



**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 5 March 2025**

**By authority of the Victorian Government Printer**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

| Member                              | Region                     | Party  | Member                        | Region                     | Party  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>          | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib    | Luu, Trung                    | Western Metropolitan       | Lib    |
| Batchelor, Ryan                     | Southern Metropolitan      | ALP    | Mansfield, Sarah              | Western Victoria           | Greens |
| Bath, Melina                        | Eastern Victoria           | Nat    | McArthur, Bev                 | Western Victoria           | Lib    |
| Berger, John                        | Southern Metropolitan      | ALP    | McCracken, Joe                | Western Victoria           | Lib    |
| Blandthorn, Lizzie                  | Western Metropolitan       | ALP    | McGowan, Nick                 | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib    |
| Bourman, Jeff                       | Eastern Victoria           | SFFP   | McIntosh, Tom                 | Eastern Victoria           | ALP    |
| Broad, Gaelle                       | Northern Victoria          | Nat    | Mulholland, Evan              | Northern Metropolitan      | Lib    |
| Copsey, Katherine                   | Southern Metropolitan      | Greens | Payne, Rachel                 | South-Eastern Metropolitan | LCV    |
| Crozier, Georgie                    | Southern Metropolitan      | Lib    | Puglielli, Aiv                | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Greens |
| Davis, David                        | Southern Metropolitan      | Lib    | Purcell, Georgie              | Northern Victoria          | AJP    |
| Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>         | Western Metropolitan       | Lib    | Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup> | Northern Metropolitan      | Greens |
| Erdogan, Enver                      | Northern Metropolitan      | ALP    | Shing, Harriet                | Eastern Victoria           | ALP    |
| Ermacora, Jacinta                   | Western Victoria           | ALP    | Somyurek, Adem <sup>6</sup>   | Northern Metropolitan      | Ind    |
| Ettershank, David                   | Western Metropolitan       | LCV    | Stitt, Ingrid                 | Western Metropolitan       | ALP    |
| Galea, Michael                      | South-Eastern Metropolitan | ALP    | Symes, Jaclyn                 | Northern Victoria          | ALP    |
| Gray-Barberio, Anasina <sup>3</sup> | Northern Metropolitan      | Greens | Tarlamis, Lee                 | South-Eastern Metropolitan | ALP    |
| Heath, Renee                        | Eastern Victoria           | Lib    | Terpstra, Sonja               | North-Eastern Metropolitan | ALP    |
| Hermans, Ann-Marie                  | South-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib    | Tierney, Gayle                | Western Victoria           | ALP    |
| Leane, Shaun                        | North-Eastern Metropolitan | ALP    | Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee           | Northern Victoria          | PHON   |
| Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>        | South-Eastern Metropolitan | LP     | Watt, Sheena                  | Northern Metropolitan      | ALP    |
| Lovell, Wendy                       | Northern Victoria          | Lib    | Welch, Richard <sup>7</sup>   | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib    |

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> DLP until 25 March 2024

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 5 March 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**Level crossing removals**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 71 signatures:

The Petition of the certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the fact that the residents of Moonee Ponds and Essendon have been ignored in their please to have the dangerous and congested level crossings in the area replaced

The Petitioners therefore request that; 1) the railway track between Maribynong Road and Glenbervie station be lowered, utilising the “rail-under-road” solution for the dangerous and congested level crossings at Puckle and Park Streets and the dangerous underpass at Mt Alexander Road, 2) release the current plans for dealing with the dangerous and congested level crossings at Puckle and Park Streets as agreed to by cabinet in Feb 2018 (site report) and in March 2021 (Initial feasibility assessment) and 3) release all FOI requested data relating to level crossing removal in the Melbourne Metropolitan area which is costing Victoria taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars to stop its release to the public.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers*

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Managing Disruptions Affecting Victoria’s Public Transport Network, March 2025  
(Ordered to be published).

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 3 March 2025 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Albert Park.

Order of 3 March 2025 giving approval to the granting of a license at Lake Boort Wildlife Reserve.

Fire Rescue Victoria – Report, 2023–24.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 2.

*Production of documents*

**Suburban Rail Loop**

**The Clerk:** I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 3 March 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 5 February 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to the Suburban Rail Loop risk register. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond to item 2(a) of the order and that the government will endeavour to provide a response as soon as possible. The letter further states that item 2(b) of the order prospectively seeks documents not yet in existence and therefore is not within the powers of the Parliament.

**Health services**

**The Clerk:** I table a letter from the Treasurer dated 3 March 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 29 May 2024 on the motion of Ms Crozier relating to the amalgamations of Victoria’s health services. The government have identified 26 documents within the scope of the order and make a claim of executive privilege over one document in part and 24 documents in full. I further table one document in full and one document in part and schedules of the identified documents.

***Business of the house*****Notices****Notices of motion given.*****Members statements*****Sydney Road Street Party**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): Let me just say what a weekend it was on Sydney Road. The Sydney Road Street Party brought Brunswick to life once again with music, food and the unmistakable energy of our incredible community. It was a joy to join my colleague the member for Pascoe Vale at our stall where we celebrated all things local, including handing out native plants to help bring more greenery to our streets and to our homes. Sydney Road has always been the beating heart of Brunswick and on Sunday it was on full display, even despite the inclement weather, can I just say. Families, friends and visitors packed the streets, enjoyed the live performances, delicious eats and of course the rich local culture that makes the area so special. From long-time locals to first-timers, everyone came together to celebrate what makes this place truly unique. We had the chance to talk to many parents at our stall, and they were so grateful about the \$400 school saving bonus and how it helped their kids settle into the new school year. Let me take this opportunity to give a shout-out to the organisers, the volunteers and the brilliant community groups who made this day possible. Events like this remind us that Sydney Road has always been more than just a street – it is a community, a meeting place and a symbol of the creativity, diversity and vibrancy of Brunswick.

**Eritrean community**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): In the last fortnight I was honoured to attend the Awate awards ceremony hosted by the Eritrean community language school in Ascot Vale, which was attended by various Eritrean elders, parents, women, young people and children. This event was a celebration of the outstanding achievements of the 2024 VCE, International Baccalaureate and university student graduates of the Eritrean community, a gorgeous evening of shared pride for the emerging leaders from this community. The Awate awards ceremony highlights the important role language schools play in our communities and for children and young people, not just in preserving culture and heritage but in fostering a deep sense of belonging and identity in a world that insists that they conform. Community language schools help strengthen communities, bring families together, support new arrivals and provide culturally safe spaces for students. Language is more than a means of communication; it is a bridge to history. According to the United Nations, a language is lost every two weeks, and with it a whole cultural and intellectual heritage. As someone for whom English is their second language, I commend the young Eritrean people who believe in the importance of connecting to their roots through their mother tongue. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Mr Al-Amin Idris, the principal of the Eritrean Community School, for his unwavering commitment to education and his community. Thank you for all that you do. I look forward to the continued success of his students. Shukran, Ramadan Mubarak to this wonderful community in Northern Metro. It was a pleasure.

**RSPCA Victoria**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): I rise to speak about the free pet food pantry at my Doncaster electorate office, which is to support community members struggling with the rising cost of living. For many families, pets are cherished companions, but financial pressures are forcing some people to make really heartbreaking decisions to surrender their pets. By providing free pet food we can help ease the burden, keeping pets where they belong, with their forever families. This initiative is made possible through a partnership with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, otherwise known as the RSPCA, a community-based charity dedicated to preventing animal cruelty. A member of RSPCA Australia since 1871, RSPCA Victoria is an integral part of the nation's leading animal welfare network, with over 90 per cent of its funding coming from generous

community support. Through its inspectorate, animal care centres, vet clinics, advocacy and outreach programs, RSPCA Victoria plays a vital role in protecting and caring for animals across the state. With their support, the pet food pantry at my office will provide free food for cats, dogs and other animals to those in need. I encourage anyone facing difficulty feeding their pets to please come and visit our pet food pantry or contact my office for assistance.

**Medicinal cannabis**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:52): Last Saturday the amendment to the Road Safety Act 1986 moved by Legalise Cannabis Victoria finally took effect. How we deal with people taking a lawfully prescribed medication that is also an illicit drug has been an issue since 2016, when medicinal cannabis was made legal. Before Saturday medicinal cannabis patients had no ability to defend themselves against a mandatory loss of licence. Our amendment proposed the sensible solution of simply allowing a magistrate to exercise discretion to not cancel the licence of a Victorian medicinal cannabis patient who tests positive for the presence of THC while driving unimpaired. The reform was supported by all members of this chamber present at the time except for Mr Bourman from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party Victoria. We are already aware of a case yesterday which fulfilled the objectives of the reform, with licence preserved and no conviction recorded. The driver in question, a truckie, relies on medicinal cannabis as an alternative to the opioid Endone to relieve the symptoms of pain and arthritis. Yesterday's court decision means he does not have to lose his livelihood, nor does he have to compromise his health. You can imagine his relief and that of patients across the state and nationally who are watching this small but important reform. This change is not a silver bullet, but it is a good interim measure which provides natural justice for medicinal cannabis patients. LCV will continue to campaign for the rights of cannabis consumers, be it on the road, in the workplace or in their private and social lives.

**Russia–Ukraine war**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I recently had the great honour of attending the Ukraine Crisis Appeal charity concert at the Collins Street Baptist Church. Emceed by the talented Amy Lehpamer and featuring many special acts, including, to name just a few, the Cheremosh Ukrainian youth association choir; Markiyan Melnychenko, accompanied by Stewart Kelly; Catgut and Air, with their new song *Sunflowers*; and the Homin Ukrainian men's choir. We also heard from the Reverend Simon Carey Holt, pastor at Collins Street; His Eminence Cardinal Mykola Bychok, bishop for Ukrainian Catholics in our region; His Excellency Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Ukrainian ambassador to Australia; and Diahanna Senko, chair of the Ukraine Crisis Appeal. The concert was held to mark the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but of course the war first started 11 years ago with the invasion of Crimea. Since that time hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have tragically lived the words of their national anthem, laying down their souls and bodies for their freedom. Millions have been displaced. Over the past few days I have been horrified to witness certain developments, and I cannot begin to comprehend the cowardice, the arrogance and the contempt of any so-called ally to now bully Ukraine and its people in its time of greatest need. But I am proud that in this country we maintain a proud bipartisan support for Ukraine. Long may it continue. The glory and freedom of Ukraine is not yet lost, and with renewed support of countries like ours, it never will be. Slava Ukraini.

**Endometriosis Awareness Month**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:55): March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. It is estimated that one in seven women, and those assigned female at birth, live with endometriosis. That is nearly 1 million Australians, some of whom are in my own office. On average it takes six to eight years from the onset of symptoms to receive a diagnosis. The median time for surgical intervention highlights a critical issue: many women are waiting far too long. Surgery remains an essential diagnostic step for those with endometriosis, and the diagnosis itself can be a form of validation for women who have endured years of unexplained suffering. Women are commonly having more than

one surgical intervention before endo can be diagnosed. Research from Western Sydney University reveals that one in six individuals with endometriosis will lose her job due to managing the disease and 70 per cent are forced to take unpaid time off work to cope with symptoms. Endo is far from a bad period, as many men would have us believe. It perpetuates a stigma and total dismissal of women's pain that has existed for as long as we can remember. Endo is a scientifically recognised medical condition and chronic disease that affects more people than diabetes. It has been found in every major organ in the body and, as well as severe pain, can cause fatigue, poor mental health and infertility – and if Marty Sheargold wants to say otherwise, I have to say to him that I have got a spare hammer.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of three brand new schools in Clyde North: Mirniyan Primary School, Turrum Primary School and Wulerrp Secondary College. I was joined by the Minister for Education Ben Carroll for a memorable day of celebrations where we had the opportunity to engage with excited students, teachers and parents, along with the local school community. These openings mark an exciting new chapter and afford the growing Clyde North community greater opportunities to access a fantastic education close at home. Michael Galea and I have had the opportunity to visit these schools on a number of occasions during the construction and preparation stages alongside the passionate new principals. These cutting-edge facilities are designed to not only provide a top-tier education but instil a sense of pride in students, parents and the wider community. They are built to provide an environment where students can thrive and be supported as they build a solid foundation for their future.

At Mirniyan Primary School the focus is on values such as respect, care and growth. Students are encouraged to respect themselves, others and the environment, celebrating diversity and inclusivity. Turrum Primary fosters a similar ethos, emphasising respect, kindness, care and always striving to do one's best. Meanwhile Wulerrp Secondary College teaches the importance of effort, respect for all cultures and the value of working together to achieve excellence while prioritising wellbeing.

The Victorian government's commitment to education has been demonstrated by our \$16.9 billion investment over the past 10 years, which has delivered a pipeline of school infrastructure projects, including 121 new schools between 2017 and 2026. Of these schools, 91 are in Melbourne's high-growth areas, including 20 in Casey and nine in Cardinia, and we have also upgraded more than 2200 existing schools. Congratulations to the principals, founding students and staff of all these new schools, and I look forward to seeing them flourish and provide opportunities for generations to come.

### Eastern Victoria Region kindergartens

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): Last week I had the honour of officially opening the Tootgarook kindergarten, the new 99-place kinder.

Sheena Watt interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH**: Yes, great stuff, Ms Watt, who has just informed the house that she attended it, but she would not have attended the new 99-place kinder which we officially opened. It was great. We had all the kids, we had the families and we had teachers and staff. I really want to thank Susan and Cheryl and everyone at Community Kinders Plus. It is great for local families to avoid the dreaded double drop-off. We have got the kinder right on site there next to Tootgarook Primary, so as the kids go through free three- and four-year-old kinder, getting ready for primary school, they are familiar with the primary school. Leigh and the team are just next door; it is an incredible thing for the local community. Talking of kinders, I also got the chance to drop into Korumburra, the new kinder there – the 66-place Karmai kinder, also based at the primary school – and see how things have flourished there since they have opened. It is unbelievable it has already been a year and a half. It was great to see all the kids and teachers and staff there.

