is my turn now. This is a debate, and the truth is that greenhouse gas emissions in the state of Victoria have reduced by 31.3 per cent, and it has nothing to do with the four years that the opposition were in government – the only four years this century that they have been in government in this state. It has had a lot to do with the work of this government, of Labor governments, to ensure that we get the energy mix right as we transition to renewables, and this legislation is a key part of the energy legislative framework.

The bill does many things. It provides amendments to the Electricity Safety Act 1998, including entry powers for Energy Safe Victoria to investigate safety issues, bushfire mitigation plans, expanding the powers of Energy Safe in the courts and increasing penalties for a range of offences. It provides amendments to the Gas Safety Act 1997, which include adding new entry powers, improving provisions for entries and regulation making and expanding enforcement powers, including increased penalties. It makes amendments to the Pipelines Act 2005, including introducing new entry powers and empowering courts to issue adverse publicity orders. And it makes amendments to the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005, including requirements for Energy Safe to submit a corporate plan every three years, with annual updates. The bill also provides increased certainty of public land tenure for proponents undertaking environment effects statement, or EES, processes, under the Environment Effects Act 1978. It is about aligning Victoria's energy safety framework with contemporary standards, boosting public safety and investor confidence and progressing towards net zero emissions in the state by 2050.

Another inconvenient truth is that this country actually digs up and exports a lot of gas. There are some 82 million tonnes of the stuff actually produced and exported each year, and that makes us the second largest producer and exporter of LNG in the world. It suggests that as a country as a whole we are pretty good at it.

When it comes to Victoria, as I said before, we are working towards getting that energy transition right. I hope I get some time to provide some context with what I did over the weekend in speaking to a member of my electorate who has recently transitioned to solar energy. I thought I would provide some history in terms of what this government has done and rebut much of what the member for Bulleen said. The truth of the matter is that the legislation gives the Minister for Environment the power to lease Crown land prior to the environment effects statement's conclusion, delivering critical site security for major projects in the gas, renewables and resources sectors.

Between 2017 and 2020 the government invested over \$40 million in direct support to incentivise new gas supply through the Victorian gas program, and that involved surveying the potential for the development of gas storage fields in Port Campbell. Lochard Energy used that data and developed the Seamer reservoir in 2024. The Mylor reservoir will become an additional gas storage facility through the Heytesbury Underground Gas Storage project. The government conducted airborne gravity surveys to facilitate future gas discoveries in the Otway Basin, and that supported our 2018 Victorian offshore acreage release. This resulted in two exploration permits being granted in 2020 to Beach Energy and Bridgeport Energy. Beach Energy are planning on acquiring the Calico 3D seismic survey over the transitional zone between Port Campbell and Peterborough in early 2026. It also assessed the potential for new onshore gas discoveries and found that there were no proven or probable onshore resources ready for imminent development.

In 2018 the government legislated that any new gas produced in Victoria must be offered to the domestic market on reasonable grounds, ensuring that Victorians get first use of Victorian gas. In August 2024 the government approved production licences for Beach Energy's Artisan and La Bella fields in the Otway Basin as part of the Commonwealth–state joint authority, and then in September 2024 the government approved production licences for Beach Energy's Enterprise field. In November 2024 the Allan Labor government passed legislation to allow offshore underground gas storage, paving the way for the Golden Beach energy storage project as well as other offshore gas storage projects under consideration from other developers. In December 2024 Minister D'Ambrosio led the push among the nation's energy ministers to expand AEMO's powers to intervene in the gas market to avoid any projected shortfall that there might have been in the east coast gas market from 2028. I note on that final point that there are many commentators who are saying that claims of a shortfall in the east coast gas market are shrill, as has been put in those different papers and articles about the place, so to say that we are running out of gas as we are transitioning is quite the misnomer.

In the remaining minute or so that I have, it was really terrific to be with the Minister for Energy and Resources and the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action Ms Watt from the other place at a local home in my electorate of Narre Warren South on the weekend. Uteng, who lives with her husband and three kids and father-in-law, was able to explain to us the benefits of solar energy on her home where she had received \$1400 in a Solar Victoria rebate. Since that installation she has seen a remarkable reduction in her family's energy. She says that they use so much solar power during the day that they are using the energy to power the house, air conditioning and pool throughout the summer. I might leave it there. Thank you, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, yesterday in question time the Premier committed to updating the house in relation to bail data and the number of offenders that have received bail. I wonder if the Premier could update the house with that data.

**The SPEAKER:** Manager of Opposition Business, that is not a point of order. However, I am happy to speak to you in my office after question time in relation to that matter.

I did want to acknowledge that today we will have in the gallery the new Greek consul general in Melbourne Dimitra Georgantzoglou. I am not sure if she is here with us yet, but she is coming in for question time.

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Economic policy**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. According to the Auditor-General, public reporting around major projects is not meaningful, reliable or comprehensive, particularly in relation to cost. Why is the Premier's secretive government deliberately hiding the true cost of major projects from Victorians?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, I would say the Leader of the Opposition is wrong, and I will now detail for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition why I state this case. Of course every year, and then at regular other times during the year, budget papers are produced, and in those budget papers – and we are happy to provide a set to the Leader of the Opposition – there is reporting on the expenditure against a whole range of things, for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition. It accounts for the record additional investment we are making in our hospital system, it accounts for the additional investment we are making in police, it accounts for the additional investment we are making in schools and it provides information on the capital program. When it comes to the capital program, there is the budget paper and there is the midyear budget update as well, which provide regular reporting to not just the Parliament but the Victorian community of the government's investment, because what we are talking about here is investment in a capital pipeline that is supporting jobs.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was a very narrow question about the Auditor-General's comments that her failure to provide public reporting is not meaningful for the Victorian people.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS**: On the point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business should know by now that points of order are not to be used to restate a question. The Premier was not debating the question. She was being entirely relevant and responding to the question as it was asked.

**The SPEAKER**: I do not uphold the point of order at this point.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Of course there would not have been a report like this between 2010 and 2014 because there were no major projects. What we have done is make a continued and sustained investment in projects. We have done that, and we report against the investment that we make in these projects through the budget papers. And behind each and every one of those projects –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: On a point of order, Speaker, sessional orders require the Premier to be factual, and the fact of the matter is that they are hiding the cost of the investment from the Victorian people.

**The SPEAKER**: It is not for me to determine if members are being factual or not.

**Will FOWLES**: On the point of order, Speaker, for the clarity of the house, the standing orders do require that answers to questions are factual. That is in the standing orders. If it is not for the Chair to determine whether answers are factual or not, who is it for?

**The SPEAKER**: There is a requirement for members on their feet to be factual. It is not for me to determine if they are being factual.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I would have thought it was an undisputed matter of fact that the budget papers that are produced annually and the midyear budget updates that are produced annually provide expenditure against the government's investment in the capital program. I think that is a matter of fact. That is not something that I thought was up for debate.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: On a different point of order, Speaker, on relevance. The question is not about the budget papers; the question is about the damning Auditor-General's report.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, on the tedious repetition that we are having now from the Manager of Opposition Business not letting the Premier answer the question, I ask that you rule her point of order out of order.

**The SPEAKER:** As the question referred to costs, I do not uphold the point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was detailing to the house, we have made investments in capital projects, big and small, across this state, and we have done so because that is an investment in working people and their families in this state, to have good, secure jobs, because behind every single one of those projects is a worker and their family. When those projects are completed, like we will see later this year with the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel, for example, the Footscray Hospital, for example, we will see Victorians get the benefit of that investment: services closer to home, being able to get home safer and sooner and more transport services. That is what you get from an investment in capital projects, and that is what we detail in the budget papers every single year.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Premier, despite \$15 billion in cost blowouts on 53 projects, your government has rejected the Auditor-General's recommendation to transparently publish major project performance despite having this information. Why won't the Premier immediately comply with the Auditor-General's recommendation and publicly release the true cost of these projects?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): Again, I see investment in capital projects in different terms, and I will provide this information to the house. The Auditor-General's report goes to the additional level crossings we have in this state, like the level crossing that we added in August 2021 at Brunt Road, Beaconsfield. The Leader of the Opposition is probably a little bit familiar with this because he had been calling on the government to add this level crossing to our program. The only reason you can call for this is because we have a program –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was a very narrow question about the recommendation of the Auditor-General to publicly release the true cost of these blown-out projects.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I refer to level crossings. I could use the Frankston Hospital as another example where we have added scope and the North East Link project where we have added scope. Where we have added scope it comes with an additional investment, and I make no apology for making additional investments in much-needed projects for this state.

#### **Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:11): I am so absolutely pleased to update the house on we are helping Victorians take control of their energy bills each and every day because we know how important it is for families to have real cost-of-living relief to make life just that bit easier. 2024 was another massive, record year for our Solar Homes program, with more than 78,000 solar panels, hot-water systems and batteries installed in homes right across the state. It takes us to over a billion dollars slashed from the up-front cost of installation of these systems, putting real dollars back in the pockets of ordinary families. That is over 300,000 households who will have solar panels, including 6000 rental properties. It is also over 50,000 energy-efficient electric hot-water systems and more than 19,000 batteries.

The numbers do not lie. More and more Victorians are taking up our rebates. Why? Because they know it will slash their energy bills each and every day. Victorian families are saving hundreds of millions of dollars every year, powering appliances in their homes with free electricity from their rooftop solar, and why wouldn't you? You can save \$1000 with solar panels. That increases to about \$1400 if you use it to heat up your hot water with a heat pump. It increases even more if you add a battery to it. Eighty-five per cent of Victorians are eligible for our rebates and our interest-free loans, including renters and those in apartments. We are on the side of Victorians at the dinner table, not on the side of the big energy and gas companies at boardroom tables, whose interests are to have all Victorians pay more for their energy on the bills. The Allan government is backing Victorian families, helping them with real cost-of-living relief, and we will continue to back Victorians every single day.

### Taxation

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier categorically rule out imposing a new tax on all Victorians who have private health insurance during this cost-of-living crisis?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): You cannot imagine how delighted I am to receive a question from the member for Brighton in his new role, and I thank the member for his question. The state budget is due to be handed down on 20 May, and I would have thought it was a little early in the season to be going through this performative act that the shadow minister wants to go through in asking the government to rule things in or out as we prepare for the forthcoming state budget. I would have thought we are a little bit early for that.

But in terms of framing the state budget this year, like we are every single year, we are going to be focused on working people and Victorian families.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question specifically went to the government's secret plan for a private health insurance tax that the government has.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We have all just had an insight into the mind of the member for Brighton – that fantasy world that occupies the member for Brighton, the fantasy world that is the member for Brighton – because there is no plan from the government. I want to make that absolutely clear. I remind the member for Brighton that as recently as October last year we cut the off-the-plan stamp duty concessions, and I seem to remember someone very agitated at the time about our commitment to building more homes for Victorians and making sure that we are using all the levers of government, and that includes cutting a tax so that we can get more apartments built in this state. So in answer to the member for Brighton's question, I can rule out that proposition.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:16): Given the Treasurer has refused to rule out introducing any new taxes on Victorians, will the Premier categorically rule out any new tax in the upcoming state budget?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:16): I remind the member for Brighton that this government has cut something like 60 taxes over the course of its time.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the standing orders provide that the Premier is required to be factual. The government has actually added 60 new taxes.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Of course, as I said earlier, the state budget will be handed down on 20 May. The member for Brighton can between now and then try this charade of ruling things in or out. The real question for the member for Brighton, the Judas Iscariot of the Victorian Parliament, is: can he categorically rule out any further threats to his current leader? Can the member for Brighton categorically rule that out?

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

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*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour. Members will be removed without warning.

**Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.**

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It is very narrow. Will there be taxes in the next budget, yes or no?

**The SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business is reminded not to repeat the question, but I do ask the Premier to not debate the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

### Ministers statements: education funding

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:19): Yesterday's interest rate cut was welcome relief for so many Victorian families right across our state – the first in four years after 13 interest rate rises in a row. We know families are still under pressure and that pressure has not gone away overnight. Families are juggling so much to give their kids the best start, but it is harder and harder in a cost-of-living crisis. We know at back-to-school time it can be even more stressful for families, but the Allan Labor government has your back. From free kinder to free TAFE to targeted financial support from P–12, we know this support can change a young life forever. We know under Labor, building the Education State is ensuring that all children, no matter their postcode, no matter their parents' education, no matter their income, are supported to get the best start in life and live a life of purpose.

Already \$120 million has been claimed through the Allan Labor government's school saving bonus, putting money directly into the back pockets of families, which they can spend on other relief. \$21.1 million we put in the last budget to expand the school breakfast program to every Victorian government school across our state. Another cost-of-living measure is the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, and an important change we have made for this year is to make sure that families can pool their resources and have more ability to pool it to certain kids and to certain activities in the school. That is what you get when a Labor government works hand in hand with the sector. There is the Glasses for Kids program, because not having 20/20 vision should not be a barrier to learning, nor should your parents' bank account.

Under the Allan Labor government every person, no matter their postcode, will get the best start in life. We know cost-of-living pressures have only added to the burden on families. We know that getting to school with all the essentials can be a challenge, but under the Allan Labor government you can rest assured that students will have the support they need, because we know the right support at the right time can change the course of a young person's life forever. That is what Labor governments stand for.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. The government proposes to raise \$11.5 billion through a value capture tax on 70,000 homes around the SRL East. That equates to \$164,000 in additional tax per home. How does another tax make new housing more affordable?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): Can I be clear for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition that the premise that he has put in his question is absolutely wrong. He is not correct. Indeed this was something that the government made clear when we released the business and investment case for the Suburban Rail Loop in August 2021. We have been clear since August 2021 that the value capture mechanisms that we announced would be part of the funding mix for the Suburban Rail Loop as far back as August 2018 – we made it absolutely clear from 2021 onwards that these measures would not be targeted at home owners. I hope that clarifies for the benefit of the Leader

of the Opposition, and I hope that also means that he will now put away his little scare campaign, which I am sure he is very much excited to run, as it is all about his ongoing opposition to building more homes next to train stations in the suburbs, exactly in the right location.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual in her answers. This is about a value capture tax on homes and seeking that homes be less affordable under this Labor government.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question. The fact that the members on the other side of the house do not understand a basic concept like value capture is not one that we can resolve for them. But the Premier was being entirely relevant to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**JACINTA ALLAN:** Those opposite can continue with their opposition to this much-needed project, a project that is building a train line to Monash University, a train line to Deakin University, Burwood, a train line that will connect communities right across the state and also give us that opportunity, like we are doing in those activity centres that the member for Brighton loves so much. We are building more homes right next to train stations, in exactly the right locations, because I want more Victorians to have the opportunity that so many of the rest of us have had of buying and getting into a home, starting a family and having access to great transport connections.

**BRAD BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): The federal government will not provide a single cent more towards SRL until problems with value capture are resolved, with federal infrastructure minister Catherine King stating there are still some hurdles, particularly around value capture. What are the hurdles leaving a \$9 billion budget black hole?

**JACINTA ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): This is one of the very few times in my time in this place in the last 10 years when I have had the opportunity to stand up and talk about a federal government investing in projects in Victoria. It is one of the very few times I have had that opportunity, because in the federal Labor government we have a partner in the Suburban Rail Loop, like we do in the airport project, like we do in the North East Link project as well. We have a partner in the federal government in this project.

**BRIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the SRL project is not funded. On relevance, the question was about what the hurdles are, creating a \$9 billion budget black hole.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS:** On the point of order, Speaker, this is an abuse of the point of order process. The Manager of Opposition Business well knows that making a point of order is not an opportunity to restate the question. We have had simply enough of this tedious repetition from the Manager of Opposition Business.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**JACINTA ALLAN:** I absolutely reject the approach of those opposite, who, when Peter Dutton was at the cabinet table, went silent on making sure Victoria got our fair share. I will not. I will continue to advocate for a fair share for Victorian infrastructure projects. I quote the federal minister, who calls the Suburban Rail Loop ‘a good project’ and an ‘important project for the city.’ It is a big project that she is a supporter of and the federal Labor government is a supporter of, and so are Victorians.

#### Ministers statements: period products

**NATALIE HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:27): Period products are not a luxury; they are a necessity. We know that too many Victorian women and children cannot afford them. In fact, one in five of those who need pads and tampons report struggling to meet

the costs. That is why I rise to update the house today about this government's free pads and tampons program.

We are fighting period poverty, and we are supporting women with the cost of living. Free pads and tampons can now be found in places like the State Library Victoria, Thomastown Library, Gordon Werribee TAFE and Sydenham Library. With more to come across the state and regional Victoria, women can access what they need when they need it. The first 50 machines have already been used more than 10,000 times over the last few months, and once they are all installed they will be available at 700 sites across our state. We know that this initiative is improving access and saving women hundreds of dollars, delivering cost-of-living relief. It also helps to tackle the stigma that girls are taught to feel about their periods, a feeling of shame that often follows them right into their adult lives.

This scheme is an Australian first, and one that we are extremely proud of. Had those opposite been in government, with their all-male leadership team, I am not sure this sort of program would have been supported, because it takes this sort of government, the Allan Labor government, to put a program like this in place that puts women's needs at the forefront. We do not even know if those opposite support this initiative. I am proud of this program because it means that women will get period products where they need them and when they need them, period.

### Housing

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Planning. The government promised to build 80,000 homes annually. However, the most recent data shows that only 52,854 homes were approved in the past year. The minister set the target. Why hasn't the minister met it?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:30): I thank the member for his question in his new shadow role. Perhaps first of all we will start with this: we know the way to make homes more affordable is to build more of them. We know on this side of the house that the Allan Labor government is about pulling every lever available to us to get the conditions right, to get the settings right, so that industry, local community and local government can get on, work together and build more homes for more Victorians, because we know when we build more homes we create more opportunities for Victorians, which is why the work we are doing is so important. The work we are doing to build –

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, on relevance, Speaker, you cannot live in a pile of paperwork. The question is why you have not met the target of building 80,000 homes.

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. I ask that you rule it out of order straightaway so that the planning minister can get on with answering this question. If the opposition ask serious questions, then they should at least give us the respect of listening to the answers.

**The SPEAKER**: There is no point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY**: In September 2023 it was this government that released our housing statement, and that statement set out the first suite of reforms – significant reforms, some of them the first in generations that we had undertaken to reform our planning system – and put into place a suite of reforms and plans that is going to drive the trajectory of increased housing for more Victorians. And we know that it is working. Victoria has been leading – top of the pops – the number of home approvals, home builds, for more Victorians. We are building on that. We are working to build more homes in the places that people want to live, in our activity centres. And why have we selected these locations? Because we know people want to live in them. What we know is that the numbers have been decreasing, and do you know why that is? Because Victorians cannot afford to live in these locations.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question – it was very narrow – about why they have not met the target of building homes, actual homes built.

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot compel the minister to answer the question, but the minister was being relevant to the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** The way you build more homes is you need to approve more planning applications. What we see from those opposite is that at every opportunity they are blocking homes, whether it is the member for Brighton or whether it is the member for Hawthorn – and I have seen you recently putting out your notices trying to discourage your community from supporting more homes for more Victorians. I put it to those opposite: how are they going to look those young Victorians in the eyes to say to them, ‘No, we don’t want you living in our neighbourhoods, in our areas. You are not good enough. You do not deserve to have the same opportunities that we had to find a home in the location of our choice, in a location where perhaps we grew up, close to family and friends, to the places where we went to school.’ It is the Allan Labor government that is going to provide those opportunities for young Victorians and enable them to buy or to rent a home of their choice and be able to lead the kind of life that they want to lead with the opportunities that they should have as well.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:34): Industry is warning Victorians that the government’s taxes and regulatory changes have resulted in uncertainty and delays and will continue to slow housing supply. Will the minister concede that Victoria’s punitive property taxes, now comprising 42 per cent of house and land costs, are hurting the housing sector and preventing Victoria from providing affordable housing?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:35): First of all, I completely reject the premise of the question and also the information included in it. I cannot accept that. What I will say is that it is the Allan Labor government that recognises the need for increased housing opportunities for Victorians. We will pull every lever available to us. As those opposite know, it was only last year that we removed and granted concessions on stamp duty to assist and support industry to get on and build the homes that Victorians need and that Victorians deserve. We are setting a plan, a pathway to deliver those homes right across Victoria, particularly in established areas close to public transport and transport connections, because we know that is where Victorians want to be able to live and we know the way to make homes more affordable is to build more of them.

#### Ministers statements: veterans support

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (14:36): I rise today to update the house on how the Veterans Card Victoria is helping the cost of living for our veterans. This nation-leading initiative, the first of its kind, provides ongoing savings for our Victorian veterans every year. Another initiative introduced by this government in 2019 is the weekly last post service at the shrine. I do need to repeat that: since 2019. This service allows the community to come together every Sunday to honour our veterans. It is an important tradition, and let me reassure our veterans and the community that this tradition will continue. Veterans served for us and for their country, and we will continue to serve them. That is why our government is focused on delivering real support for our veterans through the Veterans Card Victoria, easing cost-of-living pressures, providing real savings on car rego, marine licences and so much more; a strong employment strategy, helping veterans transition into secure jobs; and providing support for local RSLs and community organisations through funding support. Victoria is a proud home for over 100,000 veterans, and this year marks the 110th anniversary of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli in Türkiye. To all our veterans, the Allan Labor government will continue to honour you and respect your service and sacrifice. On cost of living, education and secure jobs, we are backing you – for our veterans, for families and for all Victorians

**Road maintenance**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Potholes on the Calder Highway were fixed ahead of its closure yesterday to allow Liam Neeson and crew to film a movie. Ordinary Victorian motorists need a very particular set of skills to navigate around the potholes on our roads. Why do Hollywood superstars get better roads in Victoria than Victorians?

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:38): I thank the member for his question because it allows me an opportunity to once more explain just what our record investment in road maintenance is – \$964 million this year alone, and we are only halfway through road maintenance season. We have got crews out all over our road network, whether it is up in Malmsbury, whether it is on the Calder –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the minister is debating the question. If the record investment is working, why did the road have to be fixed ahead of the movie being filmed?

**The SPEAKER:** The minister is not debating the question, but the minister will come back to answering the question.

**Melissa HORNE:** As I said, we have got crews out across the network every single day of the week. At the moment we have got crews out – and I am sure the member for Lowan will be happy about this – at Lawloit on the Western Highway. I am sure the member for Shepparton will be happy about this: we have got crews out at the Echuca-Mooroopna Road.

**A member** interjected.

**Melissa HORNE:** I am sure we have got works happening in your patch too.

**Roma Britnell:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, could the minister for roads and the Minister for Creative Industries perhaps shoot a movie in my area, because we need our roads desperately fixed. Liam Neeson might get that done.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Melissa HORNE:** In conclusion, we have got crews out across the network and there is periodic maintenance that is occurring. As I said, we are halfway through road maintenance season. We will continue doing it and continue with this record investment.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:41): Will any proceeds from the movie's production be put towards fixing potholes, or do we need Liam Neeson to shoot scenes on every road in the state in order to get them fixed?

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:41): I do suspect that the member for Gippsland South is looking for an invitation to meet Liam Neeson, and maybe the Minister for Creative Industries can assist with that. What I can tell you in relation to the investment that this movie is making is that the jobs it is creating locally are so important, and in using this road I understand that they are paying for traffic management.

**The SPEAKER:** Just for the record, Liam Neeson was sighted in a local Castlemaine supermarket this morning.

**Ministers statements: school saving bonus**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): As of today, the school saving bonus has saved Victorian families \$123 million on the cost of school camps, books and uniforms. That is \$123 million that is sitting now in families' household budgets because of the support we have provided with these back-to-school costs. To break that down even further, more than 220,000 students started school

recently in brand new uniforms thanks to the school saving bonus, 120,000 kids got the books that they needed to start school and 130,000 students will head off on their camps and excursions this year with the support of the school saving bonus.

Of course, even better than that, and I saw this myself at the school uniform shop in Bendigo – no, Liam Neeson was not there – there were parents there with their school saving bonus, knowing they had extra money in their pocket because they had the support of our government. For example, in the electorate of Bentleigh, McKinnon Secondary College topped the state with a massive \$760,000 in savings for families, Alamanda K–9 College in the Point Cook electorate has saved more on new uniforms than any other school in the state, and when we welcome the new member for Werribee next week we will be able to say that Manor Lakes P–12 has saved nearly \$550,000 in support.

We invest in schools. We do not cut vital support like the education maintenance allowance and Fresh Fruit Friday. We back families and we back working people with these back-to-school costs, because we understand that this is the support families need right now from their government.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Benambra electorate**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (14:45): (990) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. The information I seek is why a 20-bed step-down ward at Mercy Health Albury and a modular surgical ward at Albury Wodonga Health are not being funded. Albury Wodonga Health is chronically short of beds, between 50 and 70 short of what is needed every day. It means ambulances are parked, unable to get to the next emergency, while hospital staff try to find a bed for the patient. It means there are not enough beds for public surgery, and there are now 3665 people on the waiting list at Albury Wodonga Health, which is a 10 per cent increase in just the last three months. Business cases have been done, but this should be all you need. It will cost less than the daily interest on the state's debt. I asked this in 2022 and last year, and I hope to avoid another all-spin, no-substance response.

#### **Mulgrave electorate**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (14:46): (991) My constituency question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place. My question is: with the recent celebration of the Lunar New Year, how has the Allan Labor government been supporting multicultural communities in Mulgrave? One of our state's greatest strengths is our rich cultural tapestry, and the Victorian community is seen at its best when our multicultural communities are given the resources, time and attention they deserve. I had the pleasure of joining colleagues at Springvale Lunar New Year celebrations, witnessing firsthand the importance of this event to our community. Such events foster a sense of belonging, especially for first- and second-generation Australian families. I thank the minister for her continuous support, including the \$400,000 in funding over four years for the Springvale Lunar New Year. I also extend my gratitude and congratulations to the Springvale Asian Business Association for organising another wonderful festival. To all who celebrated, I wish you a happy and prosperous Year of the Wood Snake, symbolising passion, growth and tolerance.

#### **Murray Plains electorate**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:47): (992) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources because I have constituents wanting to access her government's heating and cooling rebates but who cannot, because they live in regional Victoria. The most recent complaint I received is consistent with all the others. The recommended websites never respond. The 13 pages of authorising stores do not specify the areas they cover, and when you contact them they all respond with 'Can't help you, you live too far away.' In other words, you do not live in Melbourne, so you do not matter. The rebate may be only a few hundred dollars, but for many people, including our senior citizens, the money can make a big difference to whether they are comfortable in their own homes or not. Could the minister advise me how regional Victorians can actually access the reality of these alleged rebates instead of once again being treated as second-class citizens in their own state?

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**The SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Murray Plains to reword his question so that he is not asking the minister for an action.

**Peter WALSH:** Could the minister please inform me –

**The SPEAKER:** When will the minister –

**Peter WALSH:** When will the minister advise me how regional Victorians can actually access the reality of these alleged rebates instead of once again being treated as second-class citizens in their own state?

### Thomastown electorate

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (14:48): (993) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, has the City of Whittlesea made any applications under the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, in particular in the electorate of Thomastown? There are so many people in the new suburbs that are really crying out for proper facilities so that they can join up, be active and play sport with their children or other local people in the area. There is also a great need for upgrades to existing sport and recreational facilities in the older, more established areas of Thomastown, such as the Epping Football Netball Club, the Thomastown Football and Netball Club, the Whittlesea Ranges, the Whittlesea United clubs and the Lalor soccer club. There are so, so many clubs that do so much great work with great contributions to our area.

### Mornington electorate

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (14:49): (994) My question is for the Minister for Environment. What is the minister doing to protect anglers, fishing businesses and the environment in Mornington? It has been reported that five fisheries enforcement stations around Port Phillip and Western Port, including Mornington, are closing in a bid to meet this broke government's funding cuts. There has also been a 66 per cent staff reduction in Port Phillip and Western Port. Many locals, like Neil, Ben and Lilly, are concerned this will mean a rise in maritime crime, impact law-abiding anglers, commercial fisheries and the environment and put lives at risk. Without strong enforcement, illegal operators profit while honest anglers and others struggle with dwindling stocks and rising costs. We have many great local fishing businesses, like Mornington Boat Hire, Bay Fish N Trips, Cripps Family Fish Farm, I'm Hooked Fishing Charters, Pro Red Fishing Charters, Tackle World Mornington and Sport Phillip Marine, all of which are crucial to our local economy. With our precious peninsula marine ecosystem, we cannot afford to weaken fisheries enforcement.

### Narre Warren South electorate

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:50): (995) My constituency question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and it concerns open mosque day 2025. Minister, how does funding towards open mosque day enable my community in Narre Warren South to learn about different faiths and break down any associated stigmas? Last Saturday I had the pleasure of joining the member for Cranbourne and the member for Narre Warren North at mosques in the south-east that serve our constituents for open mosque day. Our inclusive Allan Labor government is very proud to support multifaith and multicultural events like this one that celebrate the diverse communities that make up our state. I would like to thank both the Emir Sultan Mosque in Dandenong and the Hallam mosque in Narre Warren for welcoming us and the broader community too for going into these places of worship. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### Rowville electorate

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:51): (996) My question is to the Attorney-General. When will the Allan Labor government reform its flawed bail laws, which have led to an out-of-control youth crime crisis across Knox and Victoria? We continue to wake up nearly every morning to yet another story or two of out-of-control youth offending, particularly further examples of home invasions, aggravated burglaries, carjacking and stolen car chases. Day after day I am contacted by local Rowville and Knox

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constituents who are living in fear that they will soon become the next victim of this horrendous and often violent youth crime offending that is currently plaguing our community. Knox residents are simply fed up with the government's excuses and platitudes and are demanding urgent action. The Allan government must admit it made a mistake and reverse its earlier soft bail laws, including bringing back the offence of breaching bail, to prevent the current revolving door of the justice system.

### **Narre Warren North electorate**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (14:52): (997) Narre Warren North is home to the best schools in the state, from Fountain Gate Secondary College to Gleneagles Secondary College and Hallam Secondary College that we are doing some incredible work on. The question I would like to ask is to the Minister for Education, and what I would like to know is: how many people in the schools in Narre Warren North have benefited from the \$400 school saving bonus?

### **Hawthorn electorate**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (14:53): (998) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and is regarding the frequency of the 624 bus route along Auburn Road and the lack of bus services generally to serve local school communities in that precinct. On Monday I met with Ross Pritchard, the principal of Auburn High School. Mr Pritchard has suggested that adding additional buses in the morning and at the end of the school day – 8:15 am and 3:40 pm respectively – would see congestion around the school precinct ease and that his students would find it easier to get to and from school. This is a highly populated school precinct, and the benefits of any extension of bus services would be gratefully received by other schools in the precinct, Bialik College, Alia College and Auburn South Primary School. I ask the minister to advise whether this is possible and, if so, what changes to the bus timetable would be required to put this into effect.

### **Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:54): (999) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. How are local students continuing to benefit from the \$21.1 million new three-storey science, chemistry, physics, arts, food and technology building at Strathmore Secondary College? Established on the old Napier Park site, the former Napier Park greyhound racing track, Strathmore Secondary College was officially opened on 3 December 1960 and for 60 years has been providing a nurturing and inspiring learning environment for generations of local students, guided by its motto of 'palladem alite' – to nurture and cherish wisdom. The school has continued to foster the intellectual and personal growth of many local students. On 4 December it was again a pleasure to visit the school to catch up with the work of long-time principal Jillian English and acting principals Michael Pakakis AM and Vanessa Pratt to discuss the ongoing opportunities of the new \$21.1 million building, the ongoing benefits of the Victorian Space Science Education Centre, which welcomes 14,000 students at the school annually, the school's ongoing master plan priorities and other priorities around road safety on Pascoe Vale Road and the Moonee Ponds Creek advocacy. I commend the work of the 2000 students, 200 teachers and families and community members.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

### **Constituency questions**

**The SPEAKER** (14:55): I have a ruling on yesterday's constituency questions. Constituency questions must ask questions of ministers and not seek an action. Members should take care in phrasing their matters to ensure that their constituency question seeks information and does not instead ask a minister to do something. Yesterday the member for Kororoit sought an action from the minister in her constituency question, so I rule the member's question out of order.

*Bills***Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:56): I rise to contribute on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This is one of numerous energy-related bills that have come to this chamber and again does not really solve many of the issues that particularly regional Victorians and people in the electorate of Polwarth are facing with this government's approach to the renewable energy rollout. In the minister's second-reading speech she said:

Safety must be a priority in the delivery of essential services like energy. Most importantly, energy safety brings invaluable benefits by protecting life and property.

That is absolutely something that all sides of the house would agree with, particularly with the well-known statistic in regional Victoria that some 80 per cent of all lives and property lost through bushfire is as a result of electrical failure. That traditionally comes in the form of collapsed powerlines, faulty transformers and conductors that are past their use-by date. There is much that needs to continue to improve to keep energy transmission safe in Victoria. For those of us old enough to remember in this place – not that you have to be that old of course – I think it was in 1997 when we had the Longford explosion and the gas transmission system here in Victoria was put under a lot of stress and shut down. We were forced into creating some new infrastructure, which came through the seat of Polwarth – the extra gas lines from Port Campbell into the main grid. It is a very complex and necessary piece of civic infrastructure that needs to be maintained.

Unfortunately this bill, like so many others that this government brings to the chamber, fails to actually really get to the nub of keeping Victorians safe through good management of energy infrastructure but instead pushes its political agenda. Clearly in this bill the energy agenda that this government has is banning gas. I think in there it refers to going out chasing the electricians and the plumbers. We have got fines here of up to \$48,000 if they dare to install into someone's house a gas appliance. That is quite insane. It is a bit reminiscent of the attack on fishermen in a bill late last year. We have had the bizarre situation in the last few months where the government gave a company the licence to organise bail and look after some of the state's worst offenders – and they have no police checks, no background checks – but if you want to be a commercial fisherman you have to have a police check and a background check and you have to have your partner and other related entities police checked. Now we are going for the plumbers and the electricians. We are going after the tradesmen to enforce government policy. So often there are gaping holes left in the system for what the average reasonable person on the street would have expected a government would be hounding for.

There are a couple of issues that really affect Polwarth when it comes to energy transmission. Across south-west Victoria just in the last 12 months we have had an out-of-control wind turbine fire, and it was admitted by the government that you cannot put the fires out. We have asked Energy Safe Victoria for immediate review of the many thousands of wind turbines in Victoria: how many of them have fire suppression, how many do not? That is a state secret. I would have thought the very least a responsible government could do is ensure that every single CFA volunteer in their community on any given day, if they have got to rock up to an enormous 200-metre high burning, towering inferno, has a right to know whether that site is equipped to help fight the fire, and they do not know that. That is something that ESV is responsible for.

We had a situation just in the last month where a whole brand new, less than 18-month-old wind tower, 250 metres tall, collapsed onto the ground. Every single Victorian has a right to know why that collapsed. The analogy, quite simply, is if the Rialto tower here in the heart of Melbourne CBD, which is approximately the same height, fell over tomorrow, Victorians would rightly want to know why it fell over. It is the same thing.

Country Victorians have a right to know who is managing the safety of this, who is reporting back and how we know it is not going to happen again tomorrow. We are getting towers now in western Victoria closing in on 300 metres tall, and they fall a long way when they collapse. We now know we have got wind turbines within close proximity to many busy roads and highways in country Victoria. We heard earlier today in question time that unless you have a Hollywood movie star driving down your road you are not likely to get it repaired anytime soon. However, the last thing you need is a towering inferno falling across your main road, and we need to make sure that that is not going to happen. These are some of the real issues in electrical and renewable energy safety that people in western Victoria want to know.

I touched earlier on 80 per cent of all life and property lost in fires being through a power pole collapsing. The simple facts on that: in western Victoria alone there are some 480,000 wooden power poles. We replace around about 3000 a year. Three thousand to 480,000 – we are simply not replacing and managing our existing infrastructure well, and we are not doing it in a way that is ensuring people are safe. Many people in western Victoria, because the date stamps are on the power poles, will know that nearly 25 per cent of the power pole infrastructure in Victoria predates the Melbourne Olympic Games. They are pre-1956. Anyone who knows anything about a piece of hardwood stuck in the ground will also testify quite openly here: a piece of hardwood stuck in the ground does not last much longer than 50 years. And we are expecting our power infrastructure to keep going that long.

Those types of real issues are not touched on in this bill. Instead we are going after plumbers to make sure that they implement the government's ideological approach to energy use here in Victoria – not a sustainable and safe measure. That is of great concern not only to me but to the profession and to households, because quite simply, Acting Speaker O'Keeffe – and I note that you are from a regional area as well – many, many people in regional Victoria do not have access to the full power supply. With the current demand, if I was to go and build a standard three- or four-bedroom, new-format, all-electric house, as this government wants, even in my own home town of Colac, which is by no means a small country town, many of the new house blocks that have been released in my community today on the outskirts of town would not be able to power that single home if it was all-electric. There are simply not enough kilowatts going into those homes to provide them with all-electric heating and all-electric cooking. There are simply some households that need the choice. They need the options; they need to be able to choose what is best for them.

This government's continual approach through legislation to start mandating energy choices and the ways that people heat their hot water and keep their houses warm, without full knowledge of the frail network and system that we have here in Victoria, just points to how out of touch this government now is and how city-centric it is. I take the example of an existing home in my electorate where the gas hot water has blown up, and we are going to have a situation where this government can penalise a plumber \$48,000 for hooking up a similar hot-water system just to get that customer going again and make sure that family has got hot water, when there clearly would not be an electrical option. To me it makes no sense at all, and to think that we are spending time in this Parliament legislating for that is a real concern.

With the minute or so I have left, I return to ESV and their responsibility, which I touched on earlier. The other disappointing part about this legislation is it does not in fact impose more openness and transparency on ESV; it actually allows them to get away with less. I think it is moving from publishing plans once a year to publishing plans every three years. When we have a known crisis in the wooden pole electrical transmission system in Victoria, which is solely their responsibility, they need to be reporting not only to the government but to the community on a far more regular basis. We also know that this dilutes responsibility around the management of vegetation around powerlines and power and transmission easements. This is another crucial factor in regional Victoria. Far too often fires and adverse events occur because of the mismanagement of that, and that is something on which at all times maximum vigilance needs to be maintained.

All in all, the opposition will be presenting clear amendments to this bill – there will be quite a few – to be dealt with through the course of the bill, but as it stands now, this is yet another bill put forward by this government that is more focused on its very political objectives and not on the best interests and safety of all Victorians, both country and city, for the long-term betterment and growth of the state.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (15:06): I rise today in support of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. I have listened to the debate in this place, particularly from those on the other side, and I am fairly stunned that they can stand to object to a bill that is really about safety both for people working in the energy sector and for families and domestic services. It was extraordinary to hear the member for Polwarth suggest that this bill is ideologically driven. In his contribution I could hear nothing but the other side's perverse ideology, which is to hold on to those old forms of energy and to reject renewable energy at every turn, which is a crying shame for all of us, for our planet and for our children.

I am incredibly proud of what this government has done to work towards a renewable future for Victoria. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission, who has worked really tirelessly to try and make sure that Victoria has a hopeful future, a future which is supplied with renewable energy so that we can continue to have the wonderful life that we have had. To continue to block this bill seems to me to be fairly ideological and really rooted in the opposition's obsession with coal or, God forbid, nuclear energy.

I too live in the south-west of the state, in the regions. It was interesting that the member for Polwarth suggested that we are a city-centric government when only weeks ago the member for Brighton liked to say that out-of-towners were in charge.

**A member** interjected.

**Michaela SETTLE**: Yes, it is pretty extraordinary. I am very proud to be the convener of the regional caucus for this side of the house, and we are a big caucus. There are lots of regional people out there, lots of hardworking Labor members in regional areas, and we are very proud that our leaders are out-of-towners – we are very, very proud. It is odd that the member for Polwarth likes to call us city-centric, but I suppose that is just indicative of the relentless splits in those on the other side. Half of them think we are city-centric and half of them think we are too regional. It is just more and more of the splits.

**Emma Kealy**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a very limited bill. It is about energy and land legislation. It is not a time to attack the opposition on totally unrelated matters. I ask you to bring the member back to the bill.

**Nick Staikos**: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been listening to members opposite on this bill and it has been a fairly wideranging debate, so I would ask you to rule the member's point of order out of order.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe)**: I do ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Michaela SETTLE**: I would like to point out that I was responding to a comment made by the member for Polwarth about this government being city-centric in his debate not 2 minutes ago.

**Emma Kealy**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker – and it is wonderful to see you in the chair; I have not had you in the chair since you have been in that position, and you are doing an excellent job – the member is defying your ruling to return to debating the bill in front of us, and I ask you to redirect her to come back to the bill or otherwise sit her down.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe)**: Member for Eureka, can I please ask you not to reflect on prior reflections in the debate.

**Michaela SETTLE:** Can I ask you, am I able to respond to other debaters in this place, like the member for Polwarth?

**Emma Kealy:** You are disrespecting the Chair.

**Michaela SETTLE:** No, I am asking for clarity. Can I respond to the member for Polwarth's contribution?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe):** If you are responding in a respectful manner. I ask you to come back to the bill.

**Michaela SETTLE:** Absolutely. Then I would like to respond to the member for Polwarth's comment that this government is city-centric, which he made just a moment ago in his contribution to this debate, and I would like to point out in my contribution to this debate –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is the third time that the member has defied your ruling. I ask you either to direct her to return to the bill or to sit her down, because she is not applying your rulings, which is inappropriate and disrespectful. You should be respected; anybody in that chair should be respected.

**Nick Staikos:** Acting Speaker, the member is entitled to respond to commentary made by the previous speaker on this bill. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe):** I ask the member to come back to the bill and not reflect on the former member that was on their feet in a disrespectful manner.

**Michaela SETTLE:** May I seek some guidance from the Speaker? I do not believe I was speaking disrespectfully at all; I was responding to a comment made. Could I have some guidance on this, because I do not believe it is a point of order.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe):** Okay. Could you please just continue with your contribution.

**Michaela SETTLE:** Thank you. I am really delighted to speak on this bill, because this bill is all about ensuring safety for working people. On this side of the house our very core is to protect working people, and this bill is about making sure that as we transition to this incredibly important renewable future ahead of us people are safe within that.

I have a particular interest in this bill. I am delighted that my electorate is home to several wind farms and several proposed wind farms. I am delighted that my electorate will really contribute to this wonderful new renewable future that we have ahead of us, but of course what is important to me is the safety of people in my community. We have had some incidents on wind farms locally, and that just highlights how incredibly important this bill is. What is extraordinary is that the bill that we put through in 2023 was able to be enacted to come in support of the people involved in those incidents. Those on the other side seem to wish to deny the very success of the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023, which really did introduce strong penalties for noncompliance, and I am delighted that those new penalties were brought to bear as incidents have occurred.

This bill will increase the oversight and enforcement powers of Energy Safe Victoria, and I think what is really important is that, in reducing the regulatory red tape, what it really means is that they can focus on the thing that is most important, which is of course getting out there and ensuring that our operators are taking a proactive approach to safety. We are absolutely unapologetic on this side of the house about putting the safety of Victorians first. Worker and community safety is non-negotiable. We recognise that Victoria's energy landscape is evolving rapidly, and this bill ensures that our regulatory framework can keep pace as we develop into this bold new future. We committed over \$7 million in the 2023 budget to ensure that Energy Safe Victoria has the tools it needs to adapt and enforce the highest safety standards. Victoria is leading Australia in renewable energy, and we are doing it the right way. We are creating jobs, reducing emissions and keeping our workers and

communities safe, and this bill is another step forward in that journey. It can only be said that those on the other side have an ideological problem with renewable energy. They want us to pursue costly and risky nuclear.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (15:16): You will be happy to know that – or as you well know – the Nationals' debates on these bills come from a place of community and reflect what the community are thinking on particular topics. How do you get community members, landholders and food producers to go from zero to 100 in 0.98 seconds? You mention energy and land in one sentence, because this is such a contentious issue. With this bill, as with a lot of bills that come through this place, in some sort of strategy, I am guessing, or it might be an oversight – who knows, really – there are certain parts of the bill that we might agree with, but we have to oppose things like this Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, because there are large parts of it that are just not practical on the ground, particularly for communities out in the regions. So it leaves us no choice. But of course then we get demonised for standing up for our communities, which is another reason that the Nationals in particular will keep standing up, particularly on that energy and land topic that is so important, literally from the top of the state to the bottom of the state. The member for Lowan spoke about it earlier, and I will get to that.

The obvious kinds of things that we are not okay with, and it has been illustrated by members on this side, include the penalties. Let us focus on the penalties. No-one disagrees with safe workplaces – no-one. What we do disagree with is how hard the Labor government is making it to operate a business, much less be a tradie or a food producer in this state. The added powers and the increased penalties applied to tradies – like the member for Polwarth said – mean that if a gas hot water system needs to be replaced and you can get a plumber, let us say, to fix that gas hot water service, that is now a crime. That just makes it impossible and impractical. Tradies are hard enough to find as it is, much less making their job – something that they were trained to do during apprenticeships and training, and they have done their entire career – now a crime. And then we are told this is not ideological but practical and a road to renewable energy. No. It is a ridiculous result of this government's ridiculous ban on gas and their failure to explore for gas. Parts of this bill are just completely devoid of common sense. Surprised? Are you not? I would not have thought so.

Even that 20-point difference, going from 40 to 60, given that those points are worth around about \$200 each – I think they are about \$198 – makes it bad enough. But then if that tradie gets suspended – it is an immediate suspension – the appeal to have the suspension lifted has to go through VCAT. I do not know whether you have had or heard of any cases going through VCAT recently. At a glacial pace do they move. You have got tradies who are finding it so tough to do business in this state. There are not enough of them. We have got families who may need plumbers, gas fitters, electricians. They are already hard enough to find, and we are literally suspending them while we wait for the VCAT process. Again, have a little bit of common sense and practicality here, please, I beg of you. We have been begging this government for some common sense for a long time, and it certainly has not come in this bill.

Then there is the confusion over the overlapping powers of WorkSafe and Energy Safe. I would like to be a fly on the wall when that happens and they turn up at the same site, because if someone is working with something to do with energy, as illustrated in this bill – as bound by this bill – then that is automatically a worksite, is it not? I would have thought every site is a worksite. So then it is also governed by WorkSafe, would it not be? I would have thought so. Who then has jurisdiction? Is it WorkSafe, is it Energy Safe? No-one knows, and we will just wait for them to turn up and they can sort it out themselves. Is that the solution here? Again, that is no solution. If you have someone that has had their licence suspended while that bungle is going on and you have got VCAT on top of that, again it makes no sense.

Then there is the removal of the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee, the dissolution of these committees. It should come as no surprise that these committees are being abolished, silencing the voice of actual stakeholders, people on the ground and

experts in their field. If you were part of an advisory committee to many of the water boards around the state, you would know that those advisory committees were dissolved a little while ago. It leaves the local boards on the ground to wear it from people that were on those advisory committees. I know in our part of the world, where we have a huge population of irrigators who sit on those advisory committees to offer advice to the board, the boards are the ones that wear it, and their anger is directed in the wrong spot. Again, it makes no sense, but it comes as no surprise.

My biggest issue with this bill is the greater powers to enter land without landholders' consent and without the presence of the owner but requiring a warrant from a magistrate. I did ask some questions during the bill briefing. It does not matter what you are talking about, if you mention energy and land to constituents, community members, landholders and people in my electorate, they go from zero to a hundred very, very quickly. Then they hear that there are greater powers to enter land without landholders' consent after Transmission Company Victoria were awarded their transmission licence on Monday. People in the Southern Mallee are now very, very nervous that their land is going to be compulsorily acquired. This is a problem. There are perceptions around that they are anti renewables or they are being NIMBYs – not in my backyard. No, they are worried about the generational farms that have been farmed since the land was cleared. They are worried about not having any power to appeal if someone comes knocking on the door or comes to the farm gate to say, 'Hey, we're going to put a tower on your farm,' which then has all the flow-on effects of not being able to work underneath it and all of these things that are also not clear at the moment. You can understand why landholders would be triggered by this bill, and I do not blame them.

Last Sunday I was in Wycheproof to meet with a large section of the community at the Terminus Hotel. Honestly, I have never seen anything like it. For the first time you have these small communities, who are usually so tight-knit, at war with one another. They are at war with their neighbours. They are at war with their brothers, sisters, mums and dads because one has an opinion about powerlines, wind turbines or a mineral sands mine and the other has a different opinion.

There is no clarity, there is no transparency. With all the overheads that go into producing food at the moment and then the added pressure of the government coming in to just acquire your land under the guise of a different brand like TCV or Energy Safe or whatever it might be, it is absolutely appalling that this government treats our food producers, landholders and grassroots community members in my electorate like they do not matter when they are the ones that are putting food on your plate every single day. Essentially that is what it comes down to: if this government continues this reckless rollout of renewables, chewing up Victoria's agricultural land, it then becomes a question of food security. You cannot eat wind. You can eat the food that we grow, and it is getting more and more diabolical out there every single day.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (15:26): I rise today to contribute on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission and her team for all the great work that they have done on this bill. It is a remarkable piece of legislation that reinforces that we are at the leading edge of this innovative technology and absolutely on the right track for not only Victoria and the economy but also our environment and of course our future. It is genuinely an honour to assist in and be part of a government that is bringing this to reality.

We spend a lot of time on this side talking about energy, energy transition and the future of Victoria, because ensuring safety in the delivery of essential services like energy is a top priority for this government. It goes beyond protecting lives and property. Strong energy safety measures are crucial for building public trust and of course acceptance as we transition to renewable energy. That is one of the reasons why this bill is so important. It introduces reforms that will enhance long-term safety for Victorians and strengthen consumer confidence in Energy Safe Victoria, the state's energy safety regulator.

The bill amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 to modernise Victoria's energy safety framework. It also makes changes to the Land Act 1958 to provide greater investment certainty for complex projects and unreserved Crown land. The bill ensures that the framework keeps pace with these changes to manage emerging risk effectively, because Victoria's current energy safety laws were designed for a centralised fossil fuel network, leaving some regulatory gaps that must be addressed.

Victoria's energy landscape is rapidly evolving, and previous contributions have alluded to that. I know the member for Eureka was talking about the amount of wind farms that are in her electorate, and I see that because I do drive in from that area each week and there are wind farms popping up everywhere in the Western District. Of course the rise of small-scale distributed energy sources such as rooftop solar, home batteries and electric vehicles has transformed how energy is generated and used, and that is something that I know Meltonians have absolutely welcomed into their neighbourhoods. Something that I am really impressed by and very proud of is that over 8280 households across Melton have received either solar home rebates or interest-free loans, which makes it one of the highest in the metropolitan area in regard to the take-up of these products. It saves something like \$1 billion for families, this installation of solar panels, hot-water systems and batteries, and add to that the money they are saving each and every day on their bills, which is amazing for people in our electorate. I commend them for doing that and for taking up those particular products.