### Southern Lights Festival

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:59): While at Korumburra I got to catch up with the Friends of Coal Creek. It was an absolute delight to be able to announce that Shirley and all the volunteers there are receiving \$30,000 to bring back the Southern Lights Festival. It was a much-loved festival. It was not able to run last year. The year before it was a sellout, with Coal Creek packed full of locals from South Gippsland and further – an incredible event. This \$30,000 from the state government is going to see the festival come back and be able to go into the future.

### Education funding

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:59): The evidence is clear that explicit teaching and the use of systematic synthetic phonics gets results, improving our kids' ability to read and write in schools. That is what the experts tell us, that is what the report of the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the state education system found and that is why the Victorian government is implementing this style of teaching in government schools across the state, introducing our new Phonics Plus program. Developed by Victorian academic and education experts in evidence-based reading instruction, including teachers, principals and speech pathologists, it best reflects how students learn to read. We have recently announced the Allan Labor government is making a funding investment to support schools to fully implement Victoria's new approach to reading, from foundation to year 2 by the start of the 2027 school year, including a new year 1 phonics check based on the UK screening check – a short assessment that provides information to teachers on a student's phonics knowledge. The Victorian government has invested an additional \$35 billion in education over the last decade, and our recent agreement with the Albanese Labor government will ensure Victorian public schools are fully funded for the first time – the largest ever investment in Victorian public schools by the Australian government. Whether it is new schools, better classrooms or contemporary teaching resources, this Labor government is investing in what matters to teachers, to students and to parents.

### *Bills*

#### **Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment (Equity and Access) Bill 2024**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:01): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

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 Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment (Equity and Access) Bill 2024 ('the Bill').

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

##### **Overview**

###### *Background to the Bill*

In 2017 the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act was passed by the Victorian parliament, the first of its kind to be introduced in an Australian jurisdiction. The Act came into effect on 19 June 2019.

As part of the original Act, a review into its implementation and operation was required within its fifth year. In June 2023 this review was initiated by the Department of Health's Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence. The review ran for 12 months, up until July 2024, and comprised focus groups and interviews with 119 stakeholders, along with the analysis of 303 survey responses and 257 written submissions.

The review found that Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) in Victoria is operating as intended, and that access is safe. However, the review highlighted several provisions that impede access to the scheme for patients, thereby limiting their end of life choices. Whilst the review's legislated scope was restricted to the implementation and operation of the Act itself, many submissions highlighted legislative changes required to overcome significant barriers to the scheme, including:

- Removing the restriction on medical practitioners from initiating discussions about VAD

- Amending the provision of administration permits to allow patient choice of administration type, and
- Making various changes to eligibility criteria

Since the introduction of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill in 2017, all Australian states and territories (except for the Northern Territory) have introduced assisted dying schemes. The most recent was passed by the Australian Capital Territory in 2024.

These schemes provide examples of contemporary and progressive legislative provisions, which are embedded in best practice frameworks from experts in Australia and overseas. Most notable are the Tasmanian, Queensland and ACT Acts.

The changes outlined in this Bill draw on extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders including practitioners and families of those who have direct experience with the VAD process. They also draw on recommendations from the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board's annual reports, and various advocacy groups, as well as assisted dying legislation introduced by other Australian jurisdictions.

*Overview of the Bill*

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment (Equity and Access) Bill 2024 proposes several changes to the principal Act to remove current barriers to access and ensure equity for patients within the scheme.

Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying laws were nation-leading at the time of introduction. However, five years on, many people who the legislation was intended to help have been unable to access assisted dying due to barriers within the legislation itself. For those who can start the process, many find it distressing due to the design of the scheme, and many die before obtaining a permit. Evidence also suggests that relatively fewer Victorians are accessing VAD than in other jurisdictions.

The barriers in the current Victorian VAD legislation have been well-aired publicly over several years, including through the media, by relevant stakeholder groups, and by practitioners and regulatory bodies involved in VAD provision. With the recent release of the review, I am guided by these years of experience and am satisfied that whilst the scheme is operating safely, several provisions that were included out of an abundance of caution are no longer necessary.

The changes proposed cover many of those raised in consultation with stakeholders, such as removing the requirement for a time-based prognosis to death, removing the restriction on medical practitioners from initiating discussion about voluntary assisted dying, introducing nurse practitioners as co-ordinating and consulting practitioners to increase the VAD workforce and placing some obligations on practitioners who conscientiously object to voluntary assisted dying to ensure they cannot prevent people from accessing it. Importantly, the Bill also implements a three-yearly legislative review into the Act, so that it can be regularly updated in line with changing clinical practice. This could include, for example, future investigation of several emerging considerations in this space but that currently lack appropriate frameworks to support, such as access for minors and the place of voluntary assisted dying within Advanced Care Directives for individuals who lose capacity to consent to the scheme at the end of their life.

I recognise that despite the successful operation of the scheme, some members of the community remain opposed to the concept of assisted dying for religious, moral and other reasons. However, I believe that the objectives of this Bill strike the right balance between the rights of individuals to choose a dignified death, one that alleviates their intolerable suffering when living with a terminal illness or disease, and the interests and beliefs of the wider community, including families, medical practitioners and staff involved in medical care.

**Human rights issues.**

In my opinion, the human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- The right to life (section 9)
- The right to the freedom to seek, receive and impart information (section 15(2))
- The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 14)
- Equality rights (section 8)
- The best interest of children (section 17(2))

**Right to life (section 9)**

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.

The right to life, as it relates to voluntary assisted dying, has been widely discussed across many jurisdictions and human rights bodies, including throughout the statement of compatibility provided in the tabling of the

original Act. I will briefly take this opportunity to reiterate that death should be acknowledged as the final stage of life itself – and therefore how one chooses to spend their final moments is an integral aspect of one fulfilling this right. There are a number of elements proposed in this Bill which positively influence one's right to choice at the end of their life, and these are outlined below.

*Eligibility criteria*

The voluntary assisted dying framework established under the original Act was legislated in the context of Victoria being the first Australian jurisdiction to introduce such a scheme. Therefore, several eligibility criteria were included as “safeguards” against the perceived risk of coercion and other malign factors. However, evidence from sources outlined above suggest that certain ‘safeguards’ restrict a person’s right to autonomy and dignity when choosing how to approach the end of life in the context of a terminal illness, disease or medical condition.

Clause 7 of the Bill removes several eligibility criteria that restrict a person’s ability to access the scheme without justifiably protecting their right to life. This includes that the person must be an ordinary resident in Victoria and ordinarily resident for 12 months. With the introduction of legislation in all but one Australian jurisdiction, this criteria unjustly deprives a person of the autonomy at the end of life based on their residency in Victoria and does not consider the natural movements of persons between states and territories, especially at the end of their life for compassionate purposes, such as to be close to relatives and loved ones who may be providing care.

Further, clause 7 introduces a right to review by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board (the Board) in the case that an applicant does not comply with eligibility criteria on the basis that they are not an Australian citizen or permanent resident. These criteria have been shown to restrict a person’s access to legal healthcare at the end of their life based on race or nationality, thus contravening equality rights in section 8 of the Charter. There have been numerous instances of for example, people who are New Zealand citizens but are long-term residents of Australia, being denied access to voluntary assisted dying. An avenue for review through the Board provides a balanced remedy for this.

The Bill also removes the reliance on a time-based prognosis to death. Time-based prognoses within voluntary assisted dying schemes are clinically and legally problematic. Estimates of prognosis were never intended to be a legal test – rather, they are provided to patients to inform clinical care and allow patients to plan the remainder of their lives. Even experienced clinicians can have difficulty in providing certain timeframes to death, which are unpredictable and subject to change.

Given the strict time-based prognosis in the current provisions (death is expected in less than 6months, or 12months for those with neurodegenerative disease), and the inherent uncertainties associated with assessing this, it is likely that clinicians err on the side of caution and people are not gaining access to the scheme until very late in their disease. The Board has noted that this may explain why the data shows that many Victorians who start the voluntary assisted process die from their disease before they are able to access medication, thus denying these people autonomy in life.

By removing the time-based prognosis, and instead relying on clear and robust qualitative criteria, this Bill removes one of the contributors to delayed access to voluntary assisted dying. This is an approach that has also been adopted in the ACT, and is considered by many experts to adequately protect against the risk of inappropriately early application or use of voluntary assisted dying by those who should otherwise be ineligible.

Whilst some eligibility criteria have been amended or removed, the Bill balances the need to protect a person from coercion towards, or otherwise inappropriate use of, voluntary assisted dying by maintaining key eligibility criteria and assessment processes. These include that the disease must be advanced, incurable and likely to cause death, that the request and assessment progress remain multi-staged with oversight by more than one practitioner, and that oversight functions of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, Health Secretary and AHPRA, among others, remain in place. Fundamentally, the person seeking voluntary assisted dying must have capacity to provide consent, and provide that consent freely at all stages of the process.

*Choice of administration permit*

Clause 42 of the Bill sets out a new requirement, that the coordinating practitioner must consult with the person about their preferred method of administering the voluntary assisted dying substance before applying for an administration permit. Previously a person was required to self-administer the substance unless it was deemed that they were physically incapable of doing so at the time of application. The Bill proposes that a person can opt for practitioner administration, regardless of their physical capacity. The choice of how one will administer the substance, and then the act of administration itself, are some of the last choices that a person accessing assisted dying makes in their life. There have been many stories of this lack of choice causing significant distress for patients and families, including due to bureaucratic challenges and delays associated

with changing the form of administration late in the process. It is of the utmost importance that at this final life stage, undue pain and suffering is reduced. Ultimately by introducing choice, the Bill ensures that autonomy is upheld for a person as they navigate life's final stage.

***Freedom to seek, receive and impart information (section 15(2)) and freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 14)***

Section 15 of the Charter recognises that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. As previously discussed by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC), these freedoms do not extend to non-political matters, however it is my belief that the existence of voluntary assisted dying as a legal component of the health system, one that was made through purely political (state legislative) systems, thereby deems it to be political in nature. The current restriction on health practitioners from initiating a discussion with a patient about assisted dying therefore contravenes the section 15(2) right, both of the practitioner to impart information and of the patient to receive it.

The current assisted dying scheme upholds section 14 of the charter, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religious belief, but does so over the right to exchange lawful healthcare information. Where conscientious objection provisions exist across other aspects of legislated health services, it has been acknowledged that one's right to object based on religion or conscience should not act to obstruct another's right to access legitimate healthcare information. Patients should not bear the burden of managing the consequences of a practitioner's religious beliefs. If freedom of choice and autonomy and the end of one's life is to be upheld, we must strike the right balance in this regard.

Clause 5 of the Bill therefore removes the ability for a health service provider who holds a conscientious objection to refuse to provide information about voluntary assisted dying. Clause 10 then introduces a new requirement, that if a person makes a request for information about voluntary assisted dying the health service provider must provide the person with this information, including the details of the Care Navigator Service, within 2 days of the request. I believe this to be a timely and non-intrusive pathway for information provision.

Further, clause 10C of the Bill specifies that a health services provider cannot withdraw treatment from a person if they are of the belief that they have or are likely to enquire about or access assisted dying. A person's right to healthcare must be protected, even if their belief, conscience or religion differs from the service provider. This is especially important where the person resides at a facility operated by the provider. This facility is akin to the person's home, and the withdrawal of a service would have significant consequences for their quality of life. To support a person to receive care, including assessment and information, where they live, clause 10B(4) introduces that a health service provider must provide reasonable access to the required health professionals for this purpose. This does not require a service provider to participate in the assessment or the administration process in any way, especially if they hold a conscientious objection.

***Equality rights (section 8) and the best interests of children (s 17(2))***

Section 8 provides that a person has the right to recognition as a person before the law. Furthermore, the Charter specifies that 'every person has the right to enjoy his or her human rights without discrimination'. Discrimination may include prejudicial distinctions between people based on their age.

***Eligibility criteria relating to age***

The rights of children and young people to access healthcare without discrimination are inherent to section 8 of the Charter. While the capacity of a child to make decisions about their life are not universally accepted across Victorian law, the acknowledgment of children as mature minors in certain circumstances is an evolving field, especially in medical settings. In certain circumstances it may be deemed to contravene a child's section 8 right if they are to be denied access to voluntary assisted dying despite meeting all other eligibility criteria and providing free and informed consent.

However, this is an emerging legal space and balanced consideration must be given to section 17(2) of the charter, that 'every child has the right ... to such protection as in the child's best interest'. Therefore, the ability of children to access voluntary assisted dying is not directly addressed in this Bill. Instead, clause 73 requires that a legislative review of the Act is undertaken every three years, and that within this review there must be consideration of 'whether a child has decision making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying'.

*Second reading*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:01): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Today I introduce a bill to amend Victoria's voluntary assisted dying scheme to improve equity and access for all Victorians at the end of their life. At the outset, I want to extend enormous thanks to everyone who has assisted with the preparation of this bill, which has been based on extensive consultation and research for over a year. In particular, I would like to thank Dying with Dignity Victoria, Go Gentle, Dr Nick Carr and all the other practitioners and families who have shared their experiences and thoughts with us. I would also like to thank my staff, and in particular my policy adviser Georgia Lennon, who did an extraordinary job in what is an incredibly complex subject.

I remember the time when it became crystal clear to me that we needed legal voluntary assisted dying. A patient I was looking after – we'll call them 'Grace' – was an elderly woman who had an incurable condition that affected her ability to make new blood cells. We had kept her condition at bay for a couple of years with regular blood transfusions, but she was needing them more and more often, up to every few weeks. Grace experienced a number of complications from such frequent hospital visits and found the process exhausting.

One day, Grace told me she wanted to stop the transfusions – she had had enough.