I hope everyone has seen the news lately – it was spoken about in question time – that we had Liam Neeson out at Bacchus Marsh airport last week doing some filming of his new movie, *The Mongoose*.

**A member** interjected.

**Steve McGHIE:** Yes, I will rub it in a little bit. I will not say he came out there just to meet up with me, the member for Eureka and the Minister for Creative Industries, but he did. We all popped out there. And let me tell you about energy: there was a lot of energy out there at that aerodrome. The reason why they filmed out at the Bacchus Marsh Aerodrome is because they said the background scene of the mountains was similar to Afghanistan and that was the scene that they wanted to set. So to the Bacchus Marshans: you know your place is not Afghanistan, but that is why they filmed it out there, apparently, so it was fantastic. Of course, it is the third film that Liam has done in Victoria, and he has got more planned. He is coming back next year, and he was very appreciative of what is going on in Victoria in regard to the film industry. This is adding something like \$19 million back into the Victorian economy, but the most important thing out there is the \$2 million that has been injected into the local economy out at Bacchus Marsh, and that allows the people of Bacchus Marsh and Melton – the ones that are on the set, the ones that are working there – to be able to purchase these solar panels, batteries, heat pumps and things like that. So to Liam Neeson, his crew and the directors: thank you for choosing Bacchus Marsh and that area, and the injection of funds into the local community in regard to that film.

I have got to extend my appreciation to VicScreen, in particular Caroline Pitcher, for their great work. To everyone that is working on that movie, I thank them because I think it has created in excess of 600 jobs, Victorian jobs. Again, that is money that is going into Victoria's pockets to be able to engage with renewable energy. I will go back to the figure that I quoted before, and that was over 8000 Meltonians that have taken up solar panels, heat pumps and interest-free loans, which is fantastic. It was probably unexpected that that is what would happen. But yes, it is great that that has happened out that way.

The bill introduces a suite of substantial amendments that improve Energy Safe's ability. It addresses the safety risk, enforces compliance and responds effectively to emerging challenges, and includes new powers of entry with a warrant. Energy Safe officers will have enhanced entry powers where there is a risk to health and safety and property where that does not yet constitute an emergency. It is delivering faster action on safety risks. The requirement for written consent before exercising certain powers will be lifted, and I think that is important.

I want to talk about the strengthening of bushfire mitigation, and that is what this bill does. I want to go to some information around – and I know it has been raised previously when we have had debates around the previous energy bill in 2023 – bushfire mitigation. It was suggested in the past that the CFA will not respond to fires and things like that around these transmission towers and transmission lines. But in the information that has come to me, we know that the CFA volunteers have enormous experience, in particular with the procedures that they put in place. They safely fight fires around this type of infrastructure. They clearly assess the risk before entering any site – it does not matter whether it is transmission towers, transmission lines or any other fire that they respond to. Last year we strengthened Energy Safe Victoria's powers to ensure operators of wind farms comply with strict energy safety laws and regulations, and this includes submitting detailed safety management plans to the regulator for approval.

Owners and operators of wind farms have a general duty under the Electricity Safety Act to ensure the wind farm is designed, constructed, operated, maintained and decommissioned safely. The CFA are also part of a government-appointed technical reference group ensuring that bushfire risk is considered and assessed when deciding the location and routes of the proposed transmission and renewable energy projects. What I am saying is that they are involved all the way through in regard to the planning, design and the routes that they may have to travel if they have to respond to a fire around the transmission towers or transmission lines, and they have vast experience. The CFA also developed the design guidelines and model requirements for renewable energy facilities back in 2022, and that provides standard consultation in relation to bushfire risk and safety measures of renewable energy facilities, including wind farms. The guidelines have received not only national but international recognition, and most other Australian fire services have adopted those guidelines, which is fantastic.

I know I have only got a short bit of time, but the other thing I wanted to refer to was a visit by Melton Specialist School year 10 students last year to the big battery out at Plumpton. Let me tell you, I think there were about 30 students that came out, and I have got to extend my thanks to all the workers that were onsite for taking the students around the big battery site – 444 batteries is my understanding. The big battery will be operational as of this year. The students were so excited to see it, and it just explained to them all about renewable energies. They took up an interest. This is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:36): I am pleased today to rise on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. I will reference the member for Melton just to let him know that Liam Neeson actually came to my electorate first in Walhalla, and if it was not for Walhalla he would not have come back to Victoria. It is that good down there. Unfortunately our potholes did not get fixed while he was here. Anyway, let us get back to the bill. There has been a fair bit of debate on this today, and it does include a range of things being amended: the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005, the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005, the Land Act 1958, the Environment Protection Act 2017 and other consequential acts.

The debate has been fairly broad ranging today, and there are certain aspects of this bill that concern me greatly. The member for Mildura touched on it earlier. Energy Safe Victoria will now have the power to prosecute people. I find this a bit of an overreach when we already have a body, which is called WorkSafe Victoria, that prosecutes workplace safety. I do not think Energy Safe Victoria should be given this power. I think it should stay firmly with WorkSafe. That is their job. No matter where you are in this state, no matter what action you take, no matter what you are doing, if you are working and an accident occurs, that is WorkSafe's responsibility. I do think this is overreach, and I do not think Energy Safe Victoria should have this power. I think it very much and squarely should stay with WorkSafe.

When we are talking about this and we are talking about gas – and there has been a very big debate today on gas, and I will reference the member for Bulleen and some of his contribution today – we know that gas in this state is absolutely imperative to the energy supply of the state. It is not debatable. There is an expert that the member for Bulleen referenced earlier, Jane Norman.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Cooper Energy – thank you, member for Hawthorn. Twenty-five years of experience Jane Norman has, and basically she is saying that gas has at least 25 years supply in this state. Rightly so, I will listen to an expert in the industry. I am not going to listen to the minister responsible when she says, ‘I will take geology over ideology.’ We have got an expert here that says we have 25 years supply. I note the Gippsland Basin, for example, has 1.6 trillion cubic feet of gas.

**Jade Benham:** How many?

**Wayne FARNHAM:** 1.6 trillion – that is not billion, it is trillion – cubic feet of gas. That does not even include the Otway Basin. I am just talking about the Gippsland Basin. For the government to sit there and say to us that Victoria is out of gas is absolute rubbish. It is not true. Victoria has plenty of gas, and they need to get gas back in the system. But what they are doing now – and part of this bill reinforces this – is everything they possibly can in their power to stop gas occurring in this state.

The fines in this bill – the fines that have increased on trades from 40 penalty points to 240 penalty points – are absolutely criminal. To put that into perspective, that was a fine that used to be \$880 but is now \$48,000 for a tradie doing their job – 48 grand. That is absolutely ridiculous. When we talk about how we have got plumbers out there – they are gas-fitting plumbers – they are out there fixing the problems with people’s homes, and we have a lot of old homes in this state, and most of the homes built are on gas. If I look at the seats of Bass and Pakenham, for example, especially these two seats I take in, most of those homes will be on gas.

It is interesting we have got the Minister for Energy and Resources and the Premier sort of at odds about gas. The energy minister is saying, ‘No gas,’ and the Premier is saying, ‘No, there’s nothing wrong with gas; it’s okay – if your gas hotplate dies, you can replace it with another gas hotplate.’ But a bill got passed in this Parliament just last year that banned plumbers from doing those works, and this bill reinforces it just with a big, massive fine. Now, that is not fair. So fancy these older people or even younger people that have bought a house that is a bit old – they have saved and scrimped and done everything else – in these seats of Pakenham and Bass, and all of a sudden they cannot get their gas fixed.

If you are a retiree, a self-funded retiree, and you are just getting by – we know cost of living is tight – and your gas central heating unit dies, can you afford \$15,000 to put split systems in every room in your house because you can no longer have a gas central heating unit? No, you cannot. Is there enough supply in the street to power that? No, there is not. The reason there isn’t is because most streets in this state only have two-phase supply; they do not have three-phase supply. They do not have three-phase supply, and that is the problem with the way this government has gone about energy and their energy policy – they have not done the homework, because if they had done the homework they would realise that most streets in this state only have two-phase supply.

I have said it before in this chamber. I had a friend in Kew. He lives in his street, he bought an electric vehicle – well, he is not a friend anymore, because he bought an EV – and he got an EV point put in his house, and the guys there fitting the EV point said, ‘Only four more can be done in this street because there’s not enough supply coming into the street.’ So how are we going to de-gas the state when we do not have the supply? It is a very good question, and it is a question this government has not answered to this point in time; they have not answered this question, and they just keep coming out and making gas the enemy and saying gas is bad. I mean, this is the point where this state is at: last year a bill went through this house to approve offshore gas storage. Why do we need offshore gas storage? Because we have gone from being an exporter of energy to an importer of energy, and if people wonder why their energy bills are not coming down it is because we are now importing energy.

Yes, there is a space in this state for solar, and for those who can afford it that is great for them, but not everyone can afford it; it is as simple as that, and there are so many homes and so many residences in this state that are fuelled by gas. When we have got experts like Jane Norman from Cooper Energy,

who is an absolute expert in her field, saying we have enough supply, why has the government in the last 10 years only issued one licence – one exploration licence in 10 years? The government was warned in 2014 that they had to do exploration for gas, but they ignored that warning – ignored it. So we have got experts saying we should do exploration, and we have got the energy minister saying gas is bad. It is not – it burns clean. If you want to transition into the renewable space, you need to have gas as part of this energy solution; it is really that simple. You cannot deny it, and the more you deny it the more pressure will come on our energy system.

The government should really get its head out of the sand and start looking for new gas in this state. We went to the 2022 election with a policy on gas. We went to the 2022 election with a policy to do exploration for gas but secure it for domestic supply. That is an important point: we should not be importing gas into this state. It was a good policy that we went for, and if the government was half-smart, maybe they would have picked it up. If they had picked it up a lot longer ago than 2022, this state would not be in the situation we are in today. We are in an energy crisis, and the government cannot deny it. We have got a Premier and an energy minister at odds about it. They need to sort this out very quickly because the cost of energy in this state is out of control. Everyone can bang on about the cost of living all they want, but if you are not going to fix energy and you are not going to bring energy prices down, then you are in trouble. I have got one word of advice for the government: drill, baby, drill.

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (15:46): I rise to speak in support of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, which is part of our ongoing efforts to forge a safe, reliable energy network, one that is fit for purpose and adaptive to our modern world. We are well into an era of transformative change in the way we power our homes, businesses and industries. Our Labor government has been at the forefront of this work, meeting every single emissions reduction and renewable energy target we have set and driving crucial investment into Victoria's energy, resources and infrastructure sectors. The groundbreaking large-scale projects that we are progressing include massive battery, wind and solar projects but also at a household and community level things like rooftop solar, energy-efficient appliance upgrades and neighbourhood batteries. These will not only empower Victorians for decades to come but will safeguard our state and leave future generations a climate resistant energy network.

The stakes are high here. The transition to clean energy represents one of the most profound opportunities of our time but also demands that we build in the right regulations, the right governance, to protect our communities, anticipate risks and futureproof the system. The measures contained in these legislation amendments reflect that ongoing work to carefully calibrate the system and the structures which sit behind it to maintain safety, reliability and affordability.

There has been a lot of argy-bargy in the chamber about the fundamental direction Victoria should be headed in when it comes energy supply. I am not going to delve into that space because frankly the people I represent in Northcote have stood at the forefront of the energy transition for a very, very long time and we do not need to re prosecute debates about the value of renewable energy, protecting the environment and ending coal. My community understands that we must transition and that this transition must be not only safe and reliable but also just. That means bringing communities with us and delivering tangible support to households along the journey.

I am pleased to say that over the last six years as the member for Northcote I have worked hand in hand with local organisations, leaders and everyday residents to make tangible advancements in our collective efforts for a safer climate. That includes pushing for the Solar for Apartments initiative, for gas-free social housing, for stronger protection for our precious waterways, for a neighbourhood battery in Alphington and for more tree canopy down High Street in Northcote and Thornbury. Northcote is living proof that progressive, tangible and just energy policy is not only possible but popular and transformative. We recognise that every step towards cleaner energy is also a step towards healthier, more inclusive communities. We see the evidence in the real savings on power bills for people who were previously locked out of renewables schemes. We see it in improved air quality, in

the pride people take in being part of our climate solution and in the knowledge that we are leaving a livable, sustainable city for our children.

One of the particularly splendid aspects of the inner north in which I live is its tree canopy. Many of our streets are lined with mature gums, plane trees, oak and wilga trees. These trees not only add to the charm and character of our streetscapes but serve a crucial purpose in cooling down our urban suburbs, which would otherwise suffer from very real impacts around the heat island effect. Protecting and expanding this urban tree canopy has been one of my priorities locally and something I have raised on numerous occasions in Parliament, with Yarra and Darebin councils, with government and indeed directly with Energy Safe Victoria (ESV). All you have to do is walk down an urban street on a 35-degree day and take a moment to stand in the sun and then under a tree, and you will understand the profound difference that it makes to have that natural shade. And it is not just shade; trees are a filter for air pollution, they support mental wellbeing and they make our streets more accessible for pedestrians. They are an integral part of our city's livability, particularly as we densify, yet all too often I have seen beautiful mature trees being lopped down because of the tension that arises from the demands of our energy infrastructure, particularly powerline clearance rules, and the imperative to protect our canopy. This happened in Gladstone Avenue in Northcote, where, regrettably and against our advice and advocacy, the then Greens-dominated Darebin council opted to remove a number of gorgeous mature gums, and residents were absolutely devastated. It is why I have been calling for much more nuance to be applied to the current regulations for electrical line clearances and for regional and metro areas to be considered differently in terms of their risk profiles and the serious impact of removing canopy from inner-urban suburbs. Blunt and indiscriminate tree removals cannot be the default.

Councils have a huge role to play here too. Councils are responsible under the regulations for keeping trees clear of electrical lines on the public land that they manage, which is most local streets. Ideally, councils should be pruning trees in advance to accommodate for the safety requirements. This would prevent vegetation growing too close in the first place. Arborists are very proficient at doing this as the trees grow – and trees grow slowly, as we know – but for existing mature trees this can be difficult. This is why I have been exploring with ESV what other options are available to councils when they are faced with a situation in which powerlines are too close to the trees and they pose that risk of fire, electrocution or outages. There are a range of measures already available to councils. These include applying conductor covers, installing aerial bundled cable, realignment or putting the lines underground. Importantly, there are also a range of exceptions and exemptions which councils can apply to allow them to deviate from the minimum clearance space required. Yet from what we know, councils in the main simply do not make use of these provisions, meaning trees get cut down unnecessarily. Suffice it to say that I think more work does need to be done, particularly in the lead-up to renewing the electric line clearance regulations, to enable more avenues to protect our urban tree canopy.

This legislation makes important changes to ensure we maintain a proactive approach to energy safety and that we continue with our ambitious renewable energy and climate targets. It does alter the governance structures and process around clearance regulations. I note that some oppose have raised concerns about consultation, yet it is not normal practice for regulators – in this case ESV – to also have the function of creating policy, which is why the responsibility for making regulations was shifted to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action back in 2021. DEECA will consult publicly on the remake of the regulations, and I think that is a good thing because it means people in my own community – locals and advocates – can have their say on the regulations and the impact that they are having in our suburbs. I know that when the opportunity arises – and it will – I will certainly be having those conversations with both Darebin and Yarra councils as well as people in my own community about the importance of getting those regulations right.

Today I have focused mostly on a particular part of the legislation around energy safety regulations and clearances, but I do note there are a range of amendments which will help us to keep up with new

energy safety risks that are being introduced by changes in industrial and residential technology, business models and consumer behaviour. This includes introducing a new entry power for Energy Safe officers to enter premises with a magistrate-issued warrant so they can investigate risks to public safety as well as expanding their powers to stop unsafe work and suspend an electrical contractor's registration or an electrical workers licence where it is in the public interest.

The bill also clarifies that the Minister for Environment can sign a contract to lease unreserved Crown land on agreed terms, a change that reduces barriers to large-scale energy resources and infrastructure investment in Victoria. That is a really important thing to do. It is about delivering on our Labor government's vision for an energy system that is modern, environmentally responsible and socially inclusive. Let us not forget that our government is responsible for the revival of the SEC to put power back in the hands of Victorians. We are responsible for the Solar Homes and the Victorian energy upgrades schemes, enormous programs delivering real-world, tangible energy savings for families across our communities.

In Northcote we are working with Village Power to establish a neighbourhood battery, an amazing initiative that is part of our work to decentralise the energy network. For my community in the inner north, pieces of legislation like this, which deliver pragmatic, practical steps to fortify our renewable energy sector and create a regulatory environment that protects consumers and safeguards our environment – that kind of work – really make a difference. It is about securing a quality of life that is not just for this generation but for the next generation and the one after that. We need a reliable, affordable and clean energy network, one that is sensitive to the needs of both regional and metro areas and the particular pressures that we face. It needs to be sustainable, and it needs to have equity at its core. I commend this bill to the house.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (15:56): I rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. What strikes me about this bill is the paradox in it. On the one hand the government is diminishing the level of scrutiny it ought to face by the abolition of very important committees that are there to provide the government with advice but at the same time enhancing and strengthening many of the penalties, it seems without any real explanation for why, on many of the workforces that we will need to deliver the transition. Perhaps what sits at the background, though, of this bill is the absence of the government's vision for how it will secure energy for our state and how it will assure households and businesses, not only those domestic to Victoria but nationally and globally, that we have an energy system that can support an economy and that will support Victoria's growing population, a population which is the fastest growing population in the nation.

We have heard much in the debate about gas. It is a future that looks very ominous at this point in time. The government's rhetoric about gas seems to be characterised by a split personality. On the one hand, if you look at the moratorium that it left in place until 2021 coupled with its road map on gas and then compare that with the economic growth statement last year, you can only wonder at how it can reconcile the two competing positions. Whatever its rhetoric on gas, it cannot ignore the reality that will have very profound and real-world consequences for Victorians – businesses and households alike. We know that the Gippsland Basin venture, a joint venture between ExxonMobil and Woodside, is a mature asset, but we know it has a number of years yet before its wells are depleted. We know that the Otways does provide a source of gas supply. But if you believe in a responsible transition to renewables, you have to support gas remaining in the system. With those depleting resources in the Gippsland Basin and the Otways, we know that there is gas available which can be sourced conventionally and brought to market in a conventional manner. But the government has done nothing to encourage that; in fact it has done everything to discourage that. What does that mean for Victoria? It means that when it comes to gas, which will be an essential energy source to support households and businesses and to support the transition, we will have to become increasingly dependent as an importer of gas from the rest of the country, whether it is the Gladstone, Darwin or Western Australian facilities or globally in Asia and beyond, to source gas.

We know that there are a number of import proposals underway at the moment. We have Squadron Energy with the Port Kembla proposal. We have Royal Vopak with a Port Phillip proposal and Viva Energy with its Geelong refinery proposal. The government needs to come clean and tell Victorian businesses and households whether it is going to approve that. The Viva Energy one is due for an announcement by the end of March. But what importing gas means is that not only do we pay a premium, because to buy imported gas you have to engage in liquefaction, you have to then ship it –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Matters of public importance*

**Victoria Police**

**The SPEAKER** (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Caulfield proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for the chaos and dangerous precedent created by sacking a police commissioner in the middle of a crime crisis of the government's own making after:

- (a) failing to strengthen laws requested by the police commissioner including bail laws resulting in accused offenders reoffending and further endangering the community;
- (b) failing to resolve the 18-month-old enterprise agreement with police officers; and
- (c) demanding the police commissioner cut \$1 billion from the police budget as part of a restructure despite escalating gang violence, youth crime and firebombing attacks.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (16:01): In rising and speaking about this matter of public importance (MPI), can I say there is nothing more important right now than the crime crisis that Victorians are experiencing. It does not matter where you go, right across the state everybody is talking about this crime crisis. They do not feel safe in their homes. They do not feel safe in their businesses. They do not feel safe on the streets. There is one commonality about this problem, and that is the 10 years of the tired Labor Allan government. There is a crime crisis that the government has failed to act on. And when we thought that it could not get worse in terms of the government's response, which is to blame other people, we saw the lowest of the low, which only happened a few days ago. That was that rather than the Minister for Police and the Premier standing up and telling Victorians what they were going to do to fix the crime crisis, they sacked the Chief Commissioner of Police. That is what they did. They blamed the police commissioner and threw the police commissioner under a bus.

If you look at what happened in the 10 days that unfolded, which really showed the chaotic mess that the Allan Labor government are in, it speaks for itself. What we had was a police commissioner that was about to have his contract reviewed and rolled over for another five years. We had the police minister asked about what the government was going to do about that, and his response was, 'We're just going to roll this over. We're going to roll it over for another five years because we have confidence in the police commissioner.' Well, it did not take months or weeks, it literally took days for the police minister to change his mind. Then all of a sudden we heard on Friday evening that the government were not going to renew his contract. Five days earlier, 'Five more years,' five days later, 'Off you go,' he is gone – back him, sack him. Well, what happens now? It is back, sack and, thirdly, blame, because this government blame everybody else except themselves. That is what they do. They blame everybody else except themselves, and we have seen that unfold.

This is the crux of this: other than your own office and your ministerial staff, you would think, as the police minister, 'I've got a lot of people to manage, and I've got a lot of contracts to renew.' And we have all had situations where we may not have liked somebody, and we may have had to let them go. Well, this police minister has one person to employ – not all the deputy commissioners, not all the staff and not all the police that are working in the stations. He employs one person, and that is the

commissioner. ‘A week ago we liked him; a week later we don’t like him’ – this is a commissioner that has given 45 years to the job.

The Leader of the Opposition has said this is a man who bleeds blue, because his whole life has been fighting crime and fighting for community, fighting for all of us, fighting for all of our constituents. When all of a sudden this government turns their back on this bloke, do you think that the police minister would have the decency to call him and say, ‘You know what, I am really sorry, but we cannot renew your contract, even though originally I said we would’? This police minister is gutless. That is what he is. He is a gutless coward, because he did not call the chief commissioner. He did not even have the decency to text him or front him – none of that. He sent a bureaucrat over to do his dirty work. That is what he did. He sent a bureaucrat off to do his dirty work. This police minister is not up to the job. Very simply, he is not up to the job.

The government can blame the chief commissioner all it likes. As I have said before, it is like a footy club. You know, you can change the coach, but if you have got a board that does not have the money to pay the players and you do not have the wherewithal to ensure you have a strategy behind what you are doing, guess what – you have the same performance on the field. You can keep sacking your coaches because ultimately you will not look at yourself, and that is what the Allan Labor government needs to do: look in the mirror, look at themselves, look at their failure – a 15 per cent increase in crime year in, year out; every 20 minutes a carjacking year in, year out. We used to have every three days a home invasion by a young offender; now there are three a day by young offenders. And we will talk about the bail laws shortly. This government has the ability to fix the crime crisis. They have got the chequebook and they have got the ability right here in the Parliament to bring in the laws, and they have done none of them.

The police commissioner went to the government to talk about strengthening bail laws, went to the government to talk about strengthening laws against outlaw motorcycle gangs, went to the government to talk about the tobacco laws, which finally we got in place but we still have to wait another year until they are implemented. He went to the government to look at what they are going to do about the protests each and every week on the streets. Again, the government has done none of that. The government are deaf. They do not want to hear from a police commissioner. They say, ‘You know what, we will just let you do what you do, we will throw you under a bus, we will replace you, give us another six months, delay the problem.’ And you know what happens? Victorians are no safer as a result. They are worse off as a result. It is not fixing what is happening on the streets. Young people with machetes are still doing what they do. We saw a minibus today, half a dozen young offenders – off they go, into a home. We have seen places burn down, we have seen outlaw motorcycle gangs running the streets, people shot, people killed.

It is like the wild west in Victoria. That is what it is – the wild, wild west in Victoria. And you know what, the Premier does not care – she is MIA. The police minister does not care – he is MIA. It took them 2½, three days to say anything while the police commissioner was ready to go to his job on Monday. Only at 10 o’clock on Sunday night did we finally hear that he got a ‘Don’t come Monday’ letter, and it was not even a letter – he got a text from a bureaucrat, not from the disgraceful, useless police minister, or the Premier for that matter.

We have heard about no-confidence motions. The no-confidence motion that we should be having is in the police minister. He is not up to the job.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the member for Caulfield to cease banging on the table.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Thank you, Speaker, I take your ruling. Can I say I am very, very, very, very angry at the moment about the way the police commissioner has been treated by this government. It is disgraceful, the way he has been treated. I thank him for his service, but I can guarantee you that during this MPI not one of them is going to stand up here and thank the police commissioner for his service. I ask you to do that – thank him for his 45 years of service and what he has done for this state.

You may not agree with everything that he did. The Allan and Andrews Labor governments enforced the strongest lockdowns ever and said, ‘You know what, Commissioner, you lock them down, you enforce it, you do whatever it takes.’

He was a scapegoat. He has been the scapegoat all along. It was an 18-month long enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiation. You have got Victoria Police officers going to Queensland because they get a \$20,000 sign-on bonus to work up there because they are not being paid properly down here. No wonder the police are leaving. There was a promise for 1100 police to be recruited to the force – still has not happened. We have got police tired; they are exhausted, they are not paid properly. No wonder they voted on the no-confidence motion, because the Allan Labor government have not paid them, have not given them the money.

And then on bail laws – all of these bail laws, the bail failures of this state – even though the Premier had one crack and failed, the Premier came out again the other day and said we are going to do another review. Well, let us look at that review, because what did the police minister say about this review? The headline says ‘The Victorian police minister Anthony Carbines contradicts Premier Jacinta Allan on bail law review one day after announcement’ – a police minister not up to the job. Further:

Victoria’s Police Minister has blatantly contradicted Premier Jacinta Allan one day after she announced a review into the state’s bail laws, telling reporters that while he was “always focused on these matters” there are no plans for a formal review.

He goes on further:

This is stuff we’re talking about all the time. I’ve got plenty of stuff in the bottom … draw that I can pull out that will hold offenders to account.

Well, you know what, police minister, how about getting to that bottom drawer? How about doing something and getting off your backside, because that is what is not happening at the moment. This police minister is not up to the job. He is useless, absolutely useless, and the poor commissioner has worn the brunt of it. The poor commissioner has been thrown under a bus, that is what has happened.

**Dylan Wight:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the points from the member for Caulfield in his MPI are incredibly specific, and we have gone far and away further than that and really away from the MPI. I ask you to bring the member back to his MPI and be relevant.

**The SPEAKER:** The MPI has a number of points. I ask members to stick to those points.

**David SOUTHWICK:** The key part of this point is the sacking of the chief commissioner, which I am talking about. Clearly the member for Tarneit has no idea about this and the crime that is happening in Tarneit, because this government is not resourcing the police to do their job, and that is what this MPI is all about – the bail failures.

A 16-year-old boy, one of Victoria’s worst repeat home invaders, is facing charges of 32 separate aggravated burglaries in a disturbing rise of young offenders. Victoria Police regional operations deputy chief commissioner Neil Paterson said that just 20 offenders were behind 309 aggravated burglaries in the past year. We have got teens allegedly involved in shocking attacks on a 15-year-old schoolboy – that was in my electorate at Glen Eira College. He was bailed eight times before being involved in a police attack. A teen driver who allegedly killed Ashburton man William Taylor was also freed on bail again. He has gone missing within 48 hours of first release. There are so many instances. A 15-year-old boy accused of a terrifying machete attack in St Kilda was on four counts of bail for violent carjackings and assaults and weapon offences, and courts heard the wayward teen is accused of slashing his victim over the head with a machete after he refused to hand over the car keys in an armed robbery in St Kilda.

These things have been happening forever. We have offenders that have been bailed 50 times, and then you wonder why we have a crime crisis. You have got a chief commissioner going up to the police minister and saying, ‘Give us the laws,’ going to the Premier saying, ‘Give us the laws,’ going

to the police minister and saying, ‘Give us the money.’ And here is the real crux of all of this: on top of everything else, they have not paid 17,000 police for 18 months as part of the EBA – the lowest paid police force. They are heading interstate; they are leaving the job because they are stressed and they are not paid properly. They also are looking to shave the budget. And this is the killer: the police minister had informed the police commissioner to cut over a billion dollars in a restructure of the police budget – over a billion dollars from the budget in a crime crisis, a budget that is \$4 billion, and cut over a billion dollars in that budget. How can you do that in a crime crisis? How can you expect the police to get better results than they are right now in a crime crisis if you take the resources out of it? It just does not make any sense.

This is a government that is completely out of its depth. This is a government that does not care about crime, that does not care about keeping the community safe. Everywhere we go, especially in all of the Labor electorates –

*Members interjecting.*

**David SOUTHWICK:** The backbench can laugh all they like, because let me tell you their constituents are scared. They fear for their lives because this government is MIA. They have sacked the police commissioner and thrown him under a bus as a scapegoat. The person they should be sacking is the police minister. That is who should go. He is incompetent. He is a gutless coward, not being able to front the police commissioner in the first place and in a dignified way after 45 years and say, ‘Thank you for your service, and I’m sorry but your services are no longer required.’ Instead he has given the job to a bureaucrat. What a weak, gutless police minister. What a weak, gutless – and there he is – hopeless, useless police minister. That is who you are: a gutless, hopeless police minister.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Caulfield, I ask you not to cast reflections on members.

**David SOUTHWICK:** When the police minister cannot look the commissioner in the eye and say, ‘Your services are not welcome,’ the police minister is a gutless coward.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Caulfield!

**David SOUTHWICK:** That is who he is, and he should be sacked.

**The SPEAKER:** Before I call the next speaker, I remind members not to cast reflections on other members.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (16:17): Here we have the part-time DJ but full-time spinner, the member for Caulfield. We joined this place at the same time in 2010 when the previous Liberal government cut \$100 million from the police budget and funded no additional police during the four lousy years when they were in government – thrown out in record time.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Caulfield was given the respect to speak without interjections. I expect the next speaker, the Minister for Police, to have the same respect given to him.

**Anthony CARBINES:** Let us also go to a couple of the points in this matter of public importance, this fiction from the member for Caulfield – absolute fiction from the grassy knoll, from the part-time DJ and full-time spinner over there. Let us be very clear when we go to point (b), talking about the enterprise bargaining agreement. We know that there is a heads of agreement between Victoria Police and the Police Association Victoria that has been ticked off. We know on this side of the house because we support and understand unions and associations and how they work in supporting workers, so we will make sure that we respect the fact that it is police members who get the chance to vote next week in regard to that EBA. We will leave it to police members – 17,000 funded police positions in this state, the most police in the country by any jurisdiction. In part that is where we will leave it, to Victoria Police members to vote on that EBA. They can make those decisions about whether they support the

EBA that has been signed off by Victoria Police and their union. They can make that determination. That is something where we show respect to workers to have their say, and we will let them do that.

I note also ‘failing to strengthen laws’. Let us just take the member for Caulfield through ‘failing to strengthen laws’. Let us just take him through a few of the laws delivered by the Allan Labor government. Our bills include and our legislation includes our firearm prohibition orders. We have seen 700 firearm prohibition orders and searches that have been done, 800 arrests and some 2100 charges. These are game-changing legislation and laws that disrupt and dismantle organised crime in this state. Our government have made it so much easier also to serve firearm prohibition orders to those who are subject to being served with them. We can now stop them in the streets and send them to a police station, and they can be served with those FPOs. If you are in prison but you are subject to an FPO, we can serve you. There is no hiding for organised crime and those subject to firearm prohibition orders. They are not good people; they are bad people.

We also know that the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024 to prohibit gang colours passed the Parliament, introducing serious crime prevention orders and unlawful associations schemes so that we put a stop to those crooks who want to hang out together. We have given police powers – exactly the powers they asked for – to make sure that we can disrupt and dismantle organised crime. We have done more on unexplained wealth orders – the yachts, the fast cars. We can seize unexplained wealth thanks to laws by the Allan Labor government. We amended the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to streamline the administration for police to stop and search people without a warrant who they believe they need to be seizing weapons from; they are subject to those orders. We also know that we have got laws coming this year alone on banning face coverings and banning attachment devices because we have seen disruption to traffic and on our streets because those people choose to use lock-on and attachment devices. There is further work that our government is doing to make sure that we are banning prescribed terrorist organisations, their flags and their symbols – that is coming to the Parliament as well.

We have got stop-and-seize powers, and we have also got tough on further elements. If you want to be tough on crime, you have got to be tough on the causes of crime. There has been \$100 million for 940 different crime prevention programs since we have been in office and \$13 million since 2023 on our youth crime prevention program. We know that program has seen a 29 per cent reduction in offending, and not only that, a 24 per cent reduction in the severity of offending for those who participate in those programs.

I did see here something in point (c) about police budgets, and I think we want to be very clear: this situation is the result of a Victoria Police budget funded by the Allan Labor government – some \$4.5 billion in additional investment from our government since we have been in office. A billion dollars of that is for capital works – a billion dollars in capital works since we have been in office. I think we should just touch on the \$78 million for the Clyde North and Narre Warren police stations upgrades – \$78 million. How about Benalla – \$28 million for a new police station. I will be up there with the Treasurer in maybe about a month, and it also includes the incident police operations set up to service the north-eastern community. The Point Cook police station – we were up there: \$25 million for the new Point Cook police station for the growing community of Point Cook. South Melbourne has \$52 million, and the member for Albert Park is well across that project. That one also has had an announcement of builders, and the workers will be out there onsite very soon. Tasers – \$214 million in capital. That also includes the taser rollout program to make sure that we can keep those safe who keep us safe.

When we are talking about some of the new laws that we have brought in, I really want to also touch on the vehicle immobilisation devices, or stop sticks. Not only are these really important in tracking down offenders, but they also keep police safe. When police pull people over in the middle of the night or during the day, they deploy stop sticks to make sure they are not getting rammed and that they are not being put at risk. These are critical changes to the law, and I want to note the work of the member for Williamstown, the minister at the table, who has also supported that work through her transport

and road safety initiatives. Not only have we been doing that but we are funding \$4.5 billion in additional funding for Victoria Police to deploy some of the 3600 additional funded police – the largest police service in the country. Clearly that allows you to deploy those police to a range of operations that support the community and support the hard work of police, who provide of course a 24/7 emergency response to all Victorians.

So what are some of those operations that are deployed by Victoria Police because they have the resources and tools to do the job thanks to the record funding from the Allan Labor government? It must be Operation Alliance, the crackdown on youth gangs that has seen some 467 arrests, 200 gang members remanded and 4800 charges laid – that is a pretty significant number. Operation Trinity – aggravated burglary, car theft: 900 arrests for aggravated burglary and theft of motor car alone and 329 arrests for motor vehicle theft. Operation Park, on antisemitism-motivated crime – the member for Caulfield and I worked on some of these matters together. We have made sure that he has been briefed on these matters, more than perhaps has been possible in the past, to try and work together across the Parliament to ensure that we do not make these issues political but that they serve the interest of the community. In Operation Park there have been 544 separate protests, demonstrations and rallies attended by Victoria Police and 17,300-plus shifts of dedicated resources to protests and demonstrations, particularly targeting antisemitism-motivated crime. Be very clear: 70 arrests and 273 investigations, 162 of those related to antisemitism, 20 with regard to Islamophobia, 81 as yet undetermined. That work continues. Taskforce Lunar, tobacco – 109 arrests, 82 stores targeted and 90 search warrants executed. We have seized some 118,000 e-cigarettes, over 4 million cigarettes, 1.7 tonnes of loose-leaf tobacco, 2 kilograms of cannabis and \$100,000 in proceeds of crime. Taskforce VIPER is also about disrupting and dismantling organised crime. We have seen some 41 warrants executed and 120 charges. You cannot do this work unless you provide record funding and resources to Victoria Police. You cannot crack down on organised crime, disrupt it and dismantle it unless you are investing some \$4.5 billion in Victoria Police and unless you are funding 3600 additional police to ensure we retain the largest police service in the country.

What they need is to make sure that everyone in this place has their back, that everyone in this place supports them. There is an enterprise bargaining agreement before the police members right now, and we will respect their right to have their vote and their say on those matters next week. We also know that we will continue to bring legislation to this place to back Victoria Police to make sure they have the powers and the laws that they have requested and they have asked us to consider, and we have been delivering on that time and time again. Of course if you are going to have additional police, you also need to make sure that you are going to have somewhere to put them. That is why we have announced over \$1 billion of capital works investment for new police stations to put our additional police members. I am out at the academy most fortnights to see graduates, people who have made the decision to commit themselves to looking out for one another but also to look out and put their lives on the line for all Victorians. We need to make sure in all the work we do that we have their back, that we support Victoria Police in every work item that they do. Their work is critical in supporting our community. Their work is critical also in supporting one another. We need to make sure we have got their back. It is also why we have funded some \$4 million for BlueHub. That is to make sure that police who experience and see a lot of trauma get the support they need from specialist practitioners in our community.

We have also made very significant changes around the Bail Act 1977 to ensure decision-makers have to consider an individual's risk of further offending. We have brought in very significant outcomes with regard to the \$34 million for electronic monitoring and the trial that will come into place in the middle of this year. This is about making sure that our crime reduction units make sure people are complying with their bail conditions. But when they do not, we still want to be able to have that opportunity, where we can, to look up offenders, not lock them up, by making sure through electronic monitoring that they meet their obligations to the community so those that make mistakes have an opportunity to do the right thing and turn their lives around. That is why we are investing in those

940 crime prevention programs. That \$100 million is about providing opportunities to turn lives around.

Being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime comes more broadly from our record investments in education and in TAFE. It comes from our record investments in free kindergarten and other services that give people a better chance and a better start in life. Those opposite do not understand the investments that are needed in families and the cost of living so that when they are under the pump, when things are going wrong in their lives, there are opportunities to support them, opportunities to make sure that people get the care they need, opportunities to get the health care and the housing that they need and to get the education that they need. This side of the house has demonstrated that over very many years, time and time again. We will continue those investments, because we know that has a very big effect on being not only tough on crime but on the causes of crime. Investing in the community is a critical matter in relation to these aspects.

Lastly, can I be very clear that overwhelmingly police officers made a determination that could not be ignored – an unprecedented and overwhelming vote of no confidence in the chief commissioner. The government has listened, the government has heard that message and the government has respected the right of the chief commissioner at the time, Mr Patton, who has chosen to step down. We thank him for his service to the community, and we wish him well.

We also will continue to make sure that every resource that we can bring to bear to support Victoria Police we will bring to bear. We have got a track record of doing that through our \$4.5 billion investment and our investment of \$1 billion in capital projects. We will also make sure through the funding that we have for 3600 additional police that we take each and every opportunity we can to either invest in the people who keep us safe or invest in the places where they work or invest in the laws that not only keep them safe but give them the tools to disrupt and dismantle crime in our community. We have seen that. We also understand you have got to be tough on the causes of crime, but that also means investing in the programs that give people opportunities in their life to be contributors to their community, to be contributors to our citizenry and to look out for one another.

That is the work that we do on this side of the house; we have demonstrated it time and time again. Many times on this side of the house we have seen those opposite choose to water down and seek to amend and change laws that we have brought before this place, particularly around our firearm prohibition orders. We have seen that; they tried to water them down. These are game-changer laws that have had strong support and come directly here from the advice we have received from Victoria Police.

Can I say again to our members of Victoria Police: we know that you work very hard every day to keep us safe – that you put your lives on the line every day for the rest of us. We also understand that it is a 24/7 job, not only in all weather but also under all circumstances, for those who decide to give a commitment to our people, to citizens across Victoria, to put their lives on the line, to leave their families and to always, we hope, come home at the end of the day knowing that they take enormous risks every time they are out there working in our community. They take enormous risks. There is no money that we will not provide to give them the tools they need to do the job effectively and well and to make sure that they also have the places to work in that are of the highest possible standard, that they have the technology that they need and the tasers and the work that we are investing in to do their job and the laws that they can apply to get the fulfilment in their work to hold to account those in the community who seek to do us harm.

I cannot thank Victoria Police enough for the work that they do. This side of the house, and I am sure all members, support the work of Victoria Police, but you need to demonstrate that not by cutting their budget when you are in government and not by refusing to fund additional police officers when you have got the opportunity. We will stand by our record of a \$4.5 billion investment. We will stand by our record of 3600 additional funded police in this state. We stand by our record of seeing this being the largest police service in the country that has delivered over 70,000 arrests in the year to September,

a record number alone. Police are working hard, we have got their back and we thank them for their service.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:32): I am pleased to rise to support the member for Caulfield on this matter of public importance (MPI), and I fully expected of course that the government would defend its record on crime and policing in this state with the Minister for Police just a moment ago, but the minister suggested that Labor is tough on crime. If Labor is tough on crime, I will be playing centre half-forward in the Carlton premiership this year. That is how ridiculous that statement is. Fair go, actually, I am probably a fair chance compared to this minister actually demonstrating that he is tough on crime. What an absolute joke.

I love my footy analogies when it comes to politics. I never thought I would use this one, though. It was this minister that did the equivalent of the president of the footy club coming out publicly and saying the coach has the full support of the board; the board is right behind the coach. We all know what that says. That says, 'Pack your bags, coachie, because you're out.' We did not expect that would happen with the Chief Commissioner of Police, though. You might think that in a situation as serious as policing and crime, at a time when we have got a crime crisis, the police minister might come out and back the chief commissioner and that he might stay backing the chief commissioner. You would think he might, but no, the footy analogy held very true, because what was it, member for Caulfield? Five days later?

**David Southwick** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN**: Five days later: 'Sorry, Shane, you're gone.' I reckon the footy president, though, would have the courage to actually call the coach in. Mostly that is what happens. The president calls in the coach and says, 'You're out.'

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN**: In this case they just got the CEO to do it, because in this case it was the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which, as the member for Brighton indicates, suggests that perhaps it was the Premier pulling rank on this police minister, who seems to have buggered everything up.

It is unbelievable that the minister will stand there and say everything is hunky-dory. Ask the people at the service stations that are getting held up every night. Ask the people in the suburbs of Melbourne and in regional Victoria who are having offenders come into their homes at night to steal cars to go out and commit more offences – the same people over and over and over again.

We have a car stolen in Victoria now every 20 minutes. We have got teens breaking into homes three times per day. It was the police in Bendigo who told us recently that once upon a time it was almost unheard of for there to be an aggravated burglary in a regional city like Bendigo, but now there are two a day – two a day in somewhere like Bendigo, let alone somewhere like Brighton and many of these other suburbs. This is happening, and it is leading to Victorians taking matters into their own hands, and I do not mean necessarily in vigilante style but having to go out and employ their own security guards. If that is not an indictment of this government's record on crime, what is? Victorians are not only voting with their feet, they are voting with their wallets and simply saying, 'We don't trust this government to provide the police and security we need in our neighbourhoods. We're going to have to go out and do it ourselves.'

All of this is at a time when the government is at war with the police service. We have had this enterprise bargaining agreement going forever. We know that since previous public service EBAs were done, like the nurses and co, the government has just got further and further into a deep hole financially. No doubt that is one of the reasons why the government has not been able to come to a deal until just recently, and it is still not even finalised, the deal with the Police Association Victoria, because Labor cannot manage money, and it is Victorians that pay the price, and in this case it is our

police force that pays the price. As the member for Caulfield reminded me, the Treasurer had to be called in to assist because the police minister could not handle this EBA, and once again we have got what we have got.

I want to pick up the police minister's comments about the vote of no confidence from the police association in the chief commissioner and highlight that under a Labor government former chief commissioner Christine Nixon also had a vote of no confidence in her passed. The Minister for Police said a couple of times that it was unprecedented that there would be a vote of no confidence in the chief commissioner. Not true at all. It has happened multiple times over the years. I think the great Mick Miller actually had a vote of no confidence in him, if you read the papers. Former chief commissioner Nixon said of the sacking because of a vote of no confidence in the *Age* yesterday:

If that was relied on to depart a police commissioner, it doesn't feel right and doesn't set a good foundation for the future ...

That is very true. Greg Davies, former police association secretary and no particular friend of chief commissioners, described the treatment of Patton as 'small-minded and nasty'. He said:

Never in these situations is there a need for them to be carried out in such an unedifying and public manner ...

And an unedifying manner it was indeed. A bloke spends 45 years devoting his career to the police force and he does not even get the courtesy of a text or a phone call from the minister or the Premier, sacked by a public servant, and the government still has the temerity from across the chamber to say he resigned. I mean, seriously.

We are in this situation so often now that whatever the government likes to say about police numbers and resources, that is only half the issue. The big issue we are facing at the moment is not the police's inability to catch the crooks. They are doing that all the time, every day. Indeed there were more arrests last year than ever on record. But what is happening because of this government's weak bail laws is –

**A member** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is a revolving door, it is catch and release, and those criminals are repeatedly going on to commit crimes. We know from previous debates in this place what the government has done with respect to bail laws. With the assistance of the member for Malvern I remind the house of the three key things. The government removed the offence of committing an indictable offence while on bail, removed it altogether. It brought it back last year but just for some offences, not for everything.

**Michael O'Brien** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Half-baked, exactly. They removed the offence of not meeting your bail conditions. What is the point of having bail conditions if there is no consequence if you do not meet those conditions? Thirdly, they removed the responsibility of the decision-maker to consider the likelihood of an offender committing a further offence while on bail. They removed that. So what is happening? We see that young people are actually bragging on social media, 'I can just go out and do this; I'll get arrested, but I'll get released again.' For those three reasons, and the third one in particular, there is no consequence for the people that are doing this – so why not? 'I'll go out and I'll steal another car tonight'. And I have seen it. Forget Brighton, member for Brighton, forget Caulfield or Malvern where this is happening. In Leongatha I have got a 14-year-old kid – he will be nearly 15 now – who has also been charged and released 50 times – 50 times. The people of Leongatha are outraged about the number of times – it is not just this kid; it is not just one. There are more than one, as there are in many areas, who are breaking into homes, stealing cars, and they are actually doing it most of the time simply for social media notoriety and to brag about how the police cannot touch them.

I think there is nothing that sums up this MPI and this issue of the crime crisis at the moment better than the scrawl on the police cars that has the two arrows. I think it sums it up very well. It points to the police in the front seat as overworked; it points to those in the back as bailed. We see that, and that sums it up very well – because the police are doing their job. The former police chief commissioner,

whatever you might think of how he was doing his job, was trying to do his job, but the government, this Labor government, has constantly let the police and the people of Victoria down by its failure on bail in particular.

We can say again – I know the member for Malvern has said it; I have said it in this place – they were warned. We told them in 2023 when they did this. We said, ‘You are getting this wrong, and you are allowing people to get away with crimes,’ and it is continuing. That is why we have got a crime crisis in this state – because those repeat offenders are continually going out and doing this and we do not have any answers from this government. Their only answer is to take it out on the chief commissioner, to sack him on a Friday night without even having the courage to actually speak to him directly – either the minister or the Premier. It is an indictment on this government’s management of crime in this state. They stand condemned, and that is why I support this matter of public importance of the member for Caulfield.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:42): It is great to rise on this matter of public importance (MPI) and to follow some stellar work from the Minister for Police, who outlined substantially what the Victorian Labor government has done over this decade in law reform. I will add a bit of context to that, because I think there is a gaping –

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** That is all right. Have I got running commentary – DVD commentary – going on? That is okay. We will just carry on through. They might learn something as we go through. But then just in framing –

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Well, you might, Leader of the Nationals, because I remember when they talked so much about undermining chief commissioners, I thought, ‘An easy Google search might uncover something here’. And I thought, ‘Let’s go back in the drawer, back to when the Leader of the Opposition was a newly minted member of Parliament’ –

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** As the police minister said coming in, it was the member for Caulfield who joined them in the class of 2010 – and what was in an article on 28 October 2021? I am going to talk about that –

**A member** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** 2011, that is right, thank you. It was ‘Police scandal rocks Baillieu’. I thought, ‘No, no, they wouldn’t’, and I thought, ‘That wouldn’t be in relation to a chief commissioner, by any chance, would it?’ You only have to read down one sentence – and I am reading from notes here, member for Evelyn. I will read it to you:

THE Baillieu government has been rocked by the exposure of a secret plot from within the office of the Deputy Premier to oust former police commissioner Simon Overland.

Oh, my goodness! So I thought, ‘The irony, the irony,’ for the member for Caulfield to come in here about standards. It cost the parliamentary secretary their role and then ultimately saw the former member for Frankston bagpiped all the way to the crossbench. It was an extraordinary oversight on an MPI. Maybe that is why we do not see some of the other Liberals in here or leadership in here. They think ‘Jeez, the irony there – we were around at that time. That might be a little awks for us, to talk about undermining’ –

**A member** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** He might have an explanation here, having been Peter Ryan’s chief at one stage.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, firstly, can I ask why we are stopping the clock?

**The SPEAKER:** I have made a decision to stop the clock for points of order during the MPI today.

**Danny O'Brien:** Okay, righto. I am just reviewing the matter of public importance, and I cannot see anything there about 15 years ago. This is actually about what is happening currently, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the MPI.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** On the point of order, Speaker, the member for Caulfield had extensive commentary on history, and if we are to take it at present day and not refer to past behaviours, then that is an extraordinary limitation on this MPI.

**David Southwick:** On the point of order, in terms of stopping the clock, Speaker, I understand that the member for Tarneit made an extensive point of order on me and the clock ran down for maybe 40 seconds and that was not stopped.

**The SPEAKER:** On the point of order, which was a separate point of order, but on the point of order in relation to the contribution by the member for Mordialloc, I remind members again that there are some dot points in this MPI that need to be addressed in their contributions. It is okay to compare and contrast with former governments. I uphold that. In terms of stopping the clock, I apologise, member for Caulfield, if that was the case.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** I just thought it was important to set the tone and the irony in this MPI. Maybe when we come back to opposition MPIs there just might be a couple of google searches and a few words before we let loose and unload.