We had a long discussion about what that would mean. She was going to experience a gradual drop in her red blood cell count, and she would likely experience a range of unpleasant symptoms as different organs struggled with a lack of sufficient oxygen-carrying blood cells – like breathlessness, weakness, swelling, chest pain, and confusion. It would eventually lead to her death. But it was difficult for anyone to predict how long this would take.

We also knew that treating these symptoms was going to be really challenging, but we would do our absolute best to keep her comfortable.

Grace remained resolute in her decision to stop the transfusions, but she was finding it very difficult to cope with the symptoms. Even with the best palliative care, she suffered immensely. Treatments to deal with one symptom invariably caused others that were equally – or often more – unpleasant, and so she often refused them. Her condition and her other symptoms – like breathlessness and nausea – made her extraordinarily anxious, which was only heightened by the uncertainty of how long all of this would go on for. She described to me that she had a constant and tremendous sense of unease.

Grace and her family repeatedly asked if there was any possible way we could end her suffering sooner, and the answer was no. Voluntary assisted dying was not yet legal in Victoria. Despite our best efforts to provide Grace with comfort and dignity, the reality was months of relentless distress for her and her family before she eventually died. The experience still haunts me – not so much because of Grace's suffering in itself, but because she so clearly wanted more choice and control over her death, but didn't have any legal option.

When VAD laws passed in 2017, it was a monumental occasion for Victoria and showed tremendous leadership.

I often reflect on Grace, and how access to VAD might have allowed her and her family to avoid so much distress and provided her with some control and dignity at the end of her life.

But over five years on from VAD becoming a legal option in Victoria, I also wonder whether she would have actually been able to access it.

Our VAD laws, being the first in the country, were understandably quite conservative. But many of the so-called 'safeguards' have turned out to significantly restrict access to those the laws were meant to assist, adding to distress for patients and their families, and not necessarily improving safety.

I wonder if I would have been able to let Grace know that VAD was an option. Under our laws, doctors are prohibited from raising the subject of voluntary assisted dying. This creates murky areas whereby someone – as Grace did – may ask in a general sense for their suffering to end sooner, but what if they haven’t specifically asked about voluntary assisted dying? Others might be too afraid to ask about it at all, or not even know about it. No other jurisdiction apart from South Australia has this so-called ‘gag’ clause, and it is broadly recognised that this has only served to restrict access by denying people information about a legal form of health care, preventing truly informed decision-making.

I also wonder if Grace would have been able to get through the assessment in time. Being in a regional area, we would have struggled to access the mandatory specialist review – local access to specialists willing and able to participate in VAD is limited even in metro areas, and it is illegal under federal laws to have a telehealth assessment for VAD. Travelling would have been highly distressing and practically difficult for her. By the time we got through the assessments and bureaucratic hoops she may have been too confused to give free consent. I have heard heartbreaking stories from people – especially in rural Victoria – where the rigid requirements regarding practitioner types have effectively denied them access to VAD.

Would Grace’s care facility have allowed her to access VAD on their premises? It was her home, but we know that many institutions – religious or otherwise – don’t allow it. I’ve even heard reports of some institutions preventing people from making any phone calls in case they are trying to organise VAD for themselves.

Would she have been eligible given her uncertain prognosis? Probably, although it’s difficult to know for sure. Allowing only those who have a prognosis of less than six months to access VAD means many people die of their disease before they get through the process – and Victorian data bears this out. Estimating prognosis is notoriously imprecise even for experts, and no-one wants to risk breaking the law, so to be certain that someone has less than six months to live, practitioners are likely to wait until it is very clear that death is close. Estimates of life expectancy are meant for helping clinicians plan treatment, and people to plan the rest of their lives, not as legal tests.

These are just some of the problems that have become apparent over the years with Victoria’s VAD laws. They have been repeatedly highlighted by the VAD review board in their annual reports, by clinicians involved in VAD, advocacy groups, and importantly, by patients and their families who have navigated – or tried to navigate – the system. All other Australian jurisdictions apart from the Northern Territory now have their own laws in place, and they’ve learned from the Victorian experience. We are now the national laggard when it comes to access and equity.

Now, we have the long-awaited five-year review into the laws, which clearly spells out a range of legislative changes required.

Which is why the Greens are tabling this bill today. We understand that the government recently committed to improving the laws, something we truly welcome. As stated, our bill draws on extensive consultation and research, and we would urge the government to support our proposed changes.

Firstly, the bill makes a number of changes to the scheme’s eligibility criteria.

It removes the requirement that a person must have been a Victorian resident for at least 12 months prior to application. Australian citizenship and permanent residency requirements are maintained but an explicit avenue for review is established through application to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board. The board will be able to determine if there are special circumstances warranting an exemption, for example, for New Zealand citizens who are long-term residents in Australia.

Further, the bill removes the requirement for a time-based prognosis to death, whilst maintaining qualitative prognosis criteria: that a person’s condition must be incurable, advanced, progressive, expected to cause death and causing intolerable suffering. This not only brings Victoria into line with VAD legislation in the ACT, it is clinically and legally more sound.

Secondly, the bill removes the ‘gag clause’. Registered health practitioners, social workers and counsellors will have the ability to raise voluntary assisted dying within the context of providing relevant clinical care for a person. The practitioner must be satisfied that the person understands the treatment options available and likely outcomes of treatments, including palliative care options.

Thirdly, the bill makes important changes to the voluntary assisted dying workforce, including enabling nurse practitioners to act as coordinating or consulting practitioners and amending the minimum requirements of health practitioners to improve accessibility to consultations, especially in regional and rural Victoria.

Fourthly, whilst the bill upholds a practitioner’s right to refuse to participate in voluntary assisted dying on the basis of a conscientious objection, such practitioners will now have an obligation to provide information about voluntary assisted dying on the request of a person, including the details of the care navigator service. This brings VAD in line with most other jurisdictions, and mirrors similar provisions outlined in the Abortion Law Reform Act 2008.

Further, the bill specifies that healthcare services that hold an objection must not withdraw a service from a person on the basis that they believe that they have made or are likely to make an application for VAD.

And finally, on the request of a person, health service providers must allow reasonable access to a health practitioner, witness or nominated person for the purpose of accessing voluntary assisted dying. This provision does not require that an employee at that service who holds a conscientious objection to take part in the provision of voluntary assisted dying, but ensures that in settings where providers are limited – for example, in some parts of rural Victoria where the majority of aged care providers are denominational – a person is not impeded from their right to choose assisted dying.

Fifth, the bill makes amendments to remove the default assumption that a person must self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance unless physically incapable of doing so. Instead, in collaboration with their coordinating practitioner, a patient will have a choice between self-administration and administration by their coordinating practitioner. The current laws, which have self-administration as the default option, with no option to change this quickly or easily, have led to highly distressing situations for some patients and their families at the time of administration.

The bill then makes a number of minor amendments to the functions of the review board, decreases the time that must elapse between the first and final requests and establishes a number of record-keeping requirements for practitioners.

Finally, the bill establishes a mandatory, ongoing legislative review every three years – something missing from the original act. It also proposes that the review must consider several emerging themes within the assisted dying space that have been explored in international jurisdictions but require further consideration in our own context. These include challenging areas, like accessing VAD in the event someone loses capacity to consent, or access for those under 18 who demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions.

We know that this is an issue where clinical and legal practice, as well as social understanding, will continue to evolve. We will continue to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions. We know that this may not always be something the government of the day wishes to prioritise. So building in a requirement for periodic legislative reviews is important to ensure that we don’t again end up in the position we are in today.

I hope that all members of this Parliament will consider supporting this bill, which in addressing inequitable and unnecessary barriers to access to voluntary assisted dying, would once again see Victoria leading the way. And it would ensure that people like Grace could be afforded choice and dignity at the end of their lives.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

*Production of documents*

**Native bird hunting**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:14): I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all documents relating to Victoria's native bird hunting arrangements, including but not limited to:

- (1) the 2025 season arrangements, including all communication between the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Game Management Authority with the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, the Minister for Environment and the Premier;
- (2) the commissioning of the report and research by Dr Thomas Prowse to inform setting sustainable game duck harvests, including correspondence between Dr Prowse, the Game Management Authority and relevant departments;
- (3) the decision to close off preseason consultation with animal welfare, science and advocacy organisations ahead of the 2025 season;
- (4) the specific science that informed the decision to keep the pink-eared duck and hardhead on the game species list for 2025;
- (5) any correspondence regarding why the new mandatory training for shooters does not apply to existing licence-holders;
- (6) any advice received regarding the potential impact of avian influenza on native waterbird numbers across eastern Australia; and
- (7) the Game Management Authority's abundance estimate helicopter survey for game ducks in Victoria for 2024.

This is a documents motion in relation to the government's recent decision to have one of the worst duck-shooting seasons that we have seen in recent years, just one year on from ignoring their very own parliamentary inquiry, which they not only established but chaired, which told them to ban duck shooting – and then they ultimately said no. One year on it is unbelievable to see how backwards we have gone when it comes to protecting our native waterbirds, which the committee found desperately need help. One of the things that we could have done, the easiest thing that we could have done, is to ban duck shooting. This motion calls for a range of documents in relation to the government's recent decision to have a full duck-shooting season. It has been a long time since we have had a full-length duck-shooting season in Victoria because, guess what, there are no birds. The eastern Australian waterbird survey recently found that we have 50 per cent less birds and that birds are not breeding, yet Jacinta Allan and Steve Dimopoulos have gone out and called a full-length season. But not to worry, they left one bird off the bag limit, so instead of a bag limit of 10, we have a bag limit of nine. Thankfully, the minister this year did not ignore his department's advice like he did last year, and the blue-winged shoveler has been taken off the game list.

We are asking for documents that relate to this decision because it is the first season that we have had under this adaptive harvest model that the government has been talking about for a really long time. They describe it as our friend. They say this model is our friend. I would say it is their friend, because it has not been peer reviewed and it shuts out a range of stakeholders that were previously consulted when it came to making decisions around duck shooting in Victoria. They have made this decision under this incredible adaptive harvest model that apparently will monitor the conditions for decades to come and allow us to make the most sustainable decisions. If this is the decision that they are making when we have 50 per cent less waterbirds, that we get basically a full-length season, then I would hate to see what it would look like in ordinary times.

We are asking for the helicopter data because we are confused by this decision. The most obvious one is the eastern Australian waterbird survey that I just spoke about, where we are 25 per cent below the long-term average and 50 per cent less than the year before. We also asking for the sustainability model by Dr Thomas Prowse. I would note that there was some information relating to Dr Thomas Prowse's modelling and a calculator, but it has since been taken off the Game Management Authority's website. It might have been put back on since we raised it. Not to worry, the shooters association left it up, but the regulator did not.

It is incredible to see that the government has based basically their entire decision around this model and yet it has not been peer reviewed. It is also flawed for many reasons, including the fact that it is based on four of the more robust species of waterbirds. It does not acknowledge the illegal shooting of protected species, consistently high wounding rates or the cultural significance of the sites where duck shooting occurs. Basically, the terms of reference of the parliamentary inquiry do not consider those; they do not matter anymore, apparently, under our new Premier.

Just on the note of wounding, we are seeking some documents relating to this new training, this amazing training that will only apply to new shooters. Existing shooters were analysed as part of the parliamentary inquiry and it found noncompliance in wounding – wounding, for those who are not familiar with the term, is when a bird is shot but does not die. They can suffer for weeks on end on the wetlands and slowly die of predation, infection or drowning. The parliamentary inquiry found that that can be up to around 40 per cent of birds shot. Now, the government has decided as part of their commonsense reforms, as they call them, that training for wounding will only apply to new licences, despite this happening under the existing fraternity. I mean, I am going to be amazed how that new training is going to address the problem at hand. We are asking for the documents on that.

We are also asking for the documents that relate to the seven species of duck that are permitted to be shot. Particularly we want to know about pink-headed ducks and hardheads, because they are prohibited to be shot in South Australia based on worrying population trends but not here in Victoria, where the government has taken on one of my favourite terms that the shooters love to say to us: 'If it flies, it dies.' We are also asking for the documents relating to preseason consultation. That is because, and I have spoken about this before, previously many different parts of the community – experts, scientists, environmentalists, animal welfare groups – were invited to consult with the government on the duck-shooting season, but not this year. They were shut out under this incredible adaptive harvest model because it is clear the government wants to be in an echo chamber now that they have made this decision and they want to ignore the science.

We are seeking these documents because the government has just made one of the most reckless decisions that they have ever made when it comes to the safety of our native waterbirds, and we will never, ever let them forget that or forgive them for that. I commend this motion to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:20): I also rise to speak on motion 854 put forward to us today by Ms Purcell, and in doing so I acknowledge her sincere passion and advocacy on this matter. Indeed as a fellow member of the select committee which Ms Purcell mentioned, with a few other members I see in the chamber today as well, it was a very interesting opportunity to dive in and engage in a considerable amount of detail on this issue. Whilst my views are well ventilated and well known, I have also been clear throughout that, as with all committee inquiries, it is the role then of government as the executive to make its determination in response to those recommendations. We are therefore in the position today where we have had the recent announcement about the next three years of native bird hunting in Victoria, with the motion before us today from Ms Purcell seeking a number of documents in relation to that decision and to some broader topics surrounding it. I note, as is standard practice in this house, that the government will not be opposing today's motion by Ms Purcell.

I will briefly share a few comments on some of the topics, particularly on what was actually canvassed in that inquiry. Firstly, on the question of sustainability, one of the stand-outs for me from that inquiry

was that it is plainly evident that shooting birds out of the sky is going to have an impact on reducing those numbers. But what we did see was that by far the predominant factors that lead to variances in bird numbers are actually climate change and land use policies. They remain the most threatening things for our native bird populations, as indeed with other native species in this country as well.

I do note that for the first three years the seasonal harvest quota will be set at 10 per cent, which is at the lower end of the adaptive harvest model range. One of the things coming into the inquiry was we were not operating under the adaptive harvest model. We were operating under the interim harvest model. It will be witnessed through the evidence this year and from next year and the year after how the adaptive harvest model works.

Particularly, though, I do want to touch on the question of wounding – a very, very important topic, and one that we are obviously all very anxious to avoid and reduce. Ms Purcell in her contribution mentioned that the wounding rate is up to 40 per cent. One of the difficulties in getting that data is that the evidence showed it was anywhere up to 40 per cent or as little as 6 per cent, but of course any wounding rate is still far too high. We were given very clear assurances by proponents of native bird hunting that wounding rates will be able to come down and that the adaptive harvest model will be a key part of delivering that. Really now for this year and for the following two years as well it is seeing the proof of that and seeing the efforts of those hunters to follow through on their commitments and show some demonstrable improvement in wounding rates.

I note in terms of licensing as well that from this year all new licence-holders will be required to go through the wounding training that Ms Purcell referred to, and from next year any existing holder who is renewing a licence will also be required to go through that training. That training of course will also be an important part of doing everything that can be done if we are to continue this activity – which many Victorians have told us they wish to continue doing – in the most sustainable and most humane way possible. Ultimately of course the outcomes of the wounding rates will be the determinant for where we land on that.

I have mentioned previously in this chamber many of the groups that are engaged with this issue, as it comes up each year. I note the incredible work that many agencies, including Wildlife Victoria, do in responding to wounded birds up on the wetlands: the work that they do, the volunteer hours that they put in going in to protect as many birds as they can and to prevent painful situations and the painful drawn-out deaths of those birds. There are many groups that do considerable work. As I said, the government has a clear plan to reduce wounding and to improve the sustainability of native bird hunting in Victoria, and we will see in the next three years that model implemented.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:25): I rise today on behalf of the Nationals and the Liberals to not oppose this short-form documents motion, as is the practice in the house. In fact I am quite interested to see some of the eventualities of these documents being produced but probably for the exact opposite reason to the Animal Justice Party.

Ms Purcell raised the select committee inquiry into native bird hunting, and I was one of those members. There were two Liberals, Mr Bourman, the Greens, Ms Purcell and I think three Labor members. We all listened to evidence with our own kaleidoscope of ears on, because in the evidence I heard from independent scientists Klaassen and Kingsford one of them stated that native duck hunting does not make a dent in bird populations. They are part of the philosophy, the work behind (1) the interim adaptive model that we do not have yet and (2) the interim harvest model that Victorian government does operate during the duck season in Victoria. I heard that very clearly in the evidence, and you can make a judgement as to why recommendations come forward. Clearly some people hear different things to others, but the science says that it does not make a dent in the population. They went on to discuss the very important work that the adaptive harvest model can do and the fact that the search for and the science behind those aerial surveys that have been conducted for decades informs the Game Management Authority (GMA), who then present recommendations to the state

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government, the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. There is science behind this; it is not a pie in the sky. Therefore I will be interested to see some of the information coming forward.

The other point that the motion relates to is the report and research by Dr Thomas Prowse. It has got a long name, but in the end it is a Prowse report that they often refer to. Again, this gentleman is an independent researcher. He is not a hunting advocate. His credibility lies in his neutrality. He is not providing hunting advocacy in any space, rather the science behind the research. His work is peer reviewed and published in reputable scientific journals, so it undergoes rigorous academic scrutiny – something that we do not always see in the environment space. His report does not promote hunting expansion, it assesses the sustainability based on data. We just want the truth, and therefore those modellings can come forward. He recommends conservative harvest limits and calls on the ongoing research. Again, he is not pushing hunting.

The next part of the motion looks at mandatory hunter training. I think in this area Ms Purcell is really looking to say we need to fix the behaviour of hunters. The training around this relates to new mandatory training for shooters; it does not apply to existing licence-holders. The whole idea of this is to roll it out over a number of years in order to make it workable. But training is not about improving hunter outcomes. It is not about fixing hunter behaviour. It is about providing that context. If we look at the GMA's assessment of hunter compliance, and that is what we are very focused on – it is always important to do law-abiding hunting for sustainable harvests – there was 98 per cent compliance by hunters last year. There were over 1500 checks on licensed bags and 27 infringements, and some of those were by non-hunters, so I am happy to see more data on that. But the important thing, according to Brian Hiller, professor of wildlife ecology at Bemidji State University, Minnesota, a very esteemed person who spoke to us, is that:

Habitat is key. If you have habitat, you have birds.

Certainly this year there is an abundance of birds for sustainable harvest.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:30): The Greens will support this motion this morning, and that is because when it comes to protecting Victoria's wildlife, unfortunately this Labor government never fails to disappoint. It is bad enough that despite the overwhelming evidence that we all heard and read during the inquiry into duck-shooting and despite the clear recommendation of that inquiry to permanently ban slaughter by shooting in Victoria, the Premier made a captain's call against her own colleagues on that inquiry, refused to accept the recommendation and caved in once again to the shooting lobby.

What we see in preparation for the opening of this duck-shooting season in 2025 could be even worse. I have already asked the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, in relation to avian flu, what biosecurity advice has been received from the federal government in relation to cancelling or reducing the 2025 duck-shooting season, and having asked that fairly recently, I am yet to receive an answer to that question. The fact that this duck-shooting season is going ahead in a period of long drought defies logic. In a year when the state government is literally sending drought relief funding to farmers in western Victoria, where many of the waterbird wetlands are, this season looks to be the most devastating in recent memory, with the largest bag limit since 2018 and a season length increased by more than 45 per cent, adding pressure to already declining bird numbers.

The Victorian Greens call on the government to meet its obligations under the Ramsar convention by banning shooting in all Ramsar wetland sites or preferably to cancel the 2025 duck-shooting season altogether. But the public also deserves to know the reasoning behind Labor's perplexing decision to green-light another season of slaughter of our native waterbirds, so I commend Ms Purcell for bringing this motion today.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (10:32): I am not opposing this, of course. We have got nothing to hide. I find it funny that we have got people here telling us how bad shooters, hunters or whatever you want to call them are, but they are quite happy to break the law themselves. Clearly the

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whole thing is about ‘One rule for thee and one rule for me.’ Anyone with half a brain will work out why there is a rollout: you cannot do it in a short period of time. I do not get this, except for politics.

Talking about the inquiry, to say there was overwhelming evidence against the season – someone must have been asleep. I was there for the entire time; it was only the chair and I at every single presentation. I heard junk scientists and some clown from the Australia Institute that just made stuff up, and then someone turned up in disguise on Zoom. These people are presenting ‘overwhelming evidence’? The actual scientists presented real evidence. The actual scientists said habitat destruction is a real problem, and I will say it until I am blue in the face – hunting has an infinitesimal effect.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:33): I rise to make a contribution on this documents motion in Ms Purcell’s name. To commence with, I want to acknowledge Ms Purcell’s tireless advocacy and work in the space, not only for ducks but also for other animals. I listened to Mr Galea’s contribution, and of course my views on this subject are –

**The PRESIDENT:** I apologise. The time for this debate has expired.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Planning policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:34): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Allan Labor government published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* that the Minister for Planning had approved the following amendments to the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP):
  - (a) VC257 on Tuesday 25 February 2025 and tabled on Tuesday 4 March 2025;
  - (b) VC274 on Friday 28 February 2025 and tabled on Tuesday 4 March 2025;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) briefings and documents presented to or relied upon by the Minister for Planning in the gazettal of VPP amendments VC257 and VC274;
  - (b) the impact assessments on transport infrastructure, community infrastructure and drainage for the 10 pilot activity centres;
  - (c) the 2019 ministerial advisory committee’s planning mechanisms for social and affordable housing report;
  - (d) the 2021 Ten-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing;
  - (e) the 2020 ministerial advisory committee infrastructure contributions report;
  - (f) the agendas, including attachments, and minutes of all meetings of the infrastructure contributions working group; and
  - (g) the activity centres standing advisory committee referral letters.

VC257 and VC274 are part of the government’s agenda to force high-density, high-rise development into parts of our city. This is now well known and well discussed in this chamber, and there will be further discussions, no doubt. The Minister for Planning under the planning and environment act has enormous power to make decisions – to make planning scheme amendments that actually give firm legal directions to a planning scheme and to those who put in applications for a planning scheme and give clear legal direction to local government and to VCAT and others as well. Those force-of-law planning scheme amendments are made by the minister, and in this case the minister has that power alone under the planning and environment act. There is capacity for disallowance by either chamber, but overwhelmingly the Minister for Planning makes amendments to the planning scheme and they become the force of law and control planning in our city.

When the minister makes these decisions, the department and relevant officials will put material before the minister which she has to agree with or indeed modify in some circumstances potentially, but the basis on which the minister has made these particular decisions is important for the community to

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understand. It is important for the chamber to understand, because any potential disallowance could be informed by the material that the minister has relied upon when she has made those particular decisions. Equally if we want to see clear community involvement and council understanding of these, that will be improved by putting this material in the public domain. The minister has taken a formal legal decision to gazette these planning scheme amendments, and the reasons are published in part but not the full material that sits behind the decisions, not the full material on which the minister has relied. It may be that that material is extensive, or it may be that that material is not extensive. Either of those is important information for those seeking to examine these planning scheme amendments and understand these planning scheme amendments in full. So it is clearly in the public interest that we see what the minister has used – what has been in front of her when she has made those particular decisions.

The other matters, from (2)(b) to (2)(g), are matters around the pilot activity centres, the ministerial advisory committee, the 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing, the ministerial advisory committee infrastructure contributions report, the meetings of that committee and the referral letters of the Activity Centres Standing Advisory Committee. All these are matters that inform and explain to the community and the chamber the basis of some government and ministerial decisions on a wide front with a lot of the planning decisions that are being made at the moment. We think, again, it is clearly in the public interest for these to be available. It is not clear why some of them have not been made available. If some of them can be made available – I think the government could informally do this with a number of these, and it would not necessarily even require a documents motion. There is no reason why, for example, the strategy should not be out in full, and the impact assessments on transport infrastructure, community infrastructure and drainage for the 10 pilot activity centres. If you are going to put tens of thousands more people into a particular activity centre – three of the 10 pilot activity centres are in my electorate – in Boroondara, Stonnington, Glen Eira and Monash or in Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston, it is right and proper that people should see what infrastructure is going to be matched and what assessments government has done on those matters.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:40): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's short-form documents motion seeking quite a lot, to be honest, of documents to be tabled – briefings presented to the minister to make two of these decisions with respect to planning decisions, huge amounts of information about transport infrastructure and community infrastructure and a ministerial advisory committee for sort of social and affordable housing and the like. Obviously the government, as is our custom, does not oppose documents motions, but I think in the context of some of the debates that we have had in this chamber previously about documents motions requesting extensive amounts of material it is worth commenting on the scope and breadth of the motion that is being presented today so that members of the chamber are not under any illusion about just how wide a net yet again is being cast to seek this, and the work that will obviously need to go into assessing the extent to which these documents can be produced in this chamber, taking account of the necessary exercise of the range of executive privileges which the government may or may not wish to rely upon. I think that is the first point to make.

The second and I think more substantive point is that what Mr Davis is trying to get to is, I think, in a political sense to continue his campaign against more homes being built in metropolitan Melbourne. Mr Davis – and the Liberal Party more broadly – is attempting to block more homes being built in metropolitan Melbourne. He is railing against this government's attempts to build more homes in the suburbs that have good quality infrastructure and access to schools and that are close to jobs and public transport – places where the government has been investing in infrastructure and services. We can confidently say that these are places where people want to live. We are confident that these are places that people want to live in, and Labor wants to give them the opportunity to do it. Labor wants to give more Victorians the opportunity to own a home in communities where they grew up. Labor wants to give more Victorians the opportunity to own a home in communities where their families live so they are not travelling 30 or 40 minutes on the weekend just to go and have lunch with their mum and dad, so grandparents are not travelling 30 or 40 minutes just so they can see their kids play sport on the

weekends. We want to give more Victorians the opportunity to live in the communities that they want to call home. The Liberal Party wants to block that from happening.

Mr Davis clearly is interested in impact assessments on local infrastructure; he says the infrastructure is not keeping up. Let us go directly to this point about education infrastructure in – I do not know, let us pick one – Moorabbin, one of the activity centres. What is happening right now at Moorabbin Primary School? They have just opened 12 new classrooms that have been built by this state government. The new gymnasium, which will double as a community infrastructure facility, is currently under construction. This is just one example of the investments that this Labor government has been making to upgrade local schools right across this state and particularly schools close to these activity centres – Moorabbin Primary School, just near the Moorabbin activity centre after extensive consultation for the last 15, 16 months since the pilot activity centres were first announced in late 2023.

This Labor government is engaging with councils and engaging with local communities about the plans that we have to enable more Victorians to own homes in the communities that they want to live in. We are not going to stop our endeavours to try and make sure that Victorians have got the homes they need despite all of the efforts of the Liberal Party to block us.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:45): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion 855. It is a pretty simple request for some pretty simple background documents on what is clearly a very big policy, and a very big policy needs a very good and clear explanation as to how we arrived at it and what its implications are. What did the minister rely on in making their decision to bring this policy to bear on the community? It has significant effects on the communities that this policy roams across. They are pretty basic considerations: what consideration has gone into infrastructure, what consideration has gone into things like sewerage and power and school catchments and things like that? This is a pretty normal sort of thing where you would want to understand what the implications are going to be, because there is precious little in the public utterances about how these things are going to be addressed. There is a massive vacuum of information, and that leads you to two conclusions: either there is no information, there is no planning, or the planning is such that they would prefer not to have scrutiny of it.