I want to cover off on another key point that the Minister for Police talked about that I think needs further scrutiny and understanding here, because those opposite have a narrative that they have formed in now two MPI contributions of a tough-on-crime narrative here and the suggestion that Victoria Police, one, are not and that there is not a law reform agenda that is underpinned by significant policy development. I will take them to a policy area that I am deeply passionate about and have part responsibility for now, and that is the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the prevention of family violence. On the notion that you say that you are not tough on crime and bring in that narrative, the absence of this in this MPI I think is not intentional, but I think it goes to the scale of some of the fixation on some areas that we need to talk about. To say that Victoria Police and the government have not responded to some crime elements in our community is wrong. We had a royal commission into the prevention of family violence. The member for Brighton might irk or –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, further to your earlier ruling, the comments that the member is making now are outside of the remit of the MPI itself, and I ask you to bring him back to the MPI.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** On the point of order, Speaker, the suggestion that a cut to the budget of \$1 billion, which is a contested space of that being a falsehood, and that the narrative of impact is not part of the MPI and you want to readdress the MPI I do not think is a reasonable point given that that is the direct investment question right here that the police minister went to.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Mordialloc to make sure his contribution is within the boundaries of the MPI.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The notion and some of the commentary around the approach to crime are completely out of order and a reflection on Victoria Police. We have seen significant investment in Victoria Police. I go straight to this: point (c) is completely irrational and out of bounds. It was addressed by the Premier and by the police minister in his contribution. So I counter that point (c) is baseless and goes in direct contrast to the more than \$4 billion that has been invested in Victoria Police. It is a baseless claim that has been put forward. We have seen record investment since we came to this place. Imagine where we would be if we had not invested in more than 3600 police officers. Imagine

where we would be if we did not have the largest police jurisdiction in the nation, because those opposite left us with that. It required a once-in-a-generation investment the likes of which Victoria has never seen before, so it does not stack up to have that kind of narrative and that discussion.

There has been a journey of enterprise bargaining, and we welcome that as a Labor government that respects union movements. We welcome that and the work that Victoria Police do each and every day. We see taskforce operations in my area that my local police staff service, such as Operation Trinity and Operation Alliance, and the work that they do each and every day deploying into our community to keep Victorians safe. There is concern in community around the impacts of crime, but let us just remember a couple of things here. We cannot do it at the front door of policy. We cannot just say, 'You've got to be tough on crime. You've got to grab the headline' and not deal with the underlying causes of crime.

Remember that a substantial and overwhelming majority of youth offenders in youth justice have a family violence related background or a trauma background that comes from abuse. It is not to deny accountability, but it is to understand the journey that we find people in. If we are to lessen the risks and impacts to community over time, we must drive forward as quickly as we can in the support and inclusive policies that keep people safe by addressing the causes and underlying issues of crime.

I know the member for Caulfield has a political point to make with points of order, but you cannot disassociate an MPI around this from the impacts of family violence and sexual abuse on people in the community that happen to then be serious youth offenders. It is a fact, and it cannot be denied that it is a real challenge in how we execute these policies. Because there is bail and there is remand, and then there is where they serve their sentence and where these kids end up. If they come out as teenagers or adults without that reform and the recidivism rate reduced, we have harder offenders who are of more risk to our community in years to come. There is a need to have that accountability. You cannot excuse accountability for horrific and poor behaviour that undermines the safety of Victorians. That is a fundamental point and hallmark. That is why the police minister in his passion and energy and dedication – if any of those opposite had bothered to check once how many times – has been in police station after police station, hour after hour after hour, meeting directly with them. This police minister has done more than I have ever seen in going straight there, and he is at the academy every other week welcoming the next generation of Victoria Police members. Do you know why? Because he wears his heart on his sleeve and he cares, and he knows this is serious for his community and all Victorians.

That is why we need to lift the standards in here. Some of the bite back before was just unparliamentary and really not the context of what we need this debate to be. We need nuance, we need intelligence and we need respect. Yes, we can have different political points of view. Yes, we can have that debate, like how the member for Malvern put forward points before on where the legislation might go, but not those kinds of things where we are having that bite back and not going through the sequence of where we find ourselves in the challenges that we are facing.

The minister and the Premier have acknowledged that the reforms in 2024 went a long way. There are a lot more people who are sitting now in remand or who have more extensive conditions as a result of those reforms. But if we can go further, that will be the case. That is what a smart, intuitive and engaged government does when listening to community and responding to these challenges – not chasing headline after headline and not realising that to govern you need to unpick some of the most complex social policy issues in our state, because all that would do is see the problem get worse. The tough-on-crime language in Queensland has not led to less kids being abused or being impacted by family violence and finding themselves in trauma or down the path of youth justice. It is only one element – one essential ingredient of being tough on crime like this government has been – unpicking the causes of crime and understanding that we need to do that to really respond to that and have a safer and more inclusive community. So there are all those elements.

**David Southwick** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Caulfield says, 'We'll see what the voters say.' That is what it is really about for the coalition. You said the quiet bit out loud, member for Caulfield. It has always been about the voters. It has always been about the voters and not about protection. It has always been about the voters and not about vulnerable Victorians. It has always been about the voters and not vulnerable children that have been impacted in their life by trauma. That is why this side of the house will always support Victoria Police and our law reform, and they cannot be trusted.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Members will be removed from the chamber if these types of interjections continue. Member for Caulfield, you might find that amusing, but it is not.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (16:54): I am always surprised at the level of disconnect between Labor police ministers and even their MPs and the actual police force and those working on the ground – and in fact what people on the ground are saying. I think that the matter of public importance (MPI) that was put forward today could not be more apt, because we have heard time and time again about the failures in crime and the crisis in police. That crisis in police is being driven time and time again by the policies that the government introduced, and equally by the legislation that they failed to introduce. It undermines the police, and it undermines their intent. Certainly, as we have seen more recently, they have thrown the Chief Commissioner of Police Shane Patton under a bus.

They have hung him out to dry for their failures. I think that is a very sad state for Victorians to find themselves in when you have somebody like him who is trying to do the right thing and put suggestions forward and the government are just not interested.

That reflects through not only the senior leadership of the police but the police on the beat. What do you think their morale is like at the minute? Their morale is shot. They are leaving in droves. The vacancy rate is enormous. The people on leave and sick leave and those looking to go to Queensland because they have got brighter promises up there – it is extraordinary. The morale in Victoria Police is woeful, and that is such a sad thing, because there are so many great people working in the police force who want to do the right thing but are just disenchanted by the policies, decisions and legislation put forward by this government. I speak to police in my area all of the time, and I know how deflated they feel.

Looking at what happened with the police commissioner just the other day, it shows several things. Firstly, the government does not know what the right hand and left hand are doing; they are not coordinated within the government. I think it was on Wednesday that the Minister for Police said, 'Yes, the chief commissioner's term will be just rolled over – another five years, no review; you're rolled over.' It took the press on Friday night to ask a different question, and then the next thing you know, things are changing – he does not support him. His department have said no, he is actually not going to be renewed, and we get the statement put out at about 10 pm on a Sunday night. You know if things are not going well in a government, putting something out at 10 o'clock on a Sunday night is what they are going to do. You are going to try and sneak under the radar. I mean, this was never going to be under the radar, but you try to reduce the fallout.

This government is in absolute panic mode. The way that they have responded to and treated the chief commissioner and the police force generally is appalling. The minister puts up legislation, and the police know that the bail laws are not right. We see offenders reoffending constantly. We see recidivism is just enormous and the community is consistently endangered. We heard it on the streets of Prahran and we heard it on the streets of Werribee, and goodness, I have heard it on the streets of Healesville in the Yarra Valley as well. We had a terrible example in early January when three young girls went into a supermarket, into the bottle shop area, and attacked a worker, a young woman in her 30s. They got in a scrap over a bottle of vodka – seriously. The whole of Healesville are completely alarmed by this. We have been a little bit removed from it because it had not crept out there, but those people caught the train and the bus to Healesville and created havoc in the main street. But this is

happening in other communities all over the place – in the growth suburbs in the north, in the south-east and in the west. We see that crime is getting out of hand and the prevention activities are being curtailed at the same time.

Part of the MPI here is the failure to resolve the 18-month-old enterprise bargaining agreement – talk about a great reason for morale to be absolutely plummeting. Do you know, the government seem to not have faith in the Minister for Police, because the former Treasurer had to go in and try and work out a deal. This has been more and more protracted, and it is not doing anyone any favours, particularly the community.

Demanding the police commissioner find \$1 billion from the police budget – this is being steered by the Department of Treasury and Finance, and it is part of the restructure, despite escalating youth crime, firebombings and gang violence. I will tell you why. There is a very simple reason why DTF are pushing the police force to find \$1 billion in savings – because we found out today that the Auditor-General yesterday put out their report that the Allan government's accountability on major infrastructure is pretty appalling after finding costs of major projects, including the Suburban Rail Loop, blew out by nearly \$12 billion in the past year alone. So we have got a \$12 billion blowout – no wonder DTF are saying to everybody, 'Find savings.' They are asking police to find \$1 billion worth of savings when they have already had the crime prevention unit virtually disassembled and reduced funding.

It is incredible that they have got this \$12 billion blowout, an 8.7 per cent increase in spending. The total bill for major projects is now \$145.5 billion. But in typical Labor government fashion, kind of like how they hung the chief commissioner out to dry and threw him under a bus, the transport minister in this instance has responded by trying to throw the Auditor-General under a bus. She has made comments that the report lacks integrity and professionalism and is producing misleading findings. It is always somebody else's fault.

The \$1 billion that the police are being asked to find is clearly and directly linked to the budget blowouts. We have a crime crisis. We have a crisis in Victoria Police with attraction and retention. Retention is so important. It is easier to retain than trying to keep recruiting, but there are failures in that area. We have criminal incidents at virtually an all-time high. A car is stolen in Victoria every 20 minutes. Teens are breaking into homes three times a day. We have this increasing gang violence all the time. We are hearing kids saying, 'I do it because I can get away with it. I'm going to keep doing it because nothing happens.' That wet lettuce really does not go too far, and we need to look at how we can do this better.

The Minister for Police says he has got all the answers in his bottom drawer. Either that bottom drawer is stuck shut or the Premier and the Premier's private office do not like what is in the bottom drawer because it is not appealing to them to make some of these changes. I think they need to get those things out of the drawer so that we can see what his messages are, because at the moment we know that it is not good enough.

We have Neighbourhood Watch, which is inundated by requests at the minute, and that is no surprise. Why are Neighbourhood Watch inundated? Because people are worried about their neighbourhoods. They are looking for somebody to help them stay safe, because they know, through the failures of the Victorian government, that they are not. They do have groups that are starting up, and they work a lot around education. They do not want people getting pitchforks, but I tell you what, when you talk to people, people are worried and think they need baseball bats and pitchforks because there are not enough police around at the moment and the police do not have the powers that they need. Breach of bail should be there, but it is not there. Dealing with the protests, the move-on laws should be there, but they are not there. This makes it really, really difficult for the police to do their job.

I was having a look through the most recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2024–25 budget estimates. The Department of Justice and Community Safety advised that its crime

prevention output initiatives, which received \$18 million in 2021, would lapse in 2024–25, resulting in the conclusion of several community-led crime prevention activities. The government's budget blowouts have already cut, already hit these crime prevention initiatives. The government are trying to pretend that, 'No, no, we've still got it there,' but it is not really. They have wrapped it into other areas, and there is a focus on youth crime, which is important, but we see that there are cuts, cuts and more cuts already. Organisations like Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Stoppers need to be supported, and the police force need to be supported. Their senior leadership needs to know that if they have issues and they have suggestions, they need to be listened to. I fully support this MPI.

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (17:04): I rise today to make a contribution to the matter of public importance (MPI) raised by the member for Caulfield. While I do not agree with the member for Caulfield's words, it is my great pleasure to speak to the house about the wonderful police we have in this great state and the incredible job that they are doing in keeping Victorians safe. I want to start my contribution by thanking our hardworking, dedicated Victoria Police members. Their unwavering commitment to maintaining safety and order in our communities does not go unnoticed. Their efforts are crucial to every Victorian. Every day they risk their lives to protect us, respond to emergencies and uphold the law. Their professionalism and courage in the face of danger deserves our utmost respect and appreciation. Moreover, many police officers go above and beyond their duties, engaging with the community, fostering relationships and providing support to those in need. Their efforts not only help prevent crime but also build trust and cooperation among community members.

I consider myself very fortunate to live in an area where we have wonderful police officers who truly care about our community and the community that they serve and protect. My electorate office is located in a busy shopping centre, and from time to time – although I will say much less frequently than ever before – we do have antisocial behaviour around the office and in the centre. I do want to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated team at Corio police station, who are just over the road from us. They always respond so quickly when there is an incident, and they always respond both professionally and sensitively to the matter at hand.

Beyond responding to incidents, I do want to commend our local police at the Corio and Lara stations for their proactive community work. Both teams are regularly involved in community engagement events, from events like community services day held at Corio Village, where all of our local first responders come together for a day that is not only a really fun day, especially for children, but also to share more with residents about the important work they are doing and to teach people about community safety, and of course to the annual emergency services day at the Lara RSL, where we have the opportunity to thank and honour our emergency services and recognise that so many of our returned service men and women continue their community service as police officers, firefighters and ambos when they finish in the defence forces. The Corio police team run regular coffee catch-ups at Corio Village, which are a great opportunity for people to ask questions in an informal setting, and I know this is a well-loved service in our community. Even last weekend we had local police come along to mosque open day to speak with local residents there. So once again I really want to thank Victoria Police members for all the work they do in keeping us safe and promoting community safety. It is much appreciated by me and the community that I represent.

On this side of the house we recognise and appreciate everything that Victoria Police do to keep us safe, and we also understand that crime hurts hardworking families. All Victorians deserve to feel safe, and that is why it is only under a Labor government that we have seen record investment into police. We heard from the Minister for Police earlier that the Victorian government is dedicated to providing Victoria Police with the necessary resources to ensure community safety as our population grows, and that is why since coming into government we have funded a record \$4.5 billion in additional investments into our local police. This commitment has seen an additional 3600 funded police officer positions and a billion dollars in capital works. Locally in the Geelong community we have seen 149 new officers, including 13 specialising in family violence. Over recent years the government has

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invested significantly in crime prevention and community safety in the Greater Geelong area totalling over \$4.6 million across 37 grants.

One such program was Meli's Reignite Geelong client voice project that was funded thanks to the Victorian government's crime prevention strategy. It was based around the question: what if young people at risk of involvement in the justice system had a voice? The program was launched in 2023, and it elevated the voices of young people involved in or at risk of involvement in the justice system and saw 12 young people supported by Meli's youth services team share ideas on how to ensure their voices could be heard. The project developed meaningful resources targeting service providers, government partners and youth justice workers. The program was a massive success. A report commissioned by the Department of Justice and Community Safety showed reoffending among those who participated in the project halved from 92 per cent before the project to 46 per cent afterwards.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, whilst I do not deny that the program the member for Lara is talking about is important for her community, I have been listening to the member for 10 minutes and she has not once gone to the narrow confines of the matter of public importance presented by the member for Caulfield. I know that the Speaker, who was in the chair before you, was cautioning members to stick to the very narrow confines of the MPI before us today. I would ask you to direct the member for Lara back to this very narrow motion.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I listened to a number of members earlier when I was not in the chair, and there was mention in the MPI and by other members of funding. The member was talking about a program. I would –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** interjected.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It would be preferable that the Manager of Opposition Business not argue with the Chair –

**BRAD BATTIN** interjected.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** or reflect on the Chair, Leader of the Opposition. The member to continue on the MPI.

**CINDY McLEISH:** Further to the point of order raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, the Speaker was very clear earlier in her direction in asking members to specifically talk to these points that have been put forward. I understand that they are trying to have some very loose discussion, but the Speaker was very clear in what she told the chamber. There were a lot of people in the chamber at that time.

*Members interjecting.*

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Laverton, you will have your chance. The Speaker informed me that we were stopping the clock for points of order, so I ask the member on her feet –

**CINDY McLEISH** interjected.

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I just explained that. The member to continue on the MPI.

**ELLA GEORGE:** This motion states that the government has failed to strengthen laws. I fundamentally disagree with this, and that is exactly what I am speaking to. While I do appreciate the little break I had from standing on my feet here, I am very pleased to be continuing.

More funding for crime prevention initiatives and programs that are going to reduce reoffending continued in our most recent budget. Key investments included \$112 million for alcohol and drug courts to provide tailored, evidence-based treatment for addressing root causes of offending, \$34 million to pilot electronic monitoring for serious high-risk offenders on bail, \$28 million to link at-risk youth to educational opportunities and \$6.6 million to expand the youth crime prevention and early intervention project to more suburbs. This matter of public importance speaks to budget cuts. A

\$212 million investment in crime prevention last year coupled with unprecedented investment in police over the past decade does not sound like budget cuts to me or anyone with enough common sense to know that two and two makes four.

But maybe we should ask those opposite what budget cuts look like, seeing as they are the experts. A question that I have for those opposite is: what program are you going to cut first? Will it be Drug Courts or support for at-risk young people, or will it be cuts to frontline police services like the opposition have done in the past? Let us be clear here: while those on the other side of house are busy thinking up cuts and opposing legislation that would mean tougher new laws to crack down on people who want to whip up racism in our communities and hate against their fellow Victorians just because of who they are, on this side of the house we are getting on with the job of protecting Victorians.

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think you would see now that the member on her feet has indeed strayed very much from the MPI.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I do uphold the point of order. The member was straying then. Come back to the MPI, please.

**Ella GEORGE:** The heart of this motion is about how we are protecting Victorians, what laws are needed and what laws need to be strengthened to protect Victorians, and that is exactly what I am speaking to. To that end, Labor has reformed bail laws to prioritise community safety, particularly concerning serious offenders who pose a significant risk. The Allan Labor government has taken a firm stance against repeat offenders threatening the safety of families in Victoria. New laws were introduced last year to impose harsher penalties for serious offences, and additional reforms commenced on 2 December 2024 under the Youth Justice Act 2024 to ensure accountability. These updates specifically target serious alleged offenders while protecting those accused of minor offences from overly harsh consequences; they strike the right balance. The reforms clarify the unacceptable risk test and provide better guidance for bail decision-makers, ensuring they consider the seriousness of potential crimes. This is a significant shift from the previous system, where all offences while on bail were treated uniformly, to a more nuanced approach that distinguishes between serious and minor offences.

In 2023 earlier reforms aimed to make bail laws more equitable, focusing on protecting vulnerable groups such as First Nations communities, women, children and individuals facing poverty or disabilities, while still being strict with serious offenders. These adjustments were made after thorough consultation with stakeholders and took effect in 2024. Our government is working to balance community safety with fairness for individuals accused of lesser crimes. In addition to this, the Premier has tasked the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police with reviewing our current laws, including bail laws. That work is underway, and this government will continue to work with Victoria Police and others on this.

We are working to strengthen community safety and improve the justice system's response to youth offending. This includes new bail laws that were implemented in December, which require bail decision makers to consider community safety risks related to serious reoffending. This means that bail must be refused if there is an unacceptable risk of the person committing a schedule 1 or schedule 2 offence, such as aggravated burglary, armed robbery, carjacking or home invasion. There is now a new offence established for committing schedule 1 or schedule 2 offences while on bail. The Council on Bail, Rehabilitation and Accountability, comprising experts from various sectors, has been formed to address actions of repeat serious youth offenders, and there is a new trial of electronic monitoring with enhanced bail supervision and support, which will commence later this year.

None of this important reform would have happened if it were not for a Labor government. History shows us, unfortunately, when in government those opposite failed to fund one single new police officer. Instead there was a hundred million dollars in cuts and closures in Victoria Police in their time in government. It has only been under a Labor government that we have seen record investment in

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Victoria Police, because we respect and value the important work they do day in, day out, seven days a week, 24 hours a day in keeping Victorians safe. Once again I thank the member for Caulfield for this opportunity to speak about what this government is doing to keep all Victorians safe.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:16): I am very pleased to rise today to speak on this matter of public importance put forward by the member for Caulfield. Before I start, if you would indulge me, I would like to read from an article. It goes straight to the point of the matter of public importance (MPI) today and came out just a couple of hours ago:

### **'Path to killing someone': Teen allegedly involved in high-speed police chase bailed again**

A 16-year-old who was allegedly involved in a 200km/h police chase across Melbourne has been bailed despite a magistrate saying he was "highly likely" to kill someone if he continued on his path of destruction.

The teenager, who was on probation at the time of the chase and had 19 prior offences, was allegedly involved in home invasions and aggravated burglaries earlier this month after repeatedly being granted bail.

**Natalie Hutchins:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not think that the member has actually referenced what he is reading from directly.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The bottom clock has been stopped. My understanding from the clerks is this is how it has been done since the Speaker brought it in.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Can we not argue, Manager of Opposition Business? Is the minister's point of order on relevance?

**Natalie Hutchins:** Yes, relevance, and also reading from notes. Can we find out what the source is?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the point of order, Minister. The member is talking about crime. I ask him to continue and to come to the MPI as well.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** That article was from the *Age*. It was just put up 2 hours ago and directly went to the first point of the MPI, if the minister has cared to read it, about bail laws, and this is what we here are on about today. And we have not at any point in time during our contributions today diminished the value of Victoria Police, like some members on the other side have suggested; that is not the case. This MPI is about the competence of this government to keep crime in this state under control – and the government is failing terribly – and also the fact that they have pretty well sacked the police commissioner at a time when crime in this state is out of control.

It was interesting that earlier there were a couple of references to the dismissal of the police commissioner. Five days beforehand he was going to get an extension, and then he was gone. The only real reference to it was that there was a vote of no confidence in the police commissioner, which was unprecedented. That is not the case in this state. It has happened before that there has been a vote of no confidence and the police commissioner has stayed on.

I will tell you where there was another vote of no confidence around the same time – the Werribee by-election, where there was a 17 per cent swing against the government. One of the main issues in the Werribee by-election was law and order. That is why there was a swing against the government, a 17 per cent swing, which is nearly how much crime has gone up in the last 12 months – a 16 per cent increase in crime.

They sit here and they preach and they get up, and the minister got up there and gave us all these facts and figures today: 'We've done this; we've done that; we've done that.' Unfortunately, the bail laws in this state are so diminished that we have a revolving door of people going in and out, and it is the community expectation. After the Werribee by-election the government said, 'We've listened to the community. We understand the issues. We understand that the bail laws need to be firmed up.' The

Premier herself actually came out and said, 'We have to do more on bail reform.' The Minister for Police came out and said, 'There's nothing wrong. I've got a heap of solutions in the bottom drawer of my desk.' Well, that is doing a great job. He has got the solutions in the bottom drawer of his desk. We have a car stolen every 20 minutes. How is that working? If I could give a suggestion to the police minister, I would say this: get those papers out of the bottom drawer, dust them off a bit – they have probably been sitting there since 2022, because that is how long he has been in the job – put them up and actually do something, because you are doing five-eighths of stuff-all at the moment.

Let us really analyse what has been going on lately. The old police commissioner is a speed hump now for this government; they have thrown him under the bus. But let us really look at the police commissioner himself. Patton joined the force in 1978. This man has had 40-odd years experience – 47 years experience – in the police force. That is a lot of experience. This government hung him out to dry and threw him under the bus. Do you know how old our police minister was when Patton first joined the police force? He was five years old. The current minister has been in the job since 2022. He has had three years experience in the job. What we do is we throw a veteran under the bus after 47 years in the job, and the police minister keeps his job – oh, my goodness. I would much rather listen to the bloke that has had 47 years experience than three. It is really that simple. And the way they actually let him go was disgraceful. Someone of 47 years experience getting a text message saying 'Thank you very much. Goodbye' is a pretty poor way to dismiss a dedicated public servant from this state. It is actually very poor, and they should be ashamed of themselves for doing that. It was not good form.

The biggest problem I believe the police commissioner had was he did not speak out enough against this government. He did not hold the government to account enough. He had pushed the government on bail reform. He said we need bail reform. The bar is so low on bail reform it is ridiculous. It is why these kids just go, 'It doesn't matter. I'm going to go do another agg burg. I'm going to steal another car, because I know I will get arrested, I'll go there, and then they'll let me out,' which is what happened just 2 hours ago in that report. This is what this MPI is about. The community expectation of this government is to keep everyone safe, and that is not happening. That is what the MPI is about, especially around bail reform. It is not too much to ask that if somebody is committed or has been bailed 50 times they do not go back out on the street.

I am going to tell this story from Warragul in my electorate. We wanted to prohibit machetes in this state. The government said they were a controlled weapon. We wanted them gone. There was a machete attack in Warragul. They tried to get into one house; they could not get in. Then they walked down this dark lane, followed a 19-year-old girl who had just finished work, attacked her in her car and stole her car. Guess what, the offender was on bail. How do you think that 19-year-old girl feels? I know her father; I have been friends with her father for a very long time. How do you think that 19-year-old girl feels? How do you think the father feels? Guess what, he got arrested. They found him, took him to court. One guess what happened after that: he got bail.

Where has the safety of our community gone? What has this government done? You can stand up here and spout all the figures. You can spout, 'We've invested this; we've done that; we've done that,' but it is clearly not working. Even Ross Guenther, a former deputy commissioner, is quoted as having said:

Why do self-interest groups and self-described experts have so much sway over issues that impact the whole community? Do we adequately respond to the ... victims?

That is the question. Are we responding to the victims? We forget about the victims. He went on to say:

... but the system is not co-ordinated, and the elements are not working together.

The government had an absolute conniption when that happened. They went into meltdown. They gagged Guenther, and now he has left the force, like many other hardworking Victoria Police in this state. People with experience are now leaving VicPol in droves.

**A member** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Yes, some are going to Queensland. They get paid more and there is incentive to go there. You know the incentive? A Liberal government. There is the incentive to go to Queensland – because they are getting tough on crime. This government is about as tough on crime as a used condom. It is weak, absolutely weak. They are limp when it comes to crime, and they have to get this right because our communities are at risk time and time again.