This is a government that does not like accountability. It certainly does not like people asking questions, especially locals. Every time we hear the word 'consultation' from this government a wry smile springs to my face. They will have to go to the Oxford dictionary and change the definition of that word, because the way this government habitually performs consultation is a farce; it is a sham. Everybody in the community knows it. It is a pretence. Even with the recent announcement of these activity centres, people received letters saying they may be or will be affected at their address, but to find out how they had to go to a website that has no less than 40 documents of about 40 pages each, which they are meant to somehow navigate to find out how it affects their house. There are no directions about which one may affect them.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Richard WELCH**: Maybe that is fine for you, but it does not work in the real world. People do not take this as consultation; this is being consultold. If you go and look hard enough, buried down in some website you might find out what is about to happen to you, not 'Here's your opportunity,' because if you did consult, you would know that people have legitimate concerns about what is happening to their neighbourhoods, what is going to happen to their quality of life, what is going to happen to the education of their children in schools that are already understaffed and over capacity and what is going to happen to the open spaces. None of these things get answered. It is quite straightforward: let us look at what you have considered when putting this out. I think it is quite fair and reasonable. If it is a big policy, as you like to claim, then let us see the big advice that went with it. It is pretty sensible in my book.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:48): Well, well, well, where to begin with that? We are here today debating a short-form documents motion put forward by the Liberal Party, and the Liberal Party is complaining about the number of documents already available. They are saying there are too many documents available, too many documents on the website. The first speaker, Mr Davis, demanded this broadbrush range of documents and the second speaker wants less. He mentioned 40 documents on this website, and he is complaining about it. What do they want? This is an extraordinary situation where the Liberal Party have come into this place ostensibly to call for more documents, and yet they are speaking against having documents available. I do not know if Mr Welch read the documents motion before making his contribution. I am not sure if Mr Davis is happy with Mr Welch's comments, who knows?

Unlike the waffle that has come across from both speakers on the other side, this is a government that actually believes in genuine consultation, which is why there are, in that particular instance Mr Welch referred to, so many documents already available on that site and why we have as part of this process already engaged and reached out to well over 200,000 people who are living in these activity centres, these designated areas. It is why, to look at what came out last week with some of these earlier activity centres, we have actually listened. We have worked with councils, with communities, with other user groups and we have made changes. There are some cases where the higher density zone was brought back, where that was tapered off from a much closer point to the heart of the activity centre. That is all in direct response to genuine consultation, and if we were doing phoney consultation – like Mr Welch seems to say – how would this have come about? We are listening and we are citing the things that people have told us when we make these sensible changes, because – as Mr Batchelor outlined – this is a very critical policy. For week after week after week in this place we have had members opposite coming in and attacking the rights of young people, of gen Zs and millennials, to live anywhere near the centre of the city. That is what they are doing when they are coming in with these ridiculous motions and their petitions.

We have a plan for inner-city Melbourne, and Mr Batchelor referred to just one example in his electorate. We are also investing in the outer suburbs. Just this morning Mr Tarlamis gave an extensive members statement outlining all the new schools that have opened this year in one of our growing suburbs of Clyde North. We are investing in growing communities in the centre of the city, in the middle suburbs, in the outer suburbs and across the state. But what we see from those opposite is no plan, no vision, just NIMBY attacks on aspiration. It is an attack on aspiration, and it is saying to those young people that they should not have the choice to live in a terrific outer suburb or a wonderful inner-city suburb. You should have no choice; you should just have to live, in some cases, miles away from your friends, from your family, from your work opportunities. They are saying, 'No choice.'

There was a time in this country's history when the Liberal Party stood for individual freedoms and individual choices and the aspirations of everyday Australians. With these motions that is dead, buried and cremated. They clearly do not stand for that anymore, because they are saying to people, 'We do not care about your aspirations. If you don't like it, you can go off and live wherever else you want to. Not in my sleepy streets in Brighton, in Hawthorn, in Kew.' That is what the Liberal Party is saying to young people right across this state today.

We have a serious housing issue in this state, in this country, and this is a government that is taking genuine action to respond to that. When we do, we have once again the Liberal Party saying, 'No. Not on my street. Not in my backyard.' We have seen it time and time again. I am sure Mr Mulholland cringes every time he hears Mr Davis come up and speak about it, because he might understand the challenges that young people face, but it is clear that he is never going to get a fair run in that party. He has been outvoted – between Mrs McArthur on one side and Mr Davis on the other, and chief NIMBY over there, as well as Mr Newbury protesting outside hotels, protesting against the idea that young people should be able to have a place to live.

As is the case with short-form documents motions, the government will not be opposing this motion today, despite the fact that Mr Welch is apparently complaining that there are too many documents in

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the public space already. We will not be opposing this. I note as well that it is a very, very broad request for documents and this goes to the issue of what has been discussed many times about appropriate timeframes and things that we have tried to get looked at. I note that the Government Whip was very generous to the opposition in even letting them do this today, because Mr Davis apparently did not want short-form documents motions to be even considered under general business last week. We will see that change again today, I am sure. We will not be opposing this motion.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (10:54): We need more homes for Victorians. We need to ensure that families, young and old, are able to live near each other, able to live in affordable housing – housing near schools, near health infrastructure, near jobs. It is not easy to get on with this task, but the state government is up for this work, unlike the opposition, who have competing claims with each other in this motion –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora)**: Pursuant to sessional order 6, the time for this debate has elapsed.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Sessional orders**

**David Davis** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:55): I move:

That until the end of the session, unless otherwise ordered by the Council, sessional order 6 is revoked and replaced with the following sessional order to come into operation on the next sitting week:

#### **6. Production of documents – short form documents motions**

After Standing Order 10.01(3) insert:

- (4) A motion under this Standing Order (other than a motion that imposes a sanction) may be treated by the Council as a short form documents motion. The following short form documents motion procedures will apply –
  - (a) a member must advise of the intention for the motion to be treated by the Council as a short form documents motion at the time of giving notice under Standing Order 6.01;
  - (b) a maximum of two motions under this Sessional Order may be –
    - (i) moved by non-government members and debated each Wednesday;
    - (ii) moved by government members and debated on Tuesday and Thursday;
  - (c) if additional notices above the number permitted for debate each sitting day are given for short form documents motions, they will be listed on subsequent sitting days in the order that notice was given;
  - (d) a motion proposed to be debated under this Sessional Order will take precedence on –
    - (i) Tuesday and Thursday at the time prescribed for government business;
    - (ii) Wednesday at the time prescribed for short form documents motions in Sessional Order 2;
  - (e) the following time limits will apply to a short form documents motion –
    - (i) the mover of the motion may speak only once for up to six minutes;
    - (ii) any other member may speak for up to five minutes;
    - (iii) the total time for consideration of the motion will be up to 20 minutes; and
  - (f) at the conclusion of debate or after 20 minutes of debate (whichever occurs first), the President will put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion and any amendments.

This is a simple tidy-up of the short-form documents motion. It makes it clear that non-government members get to move short-form documents motions on the non-government business day, which is Wednesday, and government members have the opportunity to move short-form documents motions on Tuesday and Thursday, which are government business days. It is actually a very clear delineation, and it reaffirms the delineation that has developed in this chamber, with the exception of the 1-hour

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opportunity at the end of the day for the government to move any government business. I understand Mr Tarlamis, the Government Whip, has indicated that there will be use of that time tonight, so that opportunity is there. But essentially, most of the day on Wednesday is devoted to non-government business, and this preserves that. It closes a loophole in the standing orders and sessional orders together and ensures that that division between government business and non-government business is maintained.

I should say that we think that this set of changes will improve the sessional orders. It will make them clear. There will be no doubt about that. We look forward to the support of the chamber. I note that last sitting week the essence of this motion was supported by the crossbench, and it did that because this is a fair and clear way forward.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (10:58): Mr Davis, it is actually impressive that you can make a contribution and just not falter. I am sure we can all learn something from it. It is good.

I did not get the opportunity to speak on the similar motion last week. As it turns out, I can pull out some of these notes from last sitting week, because there was a little bit of an opportunity to talk about the proposed sessional order last week but not enough. I can be open: I spoke to a lot of people last week about how I did not like the way the process was brought, and I think the fact that we are fixing it today is a good example of the point I was trying to make.

My concern about last week's sessional orders changes was not, effectively, being dismissive of the issues. I understand non-government members had concerns in relation to the third general business slot not always getting a vote. In fact not only did I recognise that, I proposed to the opposition and the mover of the motion and other members that whilst we considered the fix for this issue I as Leader of the Government was prepared to give a guarantee that we would facilitate votes for all of the general business slots – whilst we got this right. I thought that was a reasonable compromise to make sure that we could sit down, have a conversation and work through the consequences, and my proposal was it should go to the Procedure Committee. Even if that was not accepted, I would have liked a conversation to avoid some of these issues. I was also particularly concerned about the fact that I had not had an opportunity to have a decent conversation about the impact on the people in this place that are not elected members – the people that have to record us, listen to us, advise us et cetera. Whether they are in this room or outside this room helping us, the impact on them of changes should always be considered, particularly when it can add to the extension of time and particularly later in the evening – dinner breaks, home times, family-life balance and the like. I thought that it was very dismissive of elected officials not to have put this through that process.

I was concerned about last week's fix. I thought it was rushed. I was not afforded the opportunity to even see early workings of drafts of proposals. In fact I got some old ones through various sources that were not even reflective of the motion that was put up. That is how chaotic this process was. As I said, I found it quite disrespectful to this place. I wanted further time to examine the potential ramifications. It did not take long for members of the government and some advisers that were looking at it to identify that there were some errors. We did not necessarily want to be overly petty, but we took the opportunity to point them out. We took some delight in proving that perhaps we were right, but we will not go over that too much.

But I had concerns about the consequences of the change, as I said, in relation to the impact on this place. I did want to refer it to the Procedure Committee. I stand by the fact that these types of matters should go to the Procedure Committee to allow them to be to be ventilated and for it to examine potential unintended consequences et cetera. But given we have had a little bit of time to consider this sessional order today, we are not proposing to oppose the loophole close, as I think Mr Davis put it. We are letting this go through today. I still think there should be an opportunity for the Procedure Committee to have a look at this. I would also point to the fact that I have had a motion on the notice paper since November 2023 regarding the possibility of reducing adjournment contributions from

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3 minutes to 2 minutes. I thought that would have been a good opportunity for the Procedure Committee to consider all of that at once.

I am still of the view that we should have a conversation about the duration of adjournments. It is certainly not my intention to curtail anybody's ability to raise issues for ministers to respond to, but it has become a growing practice in this place for adjournments to go for up to an hour, if not more. I do not think that people that are accustomed to speaking on their feet about issues necessarily need to fill 3 minutes for every topic. In fact it is not a practice that you see happen in the Assembly. I am not reflecting on the fact that we should copy everything that goes on over there, but when it can have a significant additional time impost or impact to the chamber at the end of the day, often late at night, I would have thought that reducing it by what can be around 20 minutes or more is something that we should consider.

But again, I am open to other options in relation to reducing perhaps some of the time that adjournments take. Some people have suggested other measures such as one per week per person like we do with member statements and the like. I was quite open to that, and I have been chopping that around for a little while. Obviously it is not first-order business for the chamber. It is a very internal issue, not necessarily front of mind for Victorians and the issues that matter to them, which is why it is not something that I have pushed with any gusto. But it is something that I would like to pick up at some point in time because I think that this place could operate better with a few of those changes, but effectively that is what the Procedure Committee is for.

On to today's motion: I acknowledge Mr Davis has effectively conceded a *mea culpa* today, and as I said, in an impressive fashion. I am more than happy to forgive some errors of a retransition back to the leader role. It is my experience with Mr Davis that generally he sticks to what he tells you, and I hope that in this case this is what we will see eventuate out of this sessional order. As I said, the main fix is to ensure that the three general business slots that are in general business for non-government members can be afforded their full time for debate, that there is a vote and that the third slot not be cut off. Because of the change there is an opportunity perhaps for that to morph into something other than the three slots and become four slots or five slots depending on how it chops and changes, but I have had a commitment from Mr Davis that the intention is not to do that. The intention is to fill the three slots. Despite this error, as I said, Mr Davis generally is a man of his word when it comes to these types of things. We are, as I said, not opposing the motion, because we have always acknowledged that the fix is warranted, and we want to facilitate that. It is the unintended consequences that have always been a concern of mine. I have watched each week how this sessional order developed. I still think it would be a good opportunity for the Procedure Committee to touch on it as well as perhaps another avenue – I am going to get an adjournment outcome at some point in time, before the end of this session hopefully.

I do put on record that the government is always willing to work with non-government members on the proper operation of the chamber. I would prefer if we could have a more comprehensive and proper engagement with topics rather than rushed changes to rules. I do note that I think that the opposition consulted with a lot of the crossbench well in advance of the government. In these types of things I find that you do not need to put a political overlay on the procedures of the house. I think we all benefit when it operates smoothly. As I said last week, 12 or so hours was not really long enough for me to delve into it, but I do invite any suggestions on procedural matters to come to me in advance. I would appreciate it; I actually like this stuff. Ms Terpstra likes this stuff. If you have got ideas, we are always happy to talk about them. Whether it is through the Procedure Committee or otherwise, we welcome conversations on ensuring that the house operates at its optimum.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:08): I will only speak briefly on this. We will be supporting this motion. I thank Mr Davis for bringing it to the chamber. Obviously when the original motion around these short-form documents spots was drafted, we did not anticipate that government members may have a desire to request documents from their own government, so I am glad to see that has been corrected now. We have made it clear that Wednesday is non-government business day, and

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it is the day where we on the crossbench and in opposition are able to use this chamber for the things that we believe are important. I would also just like to reiterate that, as I have made clear on many occasions, we are very open to suggestions from the Procedure Committee. We believe that the change that has been made around sessional orders and ensuring that the third spot gets to a vote is a reasonable one, but we are very open to suggestions about other ways we could achieve that.