This MPI is about this. This is why the MPI has been put forward, and the member for Caulfield was 100 per cent spot on in his wording of the MPI. The way the government is treating our communities, the way our communities are put at risk, is absolutely hopeless. The bail laws are failing time and time again. The government has done nothing to fix it. We have tried to strengthen them, they have blocked us two times on it, and I totally support the MPI.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (17:27): That says it all, doesn't it? The contributions of those opposite always end up in the gutter when we talk about crime. I have stood here in this place time and time again having these kinds of debates while those opposite, those blokes over there, end up dragging this debate into the gutter, into a fear campaign. It is absolutely appalling. Shame on you. How are we even surprised on this side of the house that this is the topic for the matter of public importance (MPI) today?

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I object to being called a bloke, and I would ask the member to withdraw.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The reference was not to an individual member. It is a matter for debate.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** Member for Evelyn, I have not forgotten that you are there. I can see you quite clearly. What I do have to say is that this kind of MPI is the bread and butter of their playbook which we have seen time and time again in this place for almost seven years now. It is nothing new, but they bring it back here into this house with the same vitriol, dragging this debate down into the gutter. This is all about inciting fear within our community. But what I do have to say is thanks to those opposite for again giving us the chance to talk about what the Allan Labor government is going ahead and doing, what we have done and are doing to keep all Victorians safe.

Let us be really clear: every single member in this chamber believes that all Victorians deserve not only to be safe – and this is important – but to feel safe. I am not one to shy away from having these conversations with folks in my electorate about crime, and time and time again folks in my electorate either committing crime or being victims of crime are talked about here in this place. I have had many conversations. I have had phone calls even with families who have been victims of serious criminal offences. You do not hear me drag those stories here into this place, talking about what has happened to them. Those people cannot walk away from what has happened to them. This kind of stuff is unacceptable, bringing these stories time and time again into this place and using them as political hot potatoes. It is just basic political pointscoring. It breaks my heart for people in my community that have been victims of crime or know people, their friends and family, who have been victims of crime.

Just two weeks ago we had our local police in Wyndham run a community safety forum. It was while Parliament was sitting, and a staff member attended to represent the MPs from Wyndham. It was really well attended, and I do want to thank our local police in Wyndham for hosting this forum and thank the community who attended and the community that gave their feedback. Their feedback was heard. By all accounts I heard it was a very constructive forum, and the police were really responsive to the concerns raised by people in our community. I myself make a habit of meeting regularly with our police at the police stations that service my electorate. I have got quite a few. I always say they are the best in the west. I have got Sunshine police station, I have got Werribee police station and I have got Wyndham North police station in Tarneit. I go there to hear directly from police officers on what they need to keep our community safe and what they think is going on in our local community. These guys do an incredible job, and I want to acknowledge and commend them for the work that they do each and every single day to keep our community safe. They work hard, and they deserve to be thanked.

Since coming to government in 2014 we have invested over \$4.5 billion into Victoria Police. I know that number, that amount, that funding, that investment has been said over and over and over again here in this place, but those opposite will not, cannot and do not want to hear it. We have recruited more than 3600 new police officers who are on the beat each and every single day. We have not just recruited more police, we have funded nearly \$1 billion in replacing, refurbishing and building new police stations right across our state – stations like Wyndham North station in Tarneit, which services my community and was opened thanks to this government. We have also got a new station coming nearby in Point Cook, and I know that community, including the member for Point Cook, cannot wait to see that new station open. That was thanks to a \$25 million investment by the Allan Labor government. This year Victoria Police have made 70,000 arrests, holding more offenders to account than ever – more than ever.

Those opposite continue to accuse us of trying to slash \$1 billion from the police budget. When they were last in power, they slashed \$100 million from Victoria Police's budget.

**A member:** How much?

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** \$100 million. They have never once, ever, spoken about why that was the case, why they did that. They have a Leader of the Opposition who refuses to acknowledge that. It must be a huge embarrassment to him, time and time again, to sit in this place and hear that he was part of a government that cut \$100 million from Victoria Police's budget.

Our record when it comes to investing in police speaks for itself. This motion claims that we have failed to strengthen laws requested by the Chief Commissioner of Police. I could spend hours in this place and I know that the Minister for Police has made his contribution and he has listed through every single thing – or tried to list in his 15 minutes – that we have been doing here in this state, providing police with the powers that they need to go ahead and be on the beat and catch people who are up to no good in our community. It is laws like the Justice Legislation (Police and Other Matters) Act 2023, which gave police more powers to deploy vehicle immobilisation devices to stop vehicles which are a safety risk. That matters in my community. Driver safety matters to people in my community. It is laws like the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Act 2024, which I was very happy to stand in this place and talk about when it was introduced last year, which made it easier for the police to serve a firearms protection order and restrict the sale of machetes by removing any doubt that it was a controlled weapon under the act. It is laws like the Private Security and County Court Amendment Act 2024, which improved conditions for private security employees and workers. It is laws like the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024, which is yet to commence but is going to go ahead and strengthen our unlawful association scheme. It is going to introduce serious crime prevention orders and most importantly – this what the community wants – tackle organised crime.

Very soon we are going be debating the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024 in this place, which will go ahead and strengthen police powers to stop, search and seize weapons in public places for longer periods of time. That is something our community really wants to see happen. I know my community will be very glad to see that one in particular implemented. But all of these laws were passed by our government by working alongside, together with and in collaboration with Victoria Police and them telling us the powers they need and us going ahead and delivering them, introducing them, debating them and passing them here in this place. The idea that we have not strengthened laws at their request is absolutely ridiculous – quite the opposite in fact when we work closely every single day with Victoria Police to fight crime.

We know that crime is an issue that causes so much harm to working families across Victoria, and that is why just a few weeks ago the government announced that we would be reviewing our state bail laws to see how they can go further to prevent reoffending whilst on bail and ensure that people, importantly, feel safe in their own communities and neighbourhoods and in their homes. Our

government is not in the business of being lenient to repeat offenders who put the safety of Victorian families at risk.

When it comes to youth crime today, a very serious topic of discussion, we introduced a series of stronger reforms last year when we passed the Youth Justice Act 2024 in this place, something those opposite continue to refuse to acknowledge that we went ahead and did. The legislation has now been fully implemented, and it deals with some of these recurring issues, particularly around bail. Just earlier this year the Attorney-General appointed a brand new magistrate to go ahead and oversee repeat youth offenders, something that was part of these changes, ensuring that there is one magistrate who is monitoring these cases.

In the time I have got left I am not going to go through all of the rest of the changes that we have made except to say it is so disappointing to see those opposite time and time again only able to debate crime and community safety here in this place as something to be used as a political hot potato. It is instilling fear into our local communities. It is not right; it is not appropriate. It is something they should be ashamed of. Considering your opposition leader was previously in Victoria Police, he should know better. In fact I believe he does know better, except he continues to use it as this political hot potato. This is not right. People in my community get scared. They are hurt from these kinds of conversations, and I absolutely reject this matter of public importance put before the house.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:38): The weekly skirmish known as the matter of public importance does not normally make the headlines or the nightly news. We are among friends here. We can speak the truth and acknowledge certain realities; no-one else needs to know. All of us in this chamber really do understand that crime rates go up and they go down, and whatever they are doing, the right-wing media and political parties find it a convenient way to win viewers and to win votes. Do not tell anyone, but that is just a reality that we have to acknowledge. Crime will never vanish, and no matter how many police we employ and how many prisons we fill there will always be enough crime to dominate the front page of the *Herald Sun* and the nightly news. I am not convinced that the so-called crime crisis is entirely the work of the Allan Labor government any more than I am convinced that the opposition's proposals are a useful solution, so I am urging the assembled Labor MPs to think about a different approach to this rather than keeping trying to look as tough as the Liberals on crime.

Let us take a little bit of a look back at where we have come from. Crime is as old as history, and so are debates about what we should do. Misbehaving Roman slaves were held in pits below ground known as ergastula; these were dungeons where they were chained and worked in degrading conditions. These were then reformed by the Emperor Hadrian, and we can be pretty confident that had the member for Caulfield been alive at the time, he would have accused the Emperor Hadrian of creating a crime crisis and he would have called for the return of the dungeons, and that is kind of what is happening with bail at the moment, just as it happened in 2017. After the Bourke Street massacre the Andrews government made it much harder to get bail, and as a result our prison population grew and grew to the point where in 2019 we had more than 8000 Victorians behind bars, an all-time record number of prisoners, more per head of population than at any time since the Ned Kelly era.

Former Premier Andrews even boasted in question time just before the 2018 election that Victoria had the toughest bail laws in the nation and that there were more people on remand on that day than there had ever been at any point in the state's history. Back in 2014, 19 per cent of our prisoners were unsentenced, so about one in five prisoners in Victoria had not been sentenced to be there. By 2021 that had increased to 44 per cent. It was approaching half, and for women and children in custody it was more than half. By responding to media and opposition attacks by tightening the bail laws, the government had inadvertently created a trap for vulnerable Victorians who were least able to defend themselves and too often found themselves caught in a legal quicksand where they were forced to wait for their day in court on remand in prison. First Nations Australians were particularly affected, especially women, and at that time over 60 per cent of Aboriginal women in our prisons had not been sentenced to be there.

Who were we really punishing, and for what? We were punishing people who were homeless, people who could not get a lawyer, people who could not make a clear case and people who were vulnerable, and we were punishing them too often for the crimes of one guy who drove his car up Bourke Street. This is still a problem. It was somewhat alleviated by the recent meagre bail reforms that followed Veronica Nelson's death in custody. After a recommendation by the coroner, bail laws were reformed. It is important to note that those reforms really only occurred about six months ago, and yet the member for Caulfield wants Victorian Labor, represented by the MPs in this chamber, to bow to his demands and take us back to that time. He wants us to bring back the complicated legal quicksand that trapped too many young people, too many women, too many First Nations Australians and too many homeless people in prison, often for minor offences. 'Bring back the dungeons,' says the member for Caulfield – and the question is really whether Labor will stand up to him.

COVID lockdowns and massive court delays put an end to the spiralling growth in our prison population, but not before we had spent a billion dollars building a shiny new massive prison that remains empty at Western Plains, which would have been needed had we continued locking up so many people as soon as they were charged and had COVID not intervened. To their credit, the government finally accepted that the 2017 and 2018 bail changes had created a problem, and they improved bail law about six months ago. Everyone should feel safe in their community – as the member for Laverton pointed out – and on their streets, but the same tough-on-crime overpolicing approach that we have seen from successive Labor and Liberal governments since the turn of the century, pipelining billions of dollars into prisons and police, simply does not work.

We need evidence-based solutions so that we can get smarter on crime and improve community safety. To do this we need to get to the many and various causes of crime, such as problems with mental health or with drugs and alcohol. Yet a couple of weeks ago when we checked there was not a single public drug rehabilitation or drug detox bed available in Victoria. Spending more on drug and alcohol detox and rehab is likely to achieve more than spending on police. It is one of Victoria's weakest points right now, and in Victoria we are in a mental health crisis where workers right now are literally taking industrial action because of the lack of support for their enterprise bargaining agreement. We have a shortage of mental health nurses and other workers in our mental health wards, and one of the reasons for the shortage is lack of retention. Staff are leaving. It is stressful, they are not well paid, conditions are poor, we often have very junior nurses in charge of very difficult wards and we do not have nurse-to-patient ratios in mental health wards.

What is the strongest predictor of reoffending? It is not lack of police. It is a lack of secure housing. Spending on public housing will make us safer than building more prisons like the glorious folly out at Western Plains, a monument to our last flirtation with being tough on crime. To get smarter on crime we need to properly invest in the long-term support of these services that support people and help prevent crimes from happening in the first place instead of making these knee-jerk responses. We cannot continue to funnel money to services with uniforms and flashing lights. We need to also fund the less glamorous caring services which look after the people in our community who are at greatest risk. Successive Labor and Liberal governments have cut funding to crucial frontline services. For one example, Labor cut \$1.8 million in funding to the YSAS youth crime prevention program – just a small amount of money which would have done a lot of good. We need to be looking at the evidence of what works and to properly invest in early intervention and preventive services and mental health and drug and alcohol supports as well as looking at how to improve the key environmental factors that we know drive crime in the first place, like people being unable to afford food and housing.

The real question is whether a government with twice as many MPs as the opposition should adopt policies that will harm the most vulnerable Victorians while offering no durable solution to crime simply because they fear the right-wing media. If you give in to the opposition on this one, they will be calling for longer sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, hard labour and after that who knows what horrors. I believe Victorians are looking for fresh ideas on crime and will not reward a party that

buckles in response to this tired old argument. We want governments to be smarter on crime, not to be cruel.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:47): I am pleased to speak on this motion, noting that I think it goes without saying we are speaking about extremely complex matters and it is very easy to oversimplify for the purposes of making a political point. I am seeking to not do that in this space but rather to perhaps draw out some of the delicate and difficult elements of achieving optimal outcomes when you are looking at reforming legislation of any kind but particularly in the space of community safety. I personally and I know our government takes crime, the causes of crime and crime prevention extremely seriously. We look at it holistically. I am personally very alive to community safety concerns in my community, and I am tackling it and working on all levels, as I always should be as a local member, whether it is policing, whether it is housing, whether it is mental health, whether it is alcohol and other drugs (AOD), whether it is education – all the supports that we know are critical in this space.

Just going to some of the elements of the particular matter of public importance, I did want to speak to the bail laws. I think something that has come out in the chamber is that very nuanced calibration that our government has sought to make when it comes to the reforms that we have been making progressively with bail, noting the changes made to bail laws and looking at the lower offence end of the spectrum, noting every crime is a crime too many. I do not want in any way to be interpreted that I would in any way vindicate any crime – I do not. I am just saying the changes were informed by clear evidence of how bail laws disproportionately impact vulnerable Victorians, including – and we are talking the lower end of offences – Aboriginal people, women and children, people experiencing poverty and people with disabilities. That is why from the outset I said oversimplifying these very complex matters is dangerous and damaging. If we truly want to create a safer community, then we need to take heed of that nuance.

We know some of the latest elements of the bail reform for serious offences came into effect as recently as December of last year. That pertains to those who allegedly – I am saying ‘allegedly’ because obviously you are innocent until proven guilty – commit serious offences and pose an unacceptable risk to community safety, and they should not be let out on bail. We can be absolutely emphatic on that. That is clear; that is the law. Our government is not in the business of being lenient to repeat offenders who put the safety of Victorian families at risk. If you look at the law, that is absolutely the case, and so last year we introduced new laws to deliver tougher consequences for serious repeat offenders, noting the recent iteration of that rollout.

I should say, having said that about these changes, which are already making a difference – we are now in February, those were in December – there is more to do. No-one is pretending, ‘Oh, well, crime is solved. Everything is as it should be.’ No-one is saying that, and we need to be alive to opportunities to reform criminal justice settings when community safety is at risk. I think I can speak for everyone on this side of the chamber: we want our communities to feel safe. I want my community to feel safe, so this is not the status quo. This is not a set and forget – far from it. We are sensitive to these issues day by day. This is not an issue that is going away anytime soon. It should not be. We have to be absolutely committed every single day to community safety, as with housing, as with mental health, as with AOD – it all matters.

I am just drawing out the elements of the matter. I am actually adhering to the matter as best I can, because it is certainly very important subject matter. I should say it goes without saying that our Victoria Police play an absolutely fundamental role in protecting our community and in saving lives, and I certainly personally feel a depth of gratitude for the courage that they show day in, day out, for the difficult shiftwork that they do and for some of the incredibly horrible behaviour that they have to deal with. Certainly we are extremely grateful for all that they do. It does take a particular disposition to be able to handle the difficult work that they do.

We know that Victoria Police and the Police Association Victoria have signed a heads of agreement, just to be factually accurate on that point, consistent with the recommendation made by the Fair Work Commission. Members will vote, and they should vote as they see fit. We respect unions, we respect workers and we respect their right to vote as they see fit, and they will. We have absolute confidence in that, and we absolutely back them in on doing the vote as they see fit. We know that the community can have absolute confidence that Victoria Police, the police association and the government will continue to prioritise community safety absolutely. I would also like to acknowledge the tireless advocacy of the police association. We know TPAV is a strong union which always has the wellbeing of its members at the heart of its work. It is important work, and we respect the work that they do.

There was another element to the matter regarding purported cuts, and I would like to argue to the contrary, because that just simply does not stack up, that particular contention from the opposition. We know that we absolutely back in our police. We have invested over \$4.5 billion in our police force to ensure Victorians have a modern and responsive police force, and since coming into office we have put an additional 3600 officers on the beat. Victoria Police have made over 70,000 arrests for the year, holding more offenders to account than ever. I want to say that by contrast – and this is a debate, so I am going to put in the factual comment – those opposite slashed \$100 million from the Victoria Police budget and failed to fund a single additional police officer. It is one thing to say, ‘Oh, Labor government, what are you doing?’ et cetera, but we have to look at the form of those opposite when they were in, because I think there are a lot of empty words being thrown about, and I fear that, were they to be back in that decision-making element, they would make the same decision again.

It is a convenient line when it suits, and right now there is a political purpose to the arguments that they are putting forward. I certainly have the deepest empathy for victims of crime in my community, but I am not going to bring those individual examples in here to exploit them in front of everyone for political purposes. That does not in any way detract from the compassion and the concern that we feel and the commitment that we show in terms of backing our police everyday for the difficult work that they do.

Further to investment in our police, I am very pleased that in South Melbourne there is an investment of \$52 million into a new station right in the heart of Dorcas Street, and that will be servicing the local community 24/7. Having met with local South Melbourne police recently, I know they are very much looking forward to that new police station. They truly love the work that they do, and I have absolute admiration for that because it is such a hard job but one that is obviously vital for keeping our community safe.

There are so many legislative elements, but I think they have already been well articulated on this side of the chamber, attesting to the fact that each time we bring forward legislative reform, particularly in the space of community safety, we confer with Victoria Police, amongst other relevant persons and organisations, when it comes to legislative reform in the domain of community safety and take their advice. We confer with them because they are the ones on the front line; it makes good sense to do so. There are a number of bills here that I could go through, but I only have 3 seconds, so I am going to finish there.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (17:57): I request, by leave, an extension of time so that I get the full 10 minutes allowed.

**Leave granted.**

**Jade BENHAM:** I will hopefully be able to brighten things up a little bit in here and wake everyone up. It is a luxury to be the last speaker – now that I have my full 10 minutes – on this vitally important topic. In fact there is probably no topic more important, apart from regional health, in the state at the moment than that submitted by the member for Caulfield. It is a luxury to listen to every other member in this place. There has been some colourful language used and there have been some interesting points raised.

One was raised by the member for Caulfield, and it is one that I can concur with. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police has been backed, cracked and sacked all in a week. First of all, he was backed by the Premier and the minister. He was backed – ‘We’ll have you back. We’ll give you another contract’ – and then they put a knife in it. Then the people of Werribee cracked it, it appears, with that huge swing away from the government, because they know that community safety is a huge concern. Then obviously the Premier panicked; she cracked it. The minister cracked it and went to his bottom drawer, allegedly, where there were some solutions that had not already been presented, and then the Police Association Victoria obviously cracked it as well, so cracked. Then they sacked him. All within a week.

They have used the former chief commissioner as a scapegoat. It is appalling behaviour. He has served for 47 years on the force; in 1978 I was not even thought of yet. Forty-seven years on the job and to be treated like that is absolutely appalling. Let us just say that the chief commissioner was not the problem here. The government’s inability to take his advice was the problem here. And why? Why did it all occur? Perhaps because he pointed out that Victoria is the only state in Australia that does not have a tobacco licensing scheme, which could have solved the firebombings and the tobacco wars overnight if they had have listened to him. Was that the reason? Or was it because he had requested money and funding to upgrade the IT system within Victoria Police so they did not have to go about using fax machines or triplicate notepads?

I thought the only people that still used fax machines were doctors and pharmacists. You could step the police force into the 21st century by taking that advice. That alone would also help lift morale within the force and cut down on some of their overtime, which I am told over and over again is a huge sticking point for our VicPol members. Was it because he called for stronger laws for protesters, more trainers at the academy and on-the-spot family violence orders to be issued by police, or was it just because this government is in a death spiral, panicked, and it would make it look like they are actually trying to do something?

I note that the minister said earlier that the Allan Labor government is tough on crime. That is preposterous. I could not think of the correct adjective to use. I still do not think preposterous is the right one, but it was the strongest word I could find that was parliamentary. Criminal incidents in Victoria are the highest they have ever been – ever. Teenagers are breaking into homes three times a week. I have people coming into my office looking for support because they feel failed by the justice system. Police are dealing with repeat offenders daily. They call it ‘wash and repeat’ because they bring them in, they do an amazing job, they go into the justice system and they are arresting them the very next day. And they are right. Despite the clear and urgent request from the former police chief commissioner, the Allan Labor government has again failed to listen. I am befuddled, bemused and perplexed at how members on the other side can actually say, ‘No, we are doing all this. Victorians are good, and they feel safe.’

Women everywhere will know what I mean when I say we cannot even go for a run anymore in this state, in this city, anywhere. We cannot even go for a run. I am not an easy target. I would normally feel safe, but for the first time in my life – and I have lived in some of the biggest cities in the world, all around the world – I am carrying a personal alarm and I am carrying keys on me when I go for a run in the dark early hours of the morning in Melbourne. Even someone like me – I am 6 feet tall, and I do not look easy to take down – does not feel safe. To say that we are creating a fear campaign is absolutely, again, preposterous, and it is offensive. Tell that to the women that have been killed on the street, that it is us creating a fear campaign – how offensive. It is absolutely shameful. We have continued, on this side, to point out and offer solutions. The Leader of the Opposition has twice presented private members bills to strengthen bail laws, because the experts, not the self-proclaimed experts, the ones with 47 years experience, for example, say that this would be a step in the right direction. Twice they presented that and twice the Allan Labor government voted it down so it could not even be debated. We have offered a solution. Yes, we point out the problem time after time after time, but we have presented a solution, and it has been ignored. Now we can understand a bit more

about how victims of crime in this state feel, because they too feel like they are being ignored. Like I said earlier, I have people coming into my office, families coming into my office, like Damien, whose house was broken into while he was over in Perth. His teenage daughters were at home. His house was broken into. They had weapons. How do you think a father feels being so far away, in a town like Mildura, for heaven's sake? It is absolutely mind-boggling that members on the other side can sit there and say it is us creating a fear campaign. That is absolutely shameful and ridiculous. Every member of the community in Victoria, every victim of crime who feels hard done by by the justice system and every Victorian who does not feel safe in their own home or walking home at night feels like they are being ignored, and they continue to be.

I heard the minister say during question time yesterday that every Victorian has access to a 24-hour police response. Well, not if you live in the Mallee. Again, that is a preposterous thing to say.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** Or in Gippsland. And not if you live in places like Speed, Hopetoun or Sea Lake, and that town – oh, my goodness – has really had it tough the last few years. They lost their police officer there, their long-term police officer, in a cycling accident several years ago. I did a mobile office at the Royal Hotel there last week, and do you know what the one message was? 'When are we going to have our policeman replaced? When are we going to have a copper in our town again?' There is one out there; she is currently on leave, no surprises there, because morale is so low in Victoria Police at the moment. We can talk about investment and we can talk about how many people we are recruiting. Do you know what you cannot recruit? You cannot recruit experience. You cannot recruit supervising officers and those with 47 years experience or even 10 years experience. What on earth are we going to do? Are we going to send a brand new constable out to somewhere like Hopetoun or Speed with no support? No, you cannot. You cannot recruit experience.

One of the fundamental jobs of this government is community safety, and the member for Mordialloc said what we need is nuance, intelligence and respect. Victoria Police and the Victorian people are getting none of that from this government, absolutely none of that. What they are getting is reduced safety, higher crime rates and a government who has lost control. It is very clear that this government cannot manage Victoria Police, they cannot manage their budget and they cannot manage crime and community safety. What on earth can they manage? That is their fundamental job. Honestly, all we are asking for at this point is for this Allan Labor government to just do its job. It is as simple as that: do your job.

### *Bills*

#### **Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (18:07): When we broke I was talking about the comparative costs of importing gas, bearing in mind that you have to liquefy the gas, ship it and then regasify it before it can be made available for use by industrial customers and households. Not only will that add somewhere in the region of \$4 a gigajoule, but there is a deeper and more profound implication that comes from being a state that has to import all of its gas at an increasing rate as existing reserves are depleted. It means that you will see over time a wealth transfer from Victoria to other states and other jurisdictions from whom we have to purchase gas supplies. When you think about our energy sector, it is one of the foundational sectors that is there to support a growing economy. For any government to be able to deliver a rising standard of living while minimising the cost of living you have to achieve that security of supply at affordable prices in areas of energy, but you also have to deliver a health system, an education system and a mass transport system to support that community. If you are having to import such a staple resource as gas, you can only expect that over time you become a poorer state for it and your standard of living will decline. We know that you cannot simply wish away the problem,

as the government wishes to. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), an independent agency, reports that demand for gas on the eastern seaboard will remain stable. In other words, there will be no appreciable decline in demand for the next 20 years.

Gas is there not only to support the transition as a peaking fuel. Remember that many industries – glass, bricks, packaging and so many other gas-reliant products – cannot be subjected to the transition to electrification easily or at all, and those that can, particularly bricks and glass, can only be done at great expense to consumers and to businesses. Ensuring that we have a local supply of gas is vital for that reason. We face a real shortfall as AEMO and the ACCC have reported repeatedly, along with industry leaders.