If the Procedure Committee wants to review how this change is going and come back with other suggestions, including the need for, potentially, consideration of a meal break – if we are having a big day like today could end up being, given the government may want to use their hour of government business time at the end of the day – we are very open to considering that. We are also open to discussions around things like adjournments and other matters where we want to review the timing, the number. I cannot say we will necessarily agree with all of them, but we are very open to a discussion about that. That offer stands. I do not think there is anything stopping the Procedure Committee from looking at this recent sessional orders change. I understand – we do not necessarily disagree – that in an ideal world that would have happened prior to the change, but I also do not think there is anything particularly problematic with the Procedure Committee undertaking that review very soon – having a look at it, coming back with some suggestions. We are really open to a discussion. But for today we will be supporting this motion put forward by Mr Davis, and we thank him for bringing it.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:10): I rise to make a contribution on Mr Davis's motion in regard to the short-form documents motions. We visited this matter last week, but we need to come back to it this week because there was a bit of a stuff-up. I think everyone in the chamber has acknowledged that this is about fixing the loophole, as Mr Davis called it, which he created. I am also glad to hear Dr Mansfield, on behalf of the Greens, say that they do not oppose the Procedure Committee reviewing this matter. As the Leader of the Government said earlier, what we have been saying all along is that the appropriate place for this matter to be considered is in fact the Procedure Committee, because obviously more minds are better than one and that would have provided a good opportunity for people from all sides of the chamber to contribute. I do note, though, that the Greens are not represented on the Procedure Committee; both the Leader of the Government and I are. It would be a good idea for perhaps some of the other crossies to come along, particularly the Greens, and to be on the Procedure Committee, because I think what the Leader of the Government said earlier is absolutely right.

I do not think it is appropriate, when we talk about an order that is going to impact the running of the house, that we fail to consider the very people who help keep this house running, and that is the clerks, the security people, the Hansard people and all the rest of it. I pointed that out in my contribution last week, but it fell on deaf ears and the change was rammed through this chamber. It leads to the other point on this, which is that I want to know what deals were done between the Liberals and the Greens to get this through. There was clearly a deal. What was done in exchange for that deal? There was a political overlay put on it. It seems silly. Winning at all costs for the sake of getting a deal done and getting a win on something like this is kind of nonsense when really we have all got an interest in seeing the effective and efficient running of this chamber and making sure that there are no unintended consequences experienced by people who are not elected to this chamber but certainly are integral and very important to the running of the chamber.

I note the Leader of the Government talked about Mr Davis being a man of his word. Talk is cheap, quite frankly. I like to see actions. I think actions speak louder than words. I have also had the benefit of serving on committees with many Liberal members, crossbenchers and the like, and I have seen some of these sorts of stunts undertaken on committees as well, where it is just about getting a win and defeating the government for the sake of getting a stupid win. It is really petty and just ridiculous, quite frankly, when what we need to see is more bipartisanship on things like committees. We also need to see bipartisanship on things like sessional orders, because we are all impacted by them.

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I have never had a member of the public come up to me and say, 'I'm voting for you because you've done 10 all-nighters this session.' It is nonsense. It does not happen. But it is like some kind of weird marathon that people like to wear as a badge of honour and thump their chest and go, 'Wow, we had an all-nighter and we really held the government's feet to the fire.' What a load of utter garbage. The sort of debate that we are having now around this sessional order is again reflective of a kind of bravado that people like to carry on with. It is very macho, like, 'Wow, we beat the government.' No-one cares. We have said before that we could light ourselves on fire in here and no-one would care. But the thing is we have got to consider the impact that this has on other people.

The bottom line is we are not opposing this motion and we are not going to call a division, but because there has been a deal done I would like there to be some transparency and to have the Liberals or the Greens disclose what they got in exchange for supporting Mr Davis's motion, because they did.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** No, no, no. The Liberals do deals with the Greens on all manner of things, and this is the point: they do not like it when that gets exposed. I can say this: the best disinfectant is sunlight, but those opposite do not like sunlight. They want to operate in the shadows all the time and then just come in and gazump the government and go, 'Look at us. Aren't we amazing.' It is not appropriate. We have seen it with other changes to other things. On short-form documents motions the government gets gagged because we are not allowed to speak. Again on the sessional orders, we tried to tell you last week – God forbid that you ever actually get a chance to be in charge of things, because it would be rather shambolic – because we are back here today actually fixing the sessional order that Mr Davis stuffed up last week.

I would like to see things like the Procedure Committee actually do its work and be able to be in a position to have proper, thorough, considered analysis of any change to the sessional orders. I note the Leader of the Government talked about wanting to change the length of adjournments. I note there was an email put out by Parliament staff this week talking about the fact that even on constituency questions some of them are missing the mark because they think, 'Well, I've just got to fill up time and make sure I keep ministers' offices busy rather than actually putting forward constituency questions that are serious and are something that people care about.' Some of them are missing the mark. I actually appreciate the Parliament staff pointing that out to us – not just to Liberals, but to all of us. We all got that email saying that if you are going to do a constituency question, there are things that it needs to comply with. I appreciate that guidance and advice, and had this gone to the Procedure Committee, we also would have been guided by the clerks in that regard. These things could have been pointed out to us all and we would have avoided the embarrassing display which was last week and this week.

Labor members put on the notice paper our short-form documents motions that we wanted to debate, but in a show of good faith we have withdrawn all of those because we want to get a fix on this. We are always willing to work with those opposite and the Greens, but you just want to weaponise everything because you think you are in opposition and you want to try and get a small win and go, 'Wow, look at us, aren't we special?' It kind of falls flat and no-one cares about it. In the community no-one cares about that. What they want us to do is to be in here having serious debates about matters that are important to them, legislation that actually helps people with their lives.

As I said, the government opposes this motion, but we are not going to call a division on it. I just think that all of the points that were made last week in regard to this motion should have been heeded by Mr Davis, and to be quite frank, he has been here long enough to know better. It was just a really disappointing display of poor behaviour from those opposite. I could go on and on and talk about the poor record of those opposite.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

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**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Absolutely, I could talk about how many documents motions they have opposed and how many documents they never released. I could go on and on and on about FOI access, because the record of those opposite is actually terrible, really ordinary.

But what we do over here every time there is a short-form documents motion is that we do not oppose it. We go, ‘Yes, sure, put it through.’ We do not oppose them. The departments who are the subjects of these things always do their very good work – again, hardworking public servants who are charged with analysing –

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** We can talk about Jeff Kennett if you like and his legacy, Mr Mulholland. If I can take up that interjection, how many schools did you close? How many thousands of teachers did you sack on your watch? We can absolutely bring it all out. But the point is: you tie up government departments, who are funded to do important work on behalf of Victorians, and you tie them up with these pointless documents motions. I really would like to go back through the record and see all of the documents motions that this government has not opposed and all of the documents that have been released to those opposite and check whether they have actually come back in here and talked about any of the documents that they have got and read them or used them in any meaningful way, because I can tell you they have not.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Exactly. I cannot wait to talk about the SRL business case more, because Mr Mulholland now acknowledges that it actually exists, which is fantastic. He has read it now. Now that it has been tabled in the Parliament as well, I cannot wait to actually talk about that so much and tell people in my region about how much those opposite actually oppose the Suburban Rail Loop. It is fantastic, because I know so many kids in my region want to catch a train to university. But again, those opposite do not care about kids in my region. All they want to do is come in here and stuff up our sessional orders. That is what they want to do, Mr Galea. They just want to come in here and stuff up our sessional orders.

I could talk about this government’s record of bipartisanship, when we have tried to offer advice – and considered advice – to those opposite, and particularly about Mr Davis last week, how this was going to end in tears, and it did. Here we are having to spend more time on this fixing it up today. I am not as optimistic as perhaps the Leader of the Government is. I am going to wait and watch with great interest, because actions speak louder than words. I will guarantee you, I will lay London to a brick, Mr McIntosh, that we will have some kind of stunt or scam about something else next week, because that is how they roll. I will conclude my contribution there.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:20): I think to begin my remarks today I would like to quote from a very similar debate we had last week in this place about sessional orders, when Mr McIntosh opened his contribution by saying, ‘Well, well, well.’

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Indeed, here we are again. Well, well, well, who could have predicted that we could be here again? Certainly not Mr Davis after all the Labor members who spoke last week told him how ridiculous it was to be amending sessional orders on the fly like he did. The very fact is that last week he was attempting to fix his previous mistakes in rushed, on-the-fly sessional orders. He came in last week with yet another rushed, on-the-fly, slapdash – as he is prone to – sessional orders change. He had only given the government 2 minutes before this coming up in the general business meeting, so who knows how many drafts he had. We saw all sorts of different versions of it. Who knows what was going on in that Liberal room that week. Again I am sure they were probably more focused on each other’s backs and whatever knives were in them than on whatever sessional orders they were doing. But here we go again. Labor members warned them. Labor members consistently

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said, 'Don't do this on the fly. You will most likely cock it up again.' And what happened? He cocked it up again. We saw in fact every non-government member of this place vote for a motion that actually took the short-form documents motions out of general business. We know that non-government members are, rightfully, very protective of their general business day, so it is staggering that they would consciously choose to move those short-form documents motions out of general business into a different session.

As the Treasurer outlined in her contribution, yes, we took the time to look at it, and we discovered that once again Mr Davis had cocked it up. This is exactly the sort of thing that would have been avoided had it gone to the Procedure Committee in the first place, which was exactly what we were saying. There is no point in changing a sessional order and then saying, 'Oh, but Procedure can look at it later.' You do the work properly first, and then you allow for these issues to come up. You allow for them to be resolved, and then you put them forward. But that is not how Mr Davis does it, and as he is the Leader of the Opposition in this place, that is very worrying indeed. We have seen how slapdash he has been in the past with more serious things even. We saw it when he could not even provide any of his election costings when he was Shadow Treasurer. When he was at a press conference to give out his election costings, he did not have them. And now we have the third time this term, the second time in two sitting weeks, that Mr Davis has come into this place to use –

**A member** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** They have the time. They can use it as they wish; it is completely their prerogative. Three hours in the past couple of weeks to discuss sessional orders – that tells you where the priorities of the Victorian Liberal Party are. Three hours to debate sessional orders. First it was 90 minutes because he decided to do a last-minute rush job and fix his previous cock-up. The second time was this week, because despite all advice from this side of the chamber, he mucked it up again. He mucked it up again because he did not go through the proper process. So now we have another 90 minutes of time today in general business, which the Liberals claim to hold so precious, but this is what he is doing with it. Three hours. It is quite extraordinary.

Even though government members were the only ones in this place to vote against this change giving government members the right to put through short-form documents motions, we did have the situation where the rest of the chamber voted against us. They gave us that option, so we exercised that option. We are not here to run around and play stupid games and disrupt the business of this house, and I note the considerable work of Mr Tarlamis as our whip and many others who have worked very hard to resolve the issue, but frankly, it was done to make the point that if you are going to muck around with these things, if you are going to cock it up once again, that comes with consequences. Votes in this place – it is a relatively minor thing, obviously; we are talking about sessional orders – have consequences. So do not come back and complain that you do not get to put a short-form documents motion in if you have voted specifically to allow government members to do short-form documents motions. As I say, we do not have any interest in needlessly putting our own motions in to the government for our own documents, but it was worth noting that point. Having withdrawn all government short-form documents motions this week we did of course, as has just recently happened within the last hour, see two further short-form documents motions raised and discussed and indeed put through that were raised by non-government members.

But really, what an absolute signal to the Victorian community that this is what your focus is. This has been the number one item on the Liberals general business slot for two weeks running – 3 hours. For all the things that you could be raising and discussing, clearly this is what you care about, and that is quite a remarkable thing indeed. Whilst this side of the house brings in bills and motions that affect ordinary people, while we are working to improve their lives, their communities, their infrastructure and their services, they are the priorities that you bring into this place. What it also signifies is that they cannot even be trusted. If you cannot even get a sessional order right, if you cannot go through the proper process and you have got to insist that you are fine to do it all yourself and then you muck it up not once, but twice, and then you have to come in and fix it again, what does that say about how you

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are going to write legislation? This is the alternative government of the state. What sorts of gaps and errors will they put in legislation if Mr Davis is in charge of writing some bills? It is, frankly, very, very telling and very concerning.

Mr Davis last week told us in his closing remarks four times that this was a sensible change he was bringing in – four times he said this was sensible. What on earth is sensible about coming in, mucking it up and having to then spend another 90 minutes the following week fixing up your own mistake? What on earth is sensible about that? That is maybe what is sensible to Mr Davis. Perhaps he is taking the Belle Gibson approach to sensibility. Maybe he is the Belle Gibson of the Victorian Parliament. Whatever he says is the fount of wisdom and truth, and that is very sensible and that is very fine and no need to question that. Perhaps that is the approach he is taking today – the *Apple Cider Vinegar* approach. But how else can you explain it? What is in any way sensible about coming in and spending 3 hours of time over two weeks to continually have to fix up your previous mistakes, when we have told you on this side of the house: do it properly; go to procedures. We will do whatever we can, as the Treasurer said; we can do whatever we can to accommodate in the meantime. We will then even debate it on government business once it comes back from the Procedure Committee, so it does not have to be used in one of these slots. But no – he knows best and here we are; we have the sensible outcome today apparently of spending even more time debating Mr Davis's cock-ups.

Clearly his own colleagues are dreadfully embarrassed by it. No-one else has spoken from the Liberal side on this motion and no-one on the Nats side – I am sure they are bewildered as well – not Mr McCracken, who was in the chamber before, not Mr Mulholland – I hope you will give a contribution on this, Mr Mulholland – and not Dr Heath.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: I think he might be gearing up, Mr McIntosh. I hope he is.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: He has got a wry smile indeed. Maybe we will hear Mr Mulholland somehow finding a way to defend the ineptitude of the situation that we find ourselves in, which his leader has put us into. Maybe he will come and defend that, but if not, then perhaps none of Mr Davis's own colleagues will support him, and maybe once again that knife-sharpening machine will be revved up in light of this repeated litany of cock-ups that we have seen, the repeated litany of absolute failures on the part of Mr Davis to even get a sessional orders change correct.

Mr Davis himself does have a terrific way with words, as Minister Symes outlined, and the ability to stand up po-faced and push through as if this was a perfectly sensible, reasonable thing again today – although I do note he could not even talk for longer than 4 minutes, which is as we know very, very unusual for Mr Davis, very unusual indeed. So they know that they have mucked this up. In the scheme of things that we do debate in this chamber it may be a trivial thing, but clearly we have an opposition that is focused on trivial things, and they cannot even get them right. And if you cannot get a sessional order right, how on earth are you expected to legislate on behalf of the people of Victoria?

They have cowed in embarrassment. Mr Davis is not even in the chamber, and the very small number of Liberal members who are here clearly have no willingness to speak up in defence of this outrageously ridiculous situation. Again, if we were to see Mr Davis continue in his role, and Heaven forfend if he were to have that chance to actually legislate for Victorians, well, goodness gracious – apple cider vinegar for everyone.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:30): I rise to speak on my good friend and colleague Mr Davis's motion on sessional orders, and I find the comments quite ironic –

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

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**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Ms Terpstra is going. Ms Terpstra spoke about more bipartisanship on committees, but I could not help but notice the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's local government services inquiry report, where her voting record was not even partisan with her own Labor colleagues – several votes against Labor colleagues.

**Enver Erdogan:** On a point of order, President, on relevance here, we are talking specifically about a procedural motion about the sessional orders, and I think Mr Mulholland has really drifted off.

**The PRESIDENT:** Sorry, I just got into the chair, and I actually missed a bit of the contribution, so I will ask the member to continue.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I am happy to, but Ms Terpstra was allowed to talk about committees, and I was talking about a committee in general where there was a lack of bipartisanship. I was simply pointing out the fact that given the member said there needs to be more bipartisanship on committees, the record does not show that.

Ms Terpstra also raised interesting points about deals with the Greens and what the Liberals might have got or what the Greens might have got, back and forth about a deal with the Greens. We do not operate like the Labor Party; we do not make a deal with the crossbench on one piece of legislation that results in a completely different change to another piece legislation. The government does a deal to get the Greens votes on one piece of legislation, then all of a sudden in their short-stay accommodation bill we see a whole bunch of nasties giving massive powers to local governments at the Greens' behest, which they claim as a win in negotiations with the government. We do not operate like the Labor Party.

Ms Terpstra was talking about public servants and public servants having to deal with these document motions and what a good job they do; I assume because of the Silver review led by the Treasurer there might be less of them, so that is obviously a concern. They still go on about Jeff Kennett; they still have nightmares about someone who was Premier a few decades ago and still try to claim a bogeyman on that side on someone the electorate does not really know.

We saw many discussions about sessional order changes on that side of the house, and we saw the government still banging on about 3-minute adjournments, but I actually find 3-minute adjournments quite useful; they are quite useful in explaining in depth, in detail, different issues. For example, my adjournment from last week, where I talked about Donnybrook Road once again, which I speak about every week, has been viewed by over 10,000 people in my community and Mr Erdogan's community. I think they are quite useful in being able to explain, in a longer form, tricky issues in your electorate, so I think it would be a retrograde step for this chamber and this Parliament to limit that time that members get to seek the action of a minister. I have still got an outstanding adjournment to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to actually come out and join me on Donnybrook Road in peak hour – maybe Mr Erdogan can join me as well – just to see for themselves. I might not have been able to make that request had the adjournment been a minute shorter.

Mr Galea spoke about a whole bunch of things that are not relevant to this motion. He said that we were more focused on each other, but I would say that the government is more focused on who is going to be the next leader and who is going to be the next Premier. Mr Galea also said that we do not know what we are voting on, but Mr Galea's friend Mr Carroll does not know what his department is doing, whether it is ankle bracelets or whether it is the VCE exam debacle. It is always the bureaucrats, and never the minister, that know what his department is doing. The gall of Mr Carroll's friend saying that we do not know what we are voting on when the minister does not know what is going on in his department is quite shocking.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, President, I do not think I specifically said that those opposite did not know what they were voting on. The fact that Mr Mulholland is admitting that is quite extraordinary. I said that they should have known what they were voting on.

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**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order. Mr Mulholland to continue on. It is a bit noisy, so if he can continue without too much help, that would be great.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Getting to the point of this motion and documents motions, which we have spoken about – making documents motions available for the non-government members in this place – I do read the documents motions that come back, many of which are heavily redacted and have privilege claimed over them, which we have spoken about quite a bit.

There are issues with both the secrecy of this government and the way the government uses the institutions it has available to silence Victorians. We saw that with over 7000 non-disclosure agreements given out on the North East Link. Even community sporting clubs around the Suburban Rail Loop were made to sign gag orders to not criticise the government or the SRL, which forced them to invite Labor MPs to all their events. This is the kind of process in democracy which I think is unacceptable.

Documents motions are a useful way to increase transparency and increase integrity in Victoria. The government tried to invade non-government business day with their own motions. All but one were already available. You had this strange display from the other side, trying to seek documents which were readily available either from the table office or just by googling them, but that is what they decided to do.

We are quite concerned about the lack of transparency under this government, particularly around what is going on at the North East Link at the moment, not that any of the 7000 people around the North East Link could even talk about it. Ms Terpstra should have come to our North East Link forum, which 400 people attended. We did ask the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to send a government representative. She clearly did not want Ms Terpstra going – a point she has complained about. I would agree that the minister should have sent Ms Terpstra. I will finish my contribution there. I am glad the Labor Party is not opposing this sensible change.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:39): Well, well, well, here we are again – I will say it again. I will acknowledge Mr Mulholland. He has got more front than Myers. None of his colleagues were willing to stand up on this motion. They are hiding away in their offices, embarrassed and ashamed of what their side has done to see themselves here again today, so at least Mr Mulholland stood up, and in fact he stood up and spoke for longer than Mr Davis, the lead speaker. I would have thought Mr Davis could speak a bit longer because he already had the speaking notes for this prepared for him by his staff last sitting week when we were here. I do not know about anyone else this morning, but when my clock radio went off and *I Got You Babe* by Sonny and Cher was playing, I thought, ‘Oh, my God, I am in *Groundhog Day* – we are here again; we are doing it all again.’ Unfortunately, I did not keep my notes from last time. I could have referred to them again, but here we are again. Mr Mulholland, I will give it to you, you stood up, then you fronted up, so well done. Mr Davis, I just want to pick up on some incredible quotes – ‘a loophole’ that has got us here. It is a wormhole that has got us here, that has opened up and taken us two weeks back in time. Absolutely incredible, Mr Davis.

While Victorians want us to be talking about the cost of living, while Victorians want us to be talking about things that impact on them, it is the chaos within the Liberal Party, the chaos that has led to Mr Davis being back in charge of the opposition in this place, that has seen this come about. I really would have thought Mr Davis would know better – someone who talks about tradition, someone who talks about respecting this place, someone who talks about proper process, someone who has been here for far longer than I. I would have thought that he would have seen fit to go and take this to an appropriate committee.

**Enver Erdogan** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Proper consultation. There has been a lot of conversation on that side about consultation, and this was rammed through. To borrow some of Mr Davis’s language – the sort of language he uses when he does not actually have facts or figures or stats to back it up – the shadowy,

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dark murkiness that led us to this place where this motion was rammed through. And here we find ourselves now.

We know Mr Davis has an aversion to doing the hard work. We saw that before the 2022 election. When he was Shadow Treasurer and was asked about costings for his party's policies, he could not come up with them. He did not have the attention to detail. It is further proof, yet again, that the Liberals are not fit for government. I think one of my colleagues, Mr Galea, may have said before: if they cannot even get this right, the simplest of simple things, how on earth do they think that they are fit for government? I can understand that through their revolving door of leaders and the chaos they have come out of over the Christmas break –

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, President, a point of order was just called before on relevance. This is just a disgusting waste of our time, and I ask you to bring the member back to the motion.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr McIntosh, I have heard the point of order. Since I have been sitting here, I think that all sides of the chamber have taken a fair bit of liberty on this particular motion, but I will call people back to the motion.

**Tom McIntosh:** I do agree with Dr Heath. This is a disgusting waste of time which has been brought to this place by David Davis and the Liberals, wasting all of our time when we could be discussing things that are absolutely important to Victorians.

I will just finish up on the point I was making. I think Mr Davis and the Liberals are distracted because of their revolving door of leaders over the summer. This would not have happened under Ms Crozier's watch. This would not have happened under her watch. Mr Davis clawed into his new role on the fly – Fly Davis. We warned him that this would happen, and here we are. Like many of the questions that come up in question time that are lacking in detail, that are lacking in facts or figures, this is the same thing we have seen from the Liberals, we have seen from Mr Davis, since he has come into his new role. I imagine the Liberals – I imagine all of us – hope that the Liberals can get their act together and get something as simple as a motion such as this together.

On this side, we want to be using our time in government to be talking about the things that matter to Victorians, things like kindergartens – three- and four-year-old free kinder so we can get our kids in with other kids for 15 hours, 30 hours, get them educated earlier, get that best start to a best life. In new buildings – I spoke before in my members statement about a new kinder I just opened last week in Tootgarook and visiting one that we opened last year in Korumburra. In primary schools they are saving parents from doing the double drop-off, so parents can get back to work. Then our kids get familiar with the surroundings and they go into the primary schools – primary schools that we are investing in, teachers that we are investing in, so these kids can come through academically and emotionally. Then they come out and go into a TAFE – a TAFE that we have invested in with staff that we have invested in to ensure that then they can go into jobs, jobs that we have supported in an economy where there are jobs. Low unemployment in this state – these are the things that Victorians care about, not a procedural motion that Mr Davis might put up and might have three goes at.

I will tell you what Victorians care about: they care about health services, they care about the hospitals we are building right across this state and they care about ensuring that nurses are paid properly and ensuring that our ambos are paid properly. These are the things that matter to Victorians, not a motion like this. It is about ensuring that we have the housing for Victorians, that they get that education, they have got the health care, they have got the pipeline and the pathway into jobs and the pipeline of jobs to work in, and then houses that are near loved ones, near families and where, if they want to do so, they can raise a family, something Mr Mulholland used to stand up and talk about. Now that he is in a straightjacket we do not hear that. Mr Mulholland, I do want to, just to make sure –

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

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**Tom McIntosh:** I am sorry, Mr Mulholland, your reaction just got me there. I do want to come back to the debate, as it is fit and proper to do so – this disgusting waste of time, as Dr Heath pointed out. Mr Mulholland talked about Mr Kennett. Mr Mulholland raised Mr Kennett. The nightmare of Kennett, Mr Mulholland talked about, and that nightmare is etched into people's minds. With all these things I just talked about – when you talk about schools, when you talk about TAFE, when you talk about transport – it is etched into people's minds, that nightmare of services being cut, jobs being cut, train lines being shut down and ripped out. The hospitals that were either privatised or closed down – people remember. Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for raising the Kennett nightmare, because people remember.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Tom McIntosh:** We know if there is an *Edward Scissorhands 2* you will be casting yourself in the lead role, because cut, cut, cut is all you would do if you had your hands on the levers of government.

There is a motion coming up on electrification that Mr Davis is going to raise. I will be really interested to see what he is going to say there, because we know he has got no attention to detail, as with the Liberals. They have no values that underpin anything that can give them some substance to inform policies. Mr Davis has come back into the chamber – it is good he is here. The Liberal Party have nothing other than a hands-off-the-wheel approach to government. They do not want to do anything that delivers for Victorians, and this is why they are unable to come to this place with rational, sensible debate, with some policies that bring something to the table. They do not bring anything to the table. They sit there and say no, no, no – the noalition. This is why we end up in a place where for consecutive weeks we are having a debate on this procedural motion that we should not even be talking about. We should be talking about things that really matter to Victorians. It is a disgrace, Dr Heath. We should be talking about things that matter to Victorians.

I am proud to be part of a government that has shared values – a collegial group – that we use to get our policies together, because they are instilled out of values that we believe in, values that will improve the lives of every single Victorian. Livability, affordability – we want that for people, and that is why we come to this place with things that matter to people. I really, really, really hope next wacky Wednesday I do not hear my alarm go off, I do not hear Sonny and Cher, because I do not know if we can do this for a third time. Mr Mulholland, I know you do not want to be here for a third time. It was very gutsy of you to stand up and try and cover Mr Davis's tracks. He has come back in. I have run out of time.

**Ryan Batchelor** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:49): Where do I begin? Probably with the continued exhortations coming from the backbench of the Liberal Party about what an absolute waste of time this motion is. I think probably the cat was belled just minutes ago when we had an interjection from Dr Heath, who raised a point of order about the waste of time that this motion is. Mr McIntosh talked about groundhog day, because that is what it feels like. Two weeks ago the first general business slot on Wednesday was devoted to a motion that was the most critical thing to the Liberal Party in this chamber. On a day when they got to set the agenda two weeks ago, they said the most critical thing that we should be talking about, first thing on a Wednesday, were the sessional orders. Not about Victorians, not about the issues that matter to Victorians – all about them.

Two full weeks later, one sitting week later, here we are back again, and what are we talking about? The sessional orders. The day when they get to decide what the most important issue facing Victorians is, we are debating further changes to the sessional orders to fix a mistake made by the last change they made to the sessional orders, which we had to debate to fix a mistake they made in the change to the sessional orders that they moved in November 2023. I agree with Dr Heath that this motion is a waste of time. She also said that we are going to try to get to something serious soon, by way of interjection. She said we are going to try to get to something serious soon.

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**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Why not start with that indeed, Mr Galea? Why not change the priorities the Liberal Party presents to this chamber and talk about other issues – more serious issues, in the words of Dr Heath – and get on with the debate? But we cannot, because we are in the unfortunate set of circumstances where the new leadership of the Liberal Party have decided to operate by thinking they know best and deciding on courses of action about the way this place operates without consultation, without engagement, without going through the proper processes of, for example, taking proposed changes to the sessional orders to the Procedure Committee. That would be the way that you would do it in an ordered and sensible way, but no, no, no. The new leadership of the Liberal Party have decided that they know best, that they know the right way to do things and they do not need to talk with anyone else. Their way is the right way. But it was the wrong way, because they got it wrong. They did not just get it wrong once, they got it wrong twice, because this is the third time that we have debated motions on changes to the sessional orders in this Parliament instigated by Mr Davis, and every time we have had to clean up the mess that they have left before.