Coupled with that, it is hard to understand what the government's plan is in relation to ensuring we have reliability of supply. We know that Yallourn is scheduled to close at this point in June 2028 and AGL's Loy Yang A in 2035. When and if Yallourn shuts in June 2028, what will replace it? If we are importing gas, that will come at a higher price for industrial and residential customers. But what is to replace it, and how do we ensure that we have reliability of supply? We know that many wind and solar projects operate – projects that I have no objection to if they can be connected to the grid in a way which delivers affordable and reliable energy at times people need it, not just in the middle of the day when there is a glut of rooftop solar in particular – but what do we do to ensure that we have that reliability? That cannot be an easy substitute for the vacation of Yallourn in June 2028. I would like to know from the government – the Minister for Energy and Resources is at the table – what discussions there have been, if any, about extending Yallourn beyond June 2028, because it is hard to see what will replace it. The government talks about its offshore wind energy targets as being a key source to replace our retiring coal fleet, but we know from the Port of Hastings debacle in relation to the Victorian renewable energy terminal that fell apart last year, when federal Minister Plibersek denied the application, that that has delayed that project. That will be a hub, we are told, for offshore projects in the Gippsland zone. But it has been delayed from 2028 to 2030 at the earliest, so we are unlikely to see offshore wind come online anytime soon. So how does this government assure Victorian businesses and households and global investors in our state that we have an energy system that can reliably be invested in?

Instead we are presented with this bill at a time when increasingly questions are being asked about that energy future in this state. Again, the obligation of any government is to deliver the highest standard of living with the lowest cost of living, but all we are seeing is increasing questions around the unreliability of that energy supply and the cost that will come with that. We know that gas will be more expensive for the very reasons I have outlined – if we can secure those gas supplies. We know that offshore wind is not coming anytime soon, and the government has not been up-front with the Victorian people about what is happening with Energy Australia's Yallourn and AGL's Loy Yang A and whether they will terminate on the current scheduled closure dates.

This bill shows a government confused about what its priorities ought to be. In other words, it is relieving itself of the obligations of scrutiny while imposing heavier sanctions on the workforce that we will need to deliver that energy transition – which I support, but so long as it is done in an orderly and responsible way. Not only does this bill highlight that contradiction in the government's failed attempts to demonstrate it has an energy plan, the bill itself highlights the absence of a vision for how you deliver a prosperous economy based on an energy system that can give people access to energy, whether they are industrial or residential customers, at prices they can afford as and when they need it. This bill is a missed opportunity more than anything else to give Victorians the security they need and an energy system they can rely on.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (18:13): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. From the very outset can I say a very big thank you to the responsible minister and her team and everyone at the department for all of their fantastic work in what is a very important piece of legislation, as has obviously been debated and discussed here in this place. I just want to acknowledge and reflect on a few contributions from

colleagues. In particular I note that the member for Tarneit, who is not in this place at the moment, spoke about the importance of energy efficient appliances and electricity being cheaper than gas at the moment and that this government's policies and our reform agenda in the energy space are putting money back into people's pockets. This legislation is another example of the Allan Labor government moving with the times, moving with the sector and making sure we support households and support businesses with the energy transition, as was detailed by the member for Albert Park so eloquently.

And the member for Clarinda as well spoke about how the Australian Energy Market Commission has projected that over the next decade electricity retail prices in Victoria will reduce by 9 per cent, keeping rates cheaper than anywhere else in the country. That does not happen by mistake; that happens because you have an Allan Labor government making the necessary reforms with a fantastic minister leading the charge, with a great team and a department of people working with stakeholders and working with the community to get not just this legislation but all the legislation that has come before it through. Lo and behold it sounds like those opposite will be opposing this legislation, but that is not a surprise given the amount of legislation that pertains to these portfolios. I am not sure what the hit rate is, but the percentage would be quite low – if I could guess the amount of times – that those opposite have supported legislation that pertains to energy.

To be honest I am not surprised, because we have had for a very long time, sadly, in this country culture wars when it comes to energy. How many policies did the federal Liberal government have on this? How many leaders were rolled when it came to energy policies, some of them somewhat sensible? But that did not matter for former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, just like it did not matter for many other Liberal leaders. It is sad. I thought we were getting to the end of the culture wars. I thought the federal Liberals and Liberals as a whole were embracing and understanding that renewables are the cheapest form –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask you to bring the member back to the bill. I know it is wonderful to talk about the opposition, but unfortunately that is not what we have in front of us today.

**Lily D'Ambrosio:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the greater offence is on the opposition's side in terms of having strayed from the bill with every speaker that has got up on their side. I would suggest that that point of order is unjustified.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The debate on this bill has been very wideranging. I will allow the member to continue, and we will see what he has to say.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** I am always surprised when I get a point of order. I am always so measured and reasoned, and I do not go at any particular individual. I just speak the facts. We are not perfect either, right? There is always room for improvement, but I am very proud of our progressive policy agenda. I am very proud of this legislation. But the fact remains that we have for a very long time in this country had a particular political party, and not everyone in that political party, vote down and cause stagnation and send a whole range of mixed signals to the private sector, which have sent us backwards. I am grateful and thankful for not just this Allan Labor government but the federal Albanese government and people like Chris Bowen, the federal minister, who is doing a fantastic job working in concert with the fantastic Minister for Energy and Resources, because these culture wars need to end.

We need to accept the fact that renewable energy is the cheapest form of energy generation. Victoria is moving forward with our renewables plan. We are obviously supporting businesses and households to make that really important but necessary transition – a careful transition – where we support people, and we support jobs and we grow jobs through investment in renewable energy and we do not focus on nuclear pipedreams. As we have seen as well from discussions around nuclear from the federal Liberal Party, they have no detail. I do not think there are any costings, but if there are they are not detailed. The reality is that you would also have to have state governments work with a potential –

hopefully not a future – federal Liberal government, and I have not heard any state government say they are willing to do so. So I am not sure where they are going with this. It would appear that some want to continue the culture wars, but this Allan Labor government want to continue to get on with reforming the sector and bringing pieces of legislation, necessary like this, to this house to continue to move us forward, to back businesses in and back households in, bring down the cost of energy and put more money back into the pockets of everyday Victorians and of small, medium and large everyday businesses and not into the pockets of multinational companies.

That is exactly what we did when we brought back the SEC. It always blows my mind when those opposite go, ‘Oh, you didn’t bring it back.’ Of course we were not able to bring it back like it was previously. We are building it back from the damage and the demolition job that those opposite did – which has been very well articulated in this place – back in the 1990s. But we have brought back the SEC. We are absolutely signing up project after project to again be a participant in the market and not run it for profit but run it for people, as it absolutely should be.

I remember when I was out knocking on doors and I was out at houses, there were people who were lineballing – ‘Who will I vote for? Jacko, you seem like a nice guy. I’m not sure, though’ – which is fair enough. That was before the moustache. I just reflected on the member for Frankston’s comment at the start. I did not get an opportunity to take up his interjection. They said to me time and time again that this policy, though they understood the SEC would be different, was what got them to vote for the Labor government. It is something that is so critical: having energy to an extent back in public hands, not to make money for consolidated revenue or for the back pockets of multinational companies but to help reduce prices – to help put money back into hardworking families’ pockets.

Whether it is the SEC, whether it is the hundreds of thousands of solar panels we put onto people’s houses, whether it is the solar hot-water systems, whether it is the solar batteries – we also have neighbourhood batteries; I remember we had a fantastic election commitment of providing neighbourhood batteries in my electorate of Bayswater in a number of suburbs – or whether it is the fantastic work that people take up through the Victorian energy upgrades program, this government is committed to helping people with the transition, but importantly it is about putting money back in their pockets. It is about listening to those market signals. It is about supporting and working in concert with the private industry on where we know the world is heading.

The world is heading to renewable energy, and Victoria is absolutely leading the pack. We are leading the charge with world-leading targets. Talking about targets, I remember I was out with the former Premier and the minister at the table, the Minister for Climate Action. We were out at EVO Power back before the election, and we were announcing Australia’s biggest renewable energy storage targets. I believe they were 2.3 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035, and that is absolutely groundbreaking. That is part of this government’s huge, huge tranche of commitments, its well thought out and considered transition to renewable electricity, which we know is the cheapest form of energy. It is not culture wars and not getting stuck in perceived populism; it is about doing what is right, and what is right is supporting the Victorian people. Particularly when the cost of living is such a big issue for every single Victorian, for hardworking families out there, why would you play around with this stuff? It is a cost impost on every single household.

What this government is about is facts. It is about science, it is about progressive reform and it is about bringing down the cost of energy, and we will continue to do that each and every single day we are in this place. Point of order or otherwise, that is what this government is about. I am very happy to support this bill, and I commend it.

**Kim O’KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (18:24): I rise to make a contribution on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. The bill amends a variety of acts related to the energy and resources portfolio, including the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005, the Land Act 1958 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005. Seemingly this bill does have some positive changes, and some of the changes do make sense. However, the bill in its

current form is simply pushing through amendments under a more generic bill that does not fix problems with our energy system or introduce proper accountability measures. This government's agenda is to ban gas in this state, and this is just another step to do that.

Since coming into office just over 10 years ago, Labor has failed in the state's transition to renewables, and because of that Victorians are continuing to pay the price. Energy prices are going up, putting more pressure on households. And if we want facts – the previous speaker called for some facts – in June last year the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, released its 2024 integrated system plan, which laid bare the vulnerabilities in Victoria's energy system following a decade of mismanagement under Labor. The report highlighted the critical role of gas power generation as the retirement of coal-fired power stations nears and the grid continues to transition to renewables. Labor's opposition to gas for the past 10 years has prevented critical new supplies from being brought online, and AEMO will continue to issue warnings of potential gas shortages and blackouts. In regional Victoria we are experiencing significant blackouts. We experience the government's lack of support for regions, and this is another neglected opportunity within this bill. Victorians deserve a government that understands the need for new natural gas supplies to be brought to market, and they simply are not getting that under this current government.

The government, back in December, proposed new regulations that would see the banning of gas appliances in every Victorian home, as well as banning gas connections to all new residential dwellings and most new commercial buildings. And here we have another bill supporting the banning of gas. The proposed regulations will mean that for all existing residential buildings in Victoria, gas heating and hot-water systems cannot be installed and existing gas appliances cannot be replaced with gas appliances at the end of their life.

On this side of the house we firmly oppose the government's plan to ban gas in every home and to ban new gas appliances as replacements for existing gas appliances. We know on this side of the house that gas still has a very important role in our transition to more renewable energy. Victorian households and businesses rely on gas like those in no other state in this country. Despite this fact, Labor refuses to actively pursue policies to increase supply and keep prices down. The government's failure to deliver on this has forced energy prices to increase for Victorians, and this has introduced serious risks for households and businesses. As a direct result of this, more and more businesses than ever are leaving Victoria to pursue their business interests elsewhere.

Victorians should be free to choose their own energy source freely. They should not be directed or pushed in choosing their energy source by the government. The government simply cannot be trusted when it comes to the management of our energy system. After 10 years of continual policy failures it is Victorians who are paying the price and are worse off because of this government's inability to provide affordable and reliable energy.

One of our major concerns with the bill is that it repeals the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee, which removes expert advice. The minister stated in the second-reading speech that both of these committees 'will no longer be required' – so expert advice will no longer be required? Both of these committees in the past have had distinct roles and a wealth of expertise within the energy and resources portfolio. As the lead speaker the member for Brighton pointed out in his contribution, the minister obviously does not like their advice – does not like the professional advice given by the committees – and the bill is therefore abolishing them. We do not support the disbanding of these committees. Abolishing these committees removes critical industry expertise from decision-making. This shift to centralised control is not only dangerous but unacceptable, and leads to reduced transparency of decision-making.

Under the provisions Energy Safe Victoria will be given enhanced powers to identify and mitigate safety risks earlier – and there are some positive things there – to monitor compliance with regulatory requirements and to take swift and decisive enforcement action where necessary. In addition the bill removes the need for Energy Safe authorised officers to obtain written consent before exercising

certain powers and allows officers to request assistance from any person for the purpose of entry in exercising their powers under the relevant act. This amendment will enable authorised officers to act swiftly to resolve safety risks involving new technologies and requiring specialist knowledge. It will still be a requirement for authorised officers to report their use of entry powers to Energy Safe, which will continue to maintain a register of entry power use.

We do have concerns that the bill proposes significant penalty increases for electrical and plumbing contractors, with fines rising to \$48,000 for individuals and \$240,000 for corporations. These excessive penalties could disproportionately harm small businesses and tradies for inadvertent mistakes, and as already discussed, there are concerns around the timely addressing of appeals through VCAT. The member for Morwell, a former plumber, in his contribution raised concerns about the significant impact these fines would have on a small business that is trying to navigate significant changes while supporting households. We need to support our tradies and keep a much-needed workforce, and we need to make sure that penalties are adequate and not too extreme.

Energy Safe will also be provided with new powers to suspend electrical contractor registrations or electrical worker licences and to issue prohibition notices to prevent certain activities. The ability to suspend contractors and workers on the spot raises concerns around the ability to appeal, with appeals only available through VCAT. Workers and contractors could be faced with prolonged uncertainty and financial hardship while waiting for the appeal to go through the VCAT process, and at a time when we need tradies on the ground. We do want to ensure safety and best practice, but we also need to have sensible penalties. Under these significant fines we are likely to lose businesses and cause significant hardship, and as the member for Narracan pointed out, penalties go from currently \$820 to \$48,000, which is unbelievable and totally unacceptable.

Another amendment I would like to briefly touch on is about bushfire mitigation plans. We have recently seen the devastation of the bushfires, and it has been distressful to see the communities affected by the recent bushfires across western Victoria. I acknowledge the member for Lowan's dedication to her community during that stressful time. Under the bill the bushfire mitigation plans for specified operators would now be required every five years instead of annually. Moving from an annual to a five-year cycle for bushfire mitigation plans may reduce the regulatory burden for operators, but it does raise concerns about whether it will adequately address evolving safety risks.

The bill will also amend the Land Act 1958 with respect to unreserved Crown land. The Minister for Environment will be provided with the power to enter into an agreement to lease under section 134 of the Land Act for projects on unreserved Crown land that are subject to the Environment Effects Act 1978. By increasing certainty about future land tenure for proponents of complex projects it seeks to support further investment in environment effects statement processes and future projects' needs.

The bill before us does not adequately or clearly define the roles of Energy Safe Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. Without clearer coordination there is a risk of duplication, inefficiency and regulatory confusion for businesses and workers. Victorians expect better from the government in regard to their energy policies. My office is inundated with many stories of local constituents whose energy bills have skyrocketed on Labor's watch. We must do more. We must make sure that we are making energy affordable for households at a time when we know that people are struggling to make ends meet. I support the amendments put forward by the member for Brighton, but I do ask that we give much more consideration when it comes to the impact of costings. This government continues to impose extra taxes, raising the cost of living, and fails in managing energy costs.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (18:33): It is an absolute pleasure to rise and speak on the bill before us this afternoon. I have been listening very, very intently to those opposite, and you can definitely tell the people that have some experience in a trade or a field, like the member for Morwell, but you can definitely tell the people that are reading the lines given to them by the apparatchiks in their party.

I am going to start off with a little bit of myth busting. Coalition members have repeatedly on the bill before us voiced their concerns that the fine going from around \$800 to over \$40,000 will penalise tradies doing a good job. That is absolute rubbish. When you stuff up around electricity, you kill people – you kill families, you make fires, you kill yourself. Why do I know that? Well, I was a firefighter for a couple of years, and unfortunately I have seen it.

I remember one incident at Morwell SEC, actually, when it had just closed down. We went there. We got called to a ‘man on fire’. I remember looking at the pager going, ‘Jeez, that sounds really odd. Great name for a movie,’ but you do not know what you are going to from day to day. This contractor had got the apprentice to fix some things with some busbars. For people who do not know what busbars are, they are high-voltage copper bars that you attach ancillary pieces of equipment to. You have them in a cabinet. It will say ‘Danger – don’t go anywhere near here’. This contractor took on a tender, and he decided not to turn the 550 volts off while this apprentice went in there and connected this. The apprentice had to lean over the busbar, which was probably the equivalent of me leaning over these microphones, to do his work in the cabinet. He was not able to do that, and 550 volts electrocuted him. When we arrived all we could smell was pork. This poor guy had burnt. He looked like Yahoo Serious, and we had no idea what was going on. At that stage, I guess as a very junior firey, I thought people gave a crap about their employees; they always had about me. I hear people in this chamber saying, ‘Oh, we’re penalising people for doing the wrong thing and we shouldn’t be penalising them \$40,000.’ Well, people’s lives are ruined and people can die from this. People die in house fires all the time because of dodgy electrical work, and we should be cracking down on it.

The electorate of Frankston has got a bit of history with people talking about power and electricity and power providers. We certainly had the candidate for the Liberal Party in 2018 on the now infamous David Speers program.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Yes, we do not want to watch that one again. But they do watch it in some media circles to tell students of media what not to do. I remember thinking, ‘Goodness me, these people are so confused,’ and that confusion carries on here today. On that day I remember seeing the candidate trying to convince David Speers that we needed a new coal-fired power plant. David Speers said, ‘Well, you can build one,’ and the candidate said, ‘Nah, no-one will let us.’ David Speers said, ‘Who is no-one?’ and he said ‘They’. It went on like this; it was painful. I am seeing that here today with people that do not quite understand some of the things they are talking about.

We have seen people referring to the committees in this bill. These are committees that have been around and that were introduced after the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission into Black Saturday as recommendations from that royal commission. There are probably not many of us here that were around in those days. As a firefighter at that time, I certainly was, and I watched that royal commission. I was very, very intently looking at every single hearing and intently waiting for those recommendations to come out. It crosses my mind that some of these committees have done their job. Some of these committees were about increasing safety in the systems, reducing risk, mitigating the risks with powerlines, which started fires, and locking those protocols in place, so I think when you put a historical context to it, you fear not. The other thing I guess I would think about is reducing the regulatory burden for Energy Safe Victoria. Bushfire mitigation plans are another recommendation from the royal commission into Black Saturday. They are some things that I think are well utilised and well known and the protocols have been set in place for quite some time now. It is not just us asking in this chamber for this legislation to be passed, it is people in these roles asking for that regulatory burden on them to be lessened.

I did attend a really interesting forum last week. It was a political forum, and the candidates for the Dunkley federal seat and the Flinders seat in the upcoming election were there. I heard some really, really interesting opinions on where people want their power coming from. I heard some really interesting opinions on renewables and what this state government is doing, and I think there was a

celebration, I would say, as far as that goes. People, especially those in the crowd at this forum, seemed to realise this state government's commitment. Since 2014 we have had 59 projects built, providing over 4471 megawatts of new capacity which has come on line. There are nine projects currently under construction, and as we have heard today, these include the SEC's very own project at Plumpton – one of the world's largest battery energy storage projects in the world. But what I did hear was a very confused candidate for Dunkley, who was not Labor.

**Richard Riordan:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I was enjoying the member for Frankston's reminiscences of elections past and elections future, but I would draw him back to focusing on the bill rather than giving us a blow-by-blow description of his electoral experiences in Frankston over the last 10 years. I guess he could refer to the experiences of Werribee, perhaps, but I would bring him back to the bill at hand.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** While I am enjoying the member's contribution, could he bring it back to the bill.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Thank you, Acting Speaker, and might I say again that you are doing a good job. I can talk about Werribee, where we won. There will be a new Labor member sitting in that area. Patience is a virtue, and I do forgive those members opposite for I guess their impatience at this stage. Some people obviously cannot bear with me; I do like to make a story.

The conversation at this forum went to what we are doing as a state. It also went to the federal Liberal opposition's commitment to nuclear power. And at the state level it was very, very obvious that people were ready to ask a lot of questions about that – about the timeframe, about the cost – and that is something that we need to consider here today, because not one person opposite has mentioned nuclear energy today. But we did see it go from nothing to five places in Victoria and across the nation being told without any consultations that they were going to become nuclear energy hubs, the first working by 2035, which is faster than – well, that would be a faster build than anywhere in the world, including the UAE, who built their fastest build, I think it was, in 12 years. The CSIRO disagrees with all the evidence that is being brought out by the federal opposition, but we still have people at a state level talking about this as if this is going to happen, these small to medium reactors, when not one is working in the world. Germany is closing down its nuclear reactors. That is why we are here today. We have to talk about renewables. We have to talk about the systems that we have got in place that we constantly need to change and monitor as new energy sources come in. We constantly need to keep up with the future and make sure that we are legislating around that safely.

Again I would say to those opposite: if you are going to deny us the pleasure of your vote on this bill, do it over something that you understand. Do it over something that makes sense; do it over something that you have read. Have a good read about these laws, because coming in here and saying that we are hurting tradies because crappy tradies when they kill someone should not be fined or should not be fined up to \$40,000 is not a good premise to work from. That is a terrible premise to work from. I commend this bill to the house.

**Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:42):** I rise today to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This bill makes amendments to a series of existing pieces of legislation, including the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005, the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 and the Land Act 1958 in addition to some other minor amendments to other acts. The main purpose of this bill is seemingly to enhance powers, penalties and regulatory frameworks within Victoria's energy sector. This includes an increase in the penalties for contractors committing offences under both the electricity and the gas safety acts as well as creating greater powers to immediately suspend these workers in the case of breaches. Additional changes to the Electricity Safety Act include expanding the requirement for bushfire mitigation plans for specified operators and proposing the abolition of the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee.

While frameworks for improving electrical safety are incredibly important, abolishing these committees is something that is difficult to comprehend. These committees offer independent expert advice, ensuring that decisions are not solely falling on the department and the minister's office. Removing these committees from the equation brings forward significant concerns relating to the accountability, transparent reporting and checks and balances in place that can ensure safety and trust in the energy sector is improved. The increases to both enforcement powers and penalties are also significant, and there has been minimal clarification as to why these increases have been made. One point of view might be that increasing penalties and enforcement in the energy sector would help further drive this government's crusade against gas.

This bill imposes severe penalties that could certainly be used to undermine the livelihood of any tradesperson who attempts to get in the way of this government's ideological goals. Ultimately this government's pursuit of this city-centric policy has failed to consider the necessary role that gas plays as an energy source for residents in regions like mine. It is without a doubt that regional Victoria will be disproportionately impacted by the short-sighted transition, particularly through high energy bills and the fallout that comes from having an already unreliable power supply. We know that many of our regional communities are still only fitted with gas options for heating, cooking and their water. Removing gas options in these houses will only put further pressure on our electricity supply, which has regularly crumbled under the slightest bit of pressure in recent years. I am all for the responsible transition to renewables, but how are our already struggling communities meant to survive when there are no alternatives? The financial impact on our households and businesses will be severe. Energy bills are already through the roof, and further mismanagement of our energy supply will only hurt the pockets of people in our towns even more.

These bill increases have significantly impacted our regional communities too, and far more than those residents in the city. A recent default tariff for AusNet, which services mostly regional areas in the east of Victoria, was \$1902 for a residential household and \$4388 for businesses. Meanwhile, the CitiPower tariff for metro Melbourne was just \$1456 for households and \$3025 for businesses. My office is contacted every week by people concerned about the impact these rising tariffs, rates and bills have on their ability to live their lives and continue operating their businesses. Our towns are crying out for some relief, but under this government the cost of living is getting so much more expensive. This will only get much worse when removing gas supply in our regional communities.

After power outages left much of the region without electricity last year, AusNet research found that electricity-only households were saddled with significantly higher costs than those that had gas connections as well. Electricity-only customers spent on average \$1100 to respond to an outage, but for those that had gas connections too it was reduced to just \$360. Towns like Benalla, Euroa, Longwood, Violet Town, Ruffy, Nagambie and Strathbogie are all continuing to deal with regular outages, making those figures really, really concerning during a cost-of-living crisis. These outages extend beyond bad weather and can be tracked back to issues to energy supply itself. There have been outages when it is cold, outages when it is hot, outages when it is dry, outages when it is wet, windy, calm and still. In absolutely all weather conditions we have had outages directly relating to local electricity supply.

Many of the issues in my region are due to there being a single line of power running from Benalla to Violet Town, through to Euroa and spreading out across the surrounding region, traversing 1200 kilometres of powerlines running off the longest feeder line in the state. It is pleasing to hear that a \$22 million project to install a second powerline in the region is currently awaiting approval with the Australian Energy Regulator, and that some changes to the current switches are set for the near future. Despite this promising proposal, construction would likely be years away.

Just last week I held meetings with representatives from AusNet to discuss the ongoing concerns over power reliability in my region. Meetings like this have unfortunately become far too frequent, with this most recent meeting following outages the week prior that impacted 2500 households in the wider Benalla region. These unplanned outages follow several similar incidents in Euroa, Violet Town,

Longwood and Nagambie in recent weeks and have left local businesses and homes so worried, and they are just buckling under the financial pressure.

While a series of upgrades have been implemented, there are still too many days where our towns are left with absolutely no power. It is incredibly frustrating for everyone that is affected by the outages and it is imperative that improvements continue to happen. Too many households and businesses in our region have suffered due to these regular and prolonged outages. People have been left unable to contact loved ones, unable to operate electric medical equipment and unable to keep their homes at an appropriate temperature during extreme weather. Businesses have had to close. They have lost considerable stock as refrigerators are left without power and have been forced into purchasing expensive generators just to operate.

While this bill aims to make changes to our energy sector, issues remain with the execution. A lack of clarity, excessive penalties and potential overreach make this bill difficult to condone. Some amendments to the legislation have been proposed. Ideally they would make this bill much more appropriate and ensure this government was more transparent. That would be nice, wouldn't it? This includes addressing the issue of statutorily protected consultative committees, specifically the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Energy Safety Commission. This amendment would prevent the disbandment of these committees, ensuring the status quo is maintained. We strongly oppose the government's continued attack on independent expert advice. We like transparency. In particular the government's conflict with the ELCCC, which has provided advice the minister disagrees with, is concerning. The first amendment aims to preserve these committees and their statutory foundation.

The second proposed amendment addresses the government's intentions to alter Energy Safe Victoria's requirement to table an annual corporate plan, instead allowing it to be done every three years with updates provided annually to the minister and Treasurer. We believe the Energy Safe Victoria corporate plan in this bill should still be published, with annual updates in between also made public to ensure greater transparency – that word again that we love on this side of the house and it seems the government does not.

The last amendment addresses the bill's power to enter into an agreement to lease unreserved Crown land that is subject to the Environment Effects Act 1978 for projects under section 134 of the Land Act 1958. This amendment includes seeking to improve transparency by adding a requirement to publish details of this prior to granting such a lease, including the value of the access to the public land, the basis of calculation and the value of the signed lease. All three of these amendments would make this bill a more considered and reasonable piece of legislation. If this bill remains as is, this is not something that we can support.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (18:52): I rise to support the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. In doing so I would like to acknowledge the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action for her work in bringing this bill to the chamber. I acknowledge that she is a former student many years ago of Mercy College in my electorate, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this week. It is fantastic to see a former student of Mercy here in this state Parliament as the member for Mill Park spearheading the renewable energy drive in this state.

This bill forms another important part of supporting our Labor government's nation-leading agenda to transition our energy grid to a more renewable, more sustainable and cheaper network for businesses, households and communities. Fundamental to achieving this aspiration will be safety – safety for the workers building this infrastructure and safety for the households and the communities in which this infrastructure will be built and through which it will be transmitted and the properties through which it will be hosted. The fact is the provision of an essential service like energy cannot occur without appropriate regard to safety, and that is why this bill is so important.

The reforms it introduces will have those long-term benefits for the safety of Victorians and ensure consumer protections and confidence in our energy safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria. The bill will amend a number of acts, including the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005, to strengthen Victoria's energy safety framework. The bill will also amend the Land Act 1958 to provide improved certainty when investing in complex projects on unreserved land in Victoria.

Victoria's energy sector is undergoing a rapid transformation under this minister, driven by the growth of both utility-scale and residential generation and storage. By bringing back the SEC we are working towards creating 59,000 new clean energy jobs over the coming years and meeting our carbon reduction targets of 33 per cent by 2025, 50 per cent by 2030, 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero emissions by 2045. Along with that we have invested already \$3 billion into renewable energy infrastructure. We have set forward some of the most ambitious renewable energy targets in the nation and the world, with a 65 per cent renewable electricity target by 2030 and 95 per cent renewable electricity by 2035, and we are investing in large-scale public projects for the first time in many years, like the SEC renewable energy park in Horsham and the Melbourne renewable energy hub in Melton.

The fact is we are taking that real action to reach these goals and at the same time we have driven down our emissions by 32.3 per cent. We have grown the share of energy generation that comes from renewables to almost 40 per cent of the state's energy generation, and at the same time we have grown the economy and grown jobs by 42.8 per cent.

At the same time these actions have also helped us keep downward pressure on energy prices. Through these measures Victoria now has the lowest wholesale power price in the country. This is due to our record investment in cheaper, more reliable renewable energy. Lower wholesale prices mean lower retail bills for Victorian households and businesses. The 2024–25 Victorian default energy offer also shows an average of \$100 or around a 6 per cent decrease in electricity bills for residential customers versus the previous year. For small businesses it is around \$261, or a 7 per cent decrease. That is real money back in the pockets of Victorian families and Victorian businesses. In stark contrast, it is the opposition here that are focused on the most expensive forms of energy as their alternative policy, whether it is gas or nuclear. The fact is renewable, clean energy is the cheapest form of energy.

As we undertake this transformation we need to make sure that legislation does keep pace. Victoria's energy safety framework was designed for a centralised fossil fuel based network and has not kept pace with these evolving technologies, creating regulatory gaps. That legislative reform is required to respond to those contemporary safety risks. The bill will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to strengthen energy safety and stability, to mitigate safety issues early, to monitor compliance with directions and take enforcement actions. It introduces a new entry power with a warrant where there is a risk to the health and safety of a person or of significant damage to property that does not amount to an emergency. The bill also enables the Electricity Safety Act and Gas Safety Act to be enforced by infringement notices, providing additional flexibility. There are quite a number of other reforms contained here as well, which given the time I have, I might just acknowledge that previous speakers have contributed on. The bill is based on extensive consultation with unions, the business sector and various other stakeholders, who by and large support overwhelmingly – unlike the opposition – the amendments contained in this bill.

The safe rollout of more renewable solar, cheaper energy across Victoria also has benefits for my community of Merri-bek in Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West. As the Minister for the State Electricity Commission announced over the weekend, Victorians continue to save and take up renewable energy in record droves. Our Solar Homes program has helped slash \$1 billion off the installation of solar panels, energy-efficient heat pumps and batteries, with 30 per cent of Victorian homes now having installed solar. More than 300,000 solar panels have been installed through the landmark Solar Homes program, and that is generating 2100 megawatts of solar power from rooftops, the equivalent of Loy Yang A, one of the largest coal-fired power stations in Victoria. Last year was a record for Solar Homes, with more than 78,000 solar panels, hot-water systems and batteries

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installed during 2024 – the largest year on record. Combined with the Victorian energy upgrades program, the VEU, which is providing a discount on energy-efficient appliances ranging from cooktops to heat pumps, Victorians are collectively saving a further \$440 million.

In my community and my electorate we have had a very strong uptake of installations via the Solar Homes program – 2460 solar homes installations. One of those homes that very much set the pace locally when it comes to renewable and cheaper energy is that of Katy Daily in Coburg. Minister D'Ambrosio and I visited Katy's wonderful home in Coburg back in October 2023, with Katy having installed solar panels, a solar hot-water system, insulation and double-glazed windows back in 2021. When we talk about the Solar Homes program and how it can benefit and save households money, we need to look no further than Katy, because she has not paid a power bill since upgrading her house – zero-dollar power bills. That is Katy in Coburg. I thank Katy for having hosted us in her beautiful home and commend her for her broader ongoing local environmental advocacy that she undertakes.

Building on the incredible efforts of people like Katy, I am also very pleased to have announced we have secured Merri-bek as one of the first LGAs to welcome the rollout of the new SEC consumer pilot. The pilot is very much the next step in delivering that one-stop shop for local consumers wanting to switch to all-electric. The SEC pilot in Merri-bek will include a free digital platform that walks you through a short survey about your home and energy use, then tailors a plan to cut your energy bill through electrification. The pilot includes suggestions for locals on suitable appliances, indicative costs, return on investment, government rebates, emission reductions and much more. That is support, advice and assistance that people may need to transition. Regardless of their background or their income, the SEC pilot will be there to help people across Merri-bek.

All of these measures stand in very stark contrast to those of the Liberal–Nationals, who oppose this bill. When it comes to energy, the Liberals can tell you all about what they oppose and stand against but not what they stand for. Whether it is this bill or whether it is the solar power program, wind generation or bringing back the SEC, make no mistake, the Liberals will seek to cut all of our renewable projects, and they will sell off the SEC again. While they claim to be critical –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### **Arthurs Seat Eagle redevelopment**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (19:00): (1011) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to properly engage with the local community in Arthurs Seat and Dromana before making a decision on the planning application for the Arthurs Seat Eagle redevelopment. As the member for Nepean and Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport, Events and Hospitality, I fully appreciate the vital role tourism plays on the Mornington Peninsula, and continued investment in the sector is essential for attracting visitors, supporting local businesses and creating jobs. The Mornington Peninsula, as we all know, is a premier destination. It draws visitors from right across Victoria and beyond with its stunning landscapes, pristine beaches and vibrant local culture. Recently I went up to the top of Arthurs Seat and met with members of Save Our Seat to discuss their concerns around the proposed redevelopment of the Arthurs Seat Eagle. I want to thank Kylie, Alison, Tony and Jane for taking the time to walk me through the issues.

The Arthurs Seat Eagle is an important attraction. It attracts 260,000 visitors annually from Victoria, Australia and overseas, and while it is an important attraction for our local tourism economy, any development must prioritise the ecological preservation of the surrounding natural environment. Investment in tourism is welcome, but not at the expense of what makes our region special. The unique

blend of beach, bay and mountains is why so many people choose to live on the peninsula. The natural environment matters deeply to the people who reside in Nepean. After visiting the site, I believe the proposed luge from the summit to the base of Arthurs Seat does not enhance that environment, it detracts from it. While discussions about upgrading the summit station are worth considering, significant investment in a project should not come at the cost of local voices being ignored.

A thriving tourism sector boosts employment, strengthens local businesses and enhances our region's vitality; however, tourism development must reflect the needs and values of local communities. Proper engagement with residents will ensure that any project not only attracts visitors but also preserves and enhances the quality of life for those who call the peninsula home.

**Bellarine electorate road safety**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:02): (1012) Last month the *Road Safety Action Plan 2* was launched to support the reduction of road trauma on Victorian roads by delivering life-saving road strategy infrastructure and reducing high-risk behaviours. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek from the minister is to provide an update on how this road safety action plan will support road users' safety for the electorate of the Bellarine.

I have been really pleased to see further works across the Bellarine to improve our road and pedestrian safety, and this does include a few works I would like to mention. There are new wombat crossings – they are raised pedestrian crossings – for Ocean Grove at the roundabout at Thacker Street, Shell Road and Tuckfield Street. This will improve the safety for many using the sporting facilities nearby, for students walking to school and for the nearby bus stop. We have improved safety at the Bay Shore Avenue and Jetty Road roundabout. This is better for pedestrians and boaters entering the Clifton Springs boat harbour. We are upgrading the Barwon Heads Road and Staceys Road intersection, with a new roundabout coming at a very dangerous intersection, and upgrades are underway through federal government funding for Grubb Road and Murradoc Road. Bellarine Highway will have further works, including rail safety guards installed and resurfacing between Wallington and Leopold. This is a lot of investment, but I and others still see incredibly dangerous and risky behaviour on our roads. I know that this government is committed to addressing the fatality statistics with the road safety action plan, and I look forward to sharing information with my electorate on how this will save lives on our roads.

**Wild dog control**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (19:04): (1013) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to undertake and publish a full audit of dingo licensees in Victoria, including and in addition to those that hold dingoes in relation to cultural heritage purposes. Included in that audit I ask that there is full disclosure regarding the number of licensees and dingo holders for cultural purposes in my electorate of Lowan but also across the state; the postcode of these licensees and other dingo holders; the number of dingoes held at each site; the full results of inspections by the conservation regulator, which is mandatory as part of the licensing requirements; the number of dingoes that have been released to the wild, including the location that those dingoes were released; the number of dingoes that have been chipped at each site; and the number of dingoes of whereabouts currently unknown.

Wild dogs or dingoes are something that is of enormous sensitivity to my electorate of Lowan, and I note that the member for Mildura is also in the chamber – we are both members of regions that are impacted by the area that formerly was able to be managed as part of the wild dog management zone. It is important to note at the outset that this zone was not 'kill all wild dogs within this zone'; it was simply a way to manage any wild dogs that were heading out of the national park area towards livestock areas, towards built-up areas, and was a perimeter control situation where trappers who were very experienced in tracking these wild dogs, or dingoes as they now classified, would help to protect sheep and lambs. That is now not undertaken; in fact it is banned. We have had nearly 600 sheep and lambs mauled in north-west Victoria since the unprotection order was removed. In the past four weeks I have had one landholder by the name of Alan Bennett who has lost 15 sheep and lambs. There is still

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no fencing, and during the fires in Little Desert the locals were absolutely shocked to find that only a week earlier dingoes had been seen in the Little Desert National Park.

There are concerns there is a breeding program and dingoes are being released. Given that we have got huge numbers of stock being mauled in my electorate, it is devastating to locals to think that the government is supporting these activities. They want transparency. Hindmarsh Shire Council has no knowledge of these licensees to breed dingoes in the area. I ask the government to undertake these orders and make the results public for the certainty of my community.

### Westall–Rowan roads, Dingley Village

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (19:07): (1014) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the black spot project at Westall Road and Rowan Road in Dingley Village. This intersection has long been recognised by residents as well as the City of Kingston and the City of Greater Dandenong and the department as a critical concern due to its record of serious accidents, frequent crashes and fatalities. Local schools including Kingswood Primary School and Dingley Primary School and the wider community have reiterated those concerns, stressing the urgent need for action.

So in June last year we were delighted to learn the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning was successful in the application for federal government black spot funding towards the Westall Road and Rowan Road intersection. This is a fantastic result, with more than \$1.1 million secured under the black spot program for 2024–25. The proposed treatment at the intersection will install traffic signals to control right-turn movement into Rowan Road linked to both existing nearby pedestrian-operated signals and nearby signals at Springvale Road and include new pavement marking, signage and LED upgrades. This is a great result, and this will significantly improve road safety for Dingley Village and Springvale South residents, schools, families and all road users. I commend the minister and look forward to her response.

### TrialHub

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (19:08): (1015) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is to reassure the people of Mildura the TrialHub will continue past June 2025. The funding for the existing program is due to finish in June of this year, and we are urgently seeking a commitment from the state government that it will continue, because it has been a vital part of cancer treatment in our part of the world. Given the restrictions that are now upon schemes like the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme and the government's resistance to paying for taxis even when we do not have public transport out to our airport and complications like this and the length of time it takes to get reimbursed, something like TrialHub at the Mildura Base Public Hospital is so vitally important. People in Mildura are writing to me to ask that I push for reassurance, because there are people in the middle of clinical trials at the moment through TrialHub at the hospital that are not sure and they do not need that added stress of not knowing whether their clinical trial is going to continue in Mildura, a place that is their home, or they will have to travel to the Alfred. I know firsthand how important this is. My mother-in-law has had to relocate to Melbourne so that she can seek treatment for cancer at the Alfred hospital.

There are many like Lisa. Lisa has blood cancer, and thanks to a clinical trial treatment, she is able to live a relatively normal life. She has had two years of travelling back and forth to Melbourne, but with TrialHub's support, she is able to live a relatively normal life. TrialHub has been heavily supported by Mildura Base Public Hospital to deliver this. There has been workforce upskilling, which is invaluable to our community, communications support and implementing the new model at Mildura Base Public Hospital, so they can deliver these clinical trials alongside a metro hospital, the Alfred, which reduces the need for community members to travel. Let us be honest, if you cannot afford the \$1100 on average that it costs to fly, then you are sitting on a bus and a train for up to 13 hours, and anyone that is seriously ill does not want to be doing that. I mean, no-one wants to be doing that, much less when you are uncomfortable because you are so ill.

So we are asking that the Minister for Health reassure those that are in the middle of clinical trials right now or that are potentially looking at becoming eligible for a clinical trial, like the T cell trial that my mother-in-law is currently on, that it can continue at TrialHub at Mildura Base Public Hospital.

**Greenvale electorate schools**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:11): (1016) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to join me at Greenvale Secondary College to inspect the outstanding new facilities, buildings and landscapes that this Victorian Labor government has delivered at this wonderful school as part of the second and final stage of the college's development since stage 1 was opened for the first cohort of year 7 students in 2022. Delivered thanks to a \$22.38 million investment by this government, stage 2 of Greenvale Secondary College is a truly world-class piece of education infrastructure and no less than the families and young people across Greenvale deserve. Under the leadership of foundation principal Mark Natoli, Greenvale Secondary College is building a high-quality and supportive learning culture to match its outstanding physical environment. A secondary school had been planned in Greenvale for generations, but only this government has actually delivered the investment needed to make it a reality.

While I am on my feet, I want to acknowledge all of the educators, support staff and school leaders across Craigieburn, Westmeadows, Attwood, Meadow Heights, Roxburgh Park and Greenvale, who have recommenced their incredibly impactful work for the 2025 school year. As a teacher before coming to this place, I understand the importance and the value of the work they do every day and its profound impact on young people across my community.

At the end of the 2024 school year I was thrilled to attend so many graduations, celebrations and award ceremonies across the electorate of Greenvale and to present the Greenvale leadership awards to students at each of Greenvale's wonderful schools. These prestigious awards are presented annually to a year 6 and a year 11 student at each school in the electorate who has demonstrated exceptional public service and commitment to education. It is an honour to recognise each of the winners in the Parliament of Victoria tonight and to recognise their achievements and record them for posterity: Sofia Zovko from Greenvale Secondary College, for demonstrating exceptional leadership; Dunya Dao from Roxburgh Rise Primary School, for organising and planning school assemblies; Kuze Sinsi from Roxburgh Homestead Primary, for volunteering at the school's breakfast club; Rihanna Daoud from Roxburgh Park Primary, for being a great role model for her peers; Brigham Fiu from Craigieburn South Primary, for being a role model and a leader within school sports teams; Lauren Potts from Aitken College, for helping middle and senior school events; Elyna Binil from Keelonith Primary School, for being a fantastic school captain and for demonstrating school values; Isabella Taylor from Kolbe Catholic College, for being an exceptional student wellbeing leader; Lucy Hodson from Greenvale Primary, for being an outstanding role model for her peers; Jacqob Hira from Mary Queen of Heaven Catholic Primary, for his determination and positive mindset; Isabelle Francken from St Carlo Borromeo, for her desire to make a positive impact; Mohamed Mohamed from Bethal Primary, for demonstrating great leadership; Edin Sulicic from Bethal Primary; Rose Sleiman from Good Samaritan Catholic Primary; Sura Sarhan from Roxburgh College; Shaivi Desai from Westmeadows Primary; Meron Ayshoa from Craigieburn Secondary; and Kemindi Indrasiri from Aitken College.

**Colac train station**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:14): (1017) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek from the minister is the immediate release of funds to make safe and restore the historic Colac train station. I alluded some months ago in this chamber to the secret plans to decommission the Colac train station. This government has known now for the last nearly 10 years that the Colac train station, the historical Colac train station on the Warrnambool line, was not fit for public consumption. It had been condemned. It has a demolition order on it. It currently has its chimneys being held up by safety braces, and late this afternoon in rolled

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the temporary huts from outside of the Colac community. We did not even hire them locally; they have moved them in to act as a temporary train station.

Here is a government that has overseen the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars on a train line upgrade and has failed to keep the stations up and safe and adequate. Not only that, but they have failed to manage the rolling stock, and as I have mentioned in this place before, we now have some 6000 – can you believe that, folks – fewer seats each week to Melbourne on the trains than we had before they upgraded. It is a special kind of incompetence that sees a historical train station that has been located in Colac since the 1870s fall into such disrepair that it is no longer safe to work in or for people to sit in on cold winter nights or on hot summer days to seek shelter. They are now having to sit in little site huts sprinkled through the car park, which leads to the fact that not only is there some distance between the waiting area and the platform but we have the car park, which was fairly inadequate to start with, also clogged up with several temporary huts to provide shelter for the train station.

This government says it is serious about public transport. We know the fiasco that is going on here in Melbourne, where billions of taxpayers dollars is being spent on a fanciful notion in the Suburban Rail Loop and yet something as simple as maintaining a basic country train station seems beyond the finances and capacity of this government. Minister, I urgently seek for you to do the right thing and ensure the people of Colac can access their train station safely and have toilet facilities that are available and open at all times and a train station that is befitting of a modern First World country and not some, quite frankly, ordinary show set in an asphalt car park out the back. It is not good enough. It is not dignified, and it needs repair, maintenance and upkeep immediately.

### Metro Tunnel

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (19:17): (1018) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek today is that the minister update me on the latest rounds of works on delivering the Metro Tunnel. At long last the Metro Tunnel is tracking full steam ahead for completion this year, a year ahead of schedule. The impacts it will have for westies in my electorate of Laverton will be positively transformative. How will it help westies? Let me tell you. It means more trains more often as the Sunbury line, which takes in Sunshine, Albion and Tottenham stations in my electorate, will benefit from frequent services. It means that folks that catch the train at these stations will have direct access to the five brand new stations in the CBD, with options to change between train lines at State Library and Town Hall stations for access to the city loop. It means that our tireless city loop and Flinders Street stations will be freed up to enable more frequent services on their train lines across the network, including on the Werribee line, which is also important for my electorate. All of these things are a game changer if you are a commuter in Melbourne’s west. And over these next few months works are going to continue to chug along, excuse me for the pun, as the thousands of workers on this project – and a big shout-out to them in particular – drive us forward towards completion. It is why my community would greatly appreciate a small update on where these works are at.

### Montrose intersection upgrade

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:19): (1019) Montrose is a fantastic community, and residents and small businesses are hopeful that the disruption as a result of the major roadworks and intersection upgrade in Montrose will be completed soon so that life can get back on track. Sadly for all the local shop traders, life has been very hard as the government’s Department of Transport and Planning has failed to provide them any financial compensation, despite these businesses demonstrating significant financial loss as a result of more than 12 months of disruption from the roadworks. Unfortunately, a number of much-loved local shops made the hard decision to close altogether, which has impacted local jobs. It is why I would like to see the government now commit to supporting Montrose shop traders to financially recover once the works are fully completed, the machinery has moved on and the construction works are all gone. I am appealing to the transport department: do not just move on, make good and help Montrose recover.

At a recent Montrose intersection upgrade stakeholder reference group meeting, on behalf of the community I did ask the transport department if they could add a new final phase of the project, that being an advertising and marketing campaign, including store vouchers to help entice people back to shopping in Montrose and help Montrose shop traders to recover and rebuild their businesses and employ more staff again. The action I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to outline a detailed plan that includes funding for a marketing and advertising campaign and a voucher program to support Montrose shop traders to recover and rebuild once the Montrose intersection project works are fully completed. It would provide the much-needed economic boost that these small businesses need. After more than 12 months of significant disruption as a result of the government's road project here, these small family business operators, their workers and our community deserve at least that, especially now that the government's department of transport has disappointingly stopped face-to-face stakeholder reference group meetings for the Montrose intersection upgrade project, which is really limiting community engagement in these final stages of the project. I look forward to a positive response from the minister for the Montrose community.

### **Small-scale livestock farming**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:21): (1020) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is that the minister provides me an update on how the Victorian government will support farmers whose livelihoods are at threat from the recent decision taken by the Hardwicks abattoir in Kyneton to cease taking small meat-processing orders. Livestock farmers across our region are facing a crisis. The only abattoir that offered them small-scale service kills has closed its doors to them, favouring meat for export instead. Without this facility, so many Victorians risk not being able to access meat grown in our region, particularly beef. This affects our butchers, restaurants and tourism operators as well as our hardworking farmers.

Yesterday I tabled a petition calling for action to address this issue. 2428 people signed the petition online, with a further 350 signing hard copies. It calls on the government to urgently consider recommendation 27 in the recent report on securing the Victorian food supply and to work with industry to find solutions that ensure ongoing access to service kill facilities for small livestock producers. It also calls on our government to help enable the growth of mobile and microabattoirs on farms. These changes would support the survival of small-scale livestock farmers across our region and state.

I note that Agriculture Victoria have developed an e-guide advising what is involved in establishing an on-farm small-scale fixed abattoir or mobile abattoir, including advice on the regulatory pathways, approvals and other relevant requirements. This is a helpful step to support producers, but we need more. I want to sincerely thank Tammi Jonas, Jessie Power and the team at the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance for advocating so strongly on this issue and rallying support.

Abattoirs are critical infrastructure. They support the livelihoods of our livestock farmers and butchers across Ripon, including Deb Hancock from the Fat Butcher in Inglewood, Carly Noble from Parkside Run Farm in Arnold, Will Bennett and Emma Horsburgh from Pig and Earth Farm in Kingston and Michael and Lana de Kort from Long View Farm & Meats in Clunes, just to name a few. If they do not have access to local abattoirs, farmers are forced to send their animals further afield to be processed. More time on the road impacts animal welfare and risks undermining farm viability. That is why this issue is so important, and I eagerly await the minister's response.

### **Responses**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:24): The member for Nepean has an adjournment matter for the Minister for Planning for her to engage meaningfully with the local community in Arthurs Seat and surrounds regarding the Arthurs Seat Eagle redevelopment. The member for Bellarine has called on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, asking the minister how the road safety strategy will support the Bellarine. The member for Lowan has an adjournment matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action

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she is seeking is to undertake a full audit of dingo licences. The member for Clarinda has an adjournment matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to provide a black spot update relating to his local community. The member for Mildura has a matter for the Minister for Health regarding an update and reassurances about the ongoing funding for TrialHub. The member for Greenvale has an adjournment matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education to join the member on a tour of stage 2 of the building works at Greenvale Secondary College.

The member for Polwarth has a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport to immediately release funds to restore the historic Colac rail station. The member for Laverton has a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, seeking an update on the works of the Metro Tunnel benefiting her community, which is a year ahead of schedule. The member for Evelyn has a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and has sought an outline of a detailed plan for the support of local traders after the significant upgrade at an intersection along Montrose Road. The member for Ripon has an adjournment matter for the Minister for Agriculture seeking an update on how the Victorian government will support local livestock farmers and communities regarding the closure of a local abattoir facility.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:25 pm.**