In 600-something-odd days they are going to be making a case to the people of Victoria that they are capable of governing this state. What I think this episode demonstrates is that they are incapable of governing themselves, they are incapable of governing this chamber and they have got no chance of governing this state. If the people of Victoria were watching the unedifying spectacle about changes to the sessional orders, listening to the contributions that are being made in the course of this debate, I think they would be appalled at the priorities that have been presented by the new leadership of the Liberal Party as to what matters most to Victorians, because that is what this entire episode is all about. That is what the waste of time that Dr Heath is lamenting is all about. That is why we think if you want to go through a process of trying to change the sessional orders, the best way to do it is to have a conversation with everyone in the chamber, take it to the Procedure Committee, work it through, get agreement and bring it in.

We spent 90 minutes the first time, we spent 90 minutes the second time, and we are now into our fourth and fifth hour of debate in this parliamentary session on the sessional orders. Why? Because the Liberal Party's strategy is to talk about themselves first and foremost. They are not interested in prioritising debates about the cost of living. They are not interested in prioritising debates about housing, about our plans to build more homes to give more Victorians the opportunity to live in the communities that they want to live in.

They do not want to bring a debate to this chamber about education, because they do not want to have a discussion about the \$35 billion of additional investment that this government has made to education since being elected. They do not want to have a debate about the remarkable funding agreement that this state Labor government has signed with the federal Labor government to, for the first time, fully fund public schools in Victoria, the largest single investment in public education made by the Commonwealth ever, made by the Albanese Labor government in partnership with the Allan Labor government here in Victoria. They do not want to talk about that. They have not brought a motion to this chamber to debate school funding. They do not want to talk about the record investment that we as a Labor government are making in Victoria's public schools. In the last five years one half of all of the new government schools opened in this state were built right here in Victoria.

There is no motion being brought to the chamber to debate that, because they do not want to have a debate about the measures that the Allan Labor government is taking to deliver cost-of-living relief to Victorian households – the \$400 school saving bonus, free registration for apprentices, free TAFE, free kinder, free dental check-ups, free glasses at schools and the school breakfast club program. They are not interested in a debate about the cost-of-living support that the Allan Labor government is providing to Victorians. They are not interested in a debate about our plans to make sure that young Victorians can buy a home in the suburbs that their families live in, in the suburbs that they grew up in. They are not interested in a debate about that. They are not interested in a debate about our education system. They are not interested in a debate about the additional investments we are making in

education. They are not interested in a debate about the new way that we are teaching Victorian kids how to read and write. Because if they were interested in any of those topics – what the interjections from the backbench of the Liberal Party might describe as the more serious topics that they would prefer to be debating and not, as the Liberal backbench has decried the motion today, a waste of time – then we would want to be talking about those things.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, President, the member is verballing me, and I would ask you to bring him back to the motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order, but I will call the member back to the motion.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** The Liberal Party made a decision in their strategy and tactics that the first thing they wanted to talk about today was the mistake they made about the sessional orders in the last sitting week. Mr Davis said that it was just a loophole, and the last time we were here he said that this would never happen. But it has and we are here. You cannot believe a word they say. This is their choice about what we are debating here today. We would much prefer to be debating matters that are relevant to Victorians, but instead we are debating the mistakes of the Liberal Party once again.

#### **Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

##### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

###### **Water policy**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:00): (829) My question today is for the Minister for Water. Last week federal minister Tanya Plibersek announced buybacks of at least 100 gigalitres from the Murray–Darling Basin. This announcement has raised alarm bells within the farming community in my own electorate of Northern Victoria. Can the minister confirm that Victoria does not support the removal of water from farmers through federal buybacks?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:00): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her important question. I can confirm also that there is disquiet in her electorate. I was in Shepparton only last Thursday and Friday and spoke with many people who are connected with water and those that are reliant on water in her region. Can I say that I stated it in my first ministers statement as Minister for Water in this place a couple of sessions ago, and again if you see my social media, I have been quite forthright in terms of the Victorian government’s position in terms of the Commonwealth government’s buyback scheme. As I have said, whilst there might have been a change in minister, there certainly has not been a change in the Victorian government’s position, and we do oppose the Commonwealth’s open-tendered buybacks.

Large-scale untargeted water purchases do have significant consequences for our regional communities. Victoria has delivered more than any other state towards the 450 gigalitres of additional water. We understand how important it is to achieve environmental outcomes for our rivers, but Victoria is working to meet our Murray–Darling Basin plan obligations without harming our regional communities. We have also set up an interdepartmental committee that will work across portfolios and maximise environmental outcomes while supporting ongoing economic security for Northern Victoria, and we can also create new opportunities for Northern Victorian communities to thrive into the future. This IDC includes the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. The Premier and former Treasurer, the ministers for agriculture, environment, regional development and water, along with nine basin councils also wrote to the Prime Minister to make Victoria’s position clear and call for further support for our basin communities.

I know that the IDC will be in Shepparton and the surrounding regions in early April, and I know from those conversations that I had around Shepparton late last week that there is a full agenda for the IDC, and people are really looking forward to having those face-to-face direct conversations with people on the ground. I look forward to hearing what those conversations are, over and above the ones I have had.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:03): I thank the minister for her answer. Water is the lifeblood of the farming communities in Northern Victoria. What is the minister doing to secure Victoria's water supply for the irrigation community?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:04): I thank the member for her supplementary. Again, this is a very important issue because it impacts all of us. Open tendering leads to pushing up the price of meat, fruit, dairy and vegetables, many of which are obviously produced in the basin communities. Previous water recovery has led to irrigation industry job losses and family exits, which we are well acquainted with, all of which have had significant enduring flow-on effects in our regional economies. Seventy-five per cent of Australia's grapes and wine, 50 per cent of fruit and 30 per cent of dairy is produced in the basin. The open-tender buybacks directly increase the water market prices. They leave irrigators exposed to volatile processes for water allocation, and of course the consumer also pays the price. I will continue to advocate – *(Time expired)*

#### Youth justice system

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:05): (830) My question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Yesterday the Minister for Education in the other place stated electronic monitoring on bail is being led by the minister in the other place, the Minister for Youth Justice. Given this, can the minister confirm that he approved the implementation of the enhanced bail supervision and support trial which would place high-risk youth offenders in Victorian government schools?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:05): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question and his interest in my youth justice portfolio. I think it is the first time I have received a question regarding youth justice from Mr Mulholland. Taking some points from your question, I think the Deputy Premier was clear: as a government we always prioritise the safety of staff, students and the whole Victorian community. As Minister for Youth Justice I am responsible for the implementation of our electronic monitoring and enhanced bail supervision scheme, and that work is on track. Those of you in the chamber will recall that last year we passed legislation in relation to the implementation of that, and that will be implemented in the first half of this year, as was announced.

As part of that work I think it was important that my department undertook consultation – meaningful consultation, serious consultation – with the Department of Education, educators and principals. We received feedback from them, and I was pleased to receive that feedback. The education minister has outlined that, in terms of the trial, we can make sure the trial works as effectively as possible. We should all understand that getting young people back into engagement with school or training or into work is essential in turning their lives around. It is not just me saying that; it is a fact, and the evidence will show that. Even the opposition leader has accepted it, and the opposition leader has also accepted and supported raising the age of criminal responsibility, or at least that is what he told the *Guardian*.

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, the minister has had a long go at it, but the question was very specific in confirming whether he approved the implementation of the enhanced bail supervision and support trial; it is very simple.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister was being relevant to the question, and I felt like he responded straightaway to the question, but I might be wrong.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** As I was saying, getting young people engaged in education is key to their rehabilitation. Getting them engaged in work is key. These are all protective factors if you want to keep the community safe into the longer term, and I support working to have learning options for young people whilst they are out on bail. As the Deputy Premier outlined yesterday, there are 78 options in terms of flexible learning across our state for these young people. But obviously these young people are complex and they need a tailored approach and wraparound services to meet their health, education and employment needs going forward, and we will continue to do that work. As part

of that work, I expect my department to work closely with the education department to tailor a response to their educational needs. We have received feedback from principals and educators who have taken it on board, but the trial has not begun. Now, it is important to have serious and meaningful consultation, and that is the work that my department has done. I thank them for undertaking that work, and I look forward to the successful implementation of electronic monitoring later this year.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:08): So we now know that the Minister for Youth Justice did approve this trial in Victorian government schools. Last night, Minister, you stated:

For clarity's sake, I think it is important to underline that in terms of our commitment to rolling out the electronic monitoring, that work and the consultation work is being done and that will happen this year.

The Minister for Education has stated that the government's plan to put high-risk offenders in Victorian schools is wrong on so many levels. Can the minister guarantee that no high-risk offenders wearing ankle bracelets will be placed in mainstream government schools in Victoria?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:09): I thank Mr Mulholland for his supplementary question. I think that the Deputy Premier and education minister was very clear that he does not believe that mainstream schools are appropriate for the learning outcomes for these young people, and I support him doing that work. But there are learning options, because we want young people to learn and we want them to engage in education, because education is a protective factor in ensuring that they do not reoffend and the community is kept safe. I fully support us working together with the education department to have learning options for these young people, and I support the Deputy Premier in saying that mainstream schools are not appropriate for them. So we will continue to do that work, and I look forward to the successful rollout of this program.

**Ministers statements: early childhood education and care**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:10): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is opening 65 new or expanded kinders in 2025. This week I was delighted to attend Barayip Primary School Kindergarten, alongside the member for Tarneit from the other place, to officially open the new kinder and celebrate the new kinder year. It was wonderful to meet the children and families who have enrolled in such a beautiful new facility, which has provided up to 238 new kinder places in the growing Tarneit community.

But Barayip Primary School is just one of the 65 new or expanded services welcoming children in 2025. Last week I joined Mr Galea and Mr Tarlamis at the Topirum kindergarten in Clyde North, another of the 20 new kindergartens opening at government schools, which we know makes life easier for families, saving families time during the most busy period of the day by removing the double drop-off. Importantly, it also makes the transition from kinder to school easier for children, supporting their learning and education. These 20 new kinders on school sites will provide up to 2575 new kinder places for Victorian children. In addition, another 45 new or expanded kinders are opening this year at council, non-government school and other sector sites. These projects were supported by Building Blocks partnerships and capacity-building grants and will create more than 4000 new kinder places.

Not only are we building kinder facilities right across Victoria, we are also directly supporting families with the cost of living. Our free kinder program continues to save families up to \$2600 per child at a time when we know every cent counts. It is all part of our nation-leading, \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms, which are transforming early childhood education, saving families money and supporting parents and carers to return to work or study if they choose. We are investing billions to build and expand hundreds of kinders across the state and support children to access quality kinder programs. I look forward to visiting many more of these centres in the coming months to see firsthand the benefits they are bringing families in these communities.

### Payroll tax

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:12): (831) My question is for the Treasurer. Recently this Parliament passed a bill that confirmed that GP clinics are liable to pay payroll tax. However, that payroll tax liability could be reduced depending on the amount of bulk-billing that the clinic does. I also note that the federal government recently announced a plan to massively increase bulk-billing arrangements. My question to the Treasurer is: what sort of impact will this have on state revenues?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:12): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and his interest in this matter. You are correct in reflecting on changes that the house made in relation to GPs and their liability in relation to payroll tax. Specifically what we did in that legislation was provide an exemption from payroll tax for payments to contract a GP and employ GPs who are providing bulk-billing services. Our aim was to get more doctors into the bulk-billing scheme, which obviously is more accessible for a greater range of Victorians. In relation to that change, just here in Victoria, in the budget update we estimated that that exemption would cost the government around \$26 million a year from 2025–26, so \$26 million less in payroll tax. At the outset I would welcome the federal government’s announcement in relation to increasing bulk-billing. It is consistent with the position that we took in Victoria. They have obviously got a few more levers in relation to capacity to influence GPs and to be able to have more accessible –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: They are anti more accessible GP visits over here. In relation to the impact on the budget, we will update any forecast modelling in relation to those changes, but I think what I would say is that I am more than happy to take a hit in relation to the state coffers if it means more people can access bulk-billing GP appointments.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:14): I thank the Treasurer for her answer on that and look forward to seeing the updated estimates on revenue. My supplementary question is: was the Treasurer consulted by the federal government about the potential effects on taxation revenue in Victoria before the federal government announced this policy?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:15): Mr Limbrick, not in any formal manner. I was just reflecting on whether it would have been part of informal conversations. It is certainly not in a formal capacity. That would be my answer.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:15): (832) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Community infrastructure needs assessments carried out as part of the SRL East draft structure planning process deliberately did not consider higher community demand for primary and secondary schools. With the government looking to increase the population of the Cheltenham area by 121 per cent, why were primary and secondary schools excluded from this assessment?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:15): Thank you very much for that question, Mr Mulholland, and for your interest in managing growth and managing it well, including in the Cheltenham area. As you have quite rightly pointed out, the population in Cheltenham is going to more than double over the next 15 years, and that requires really careful and considered planning, which is where the release of the –

**Georgie Crozier**: It has not been done.

**David Davis:** You are not doing it.

**Harriet SHING:** All right, I am going to pick up that interjection, because what you have done is given me an opportunity to lay bare the narrative that you are running that we have not in fact been engaging in consultation. Conversations started with communities in 2019. We released a directions paper. There have been just under 10,000 submissions, countless conversations, meetings, discussions. There have been community reference groups, there was a youth panel, and again –

**David Davis:** Gagged reference groups. They are all on non-disclosure agreements.

**Harriet SHING:** All right, Mr Davis. I am going to take you up on that interjection. When you say that community groups have not had an opportunity to participate in discussions –

**David Davis:** No, I said they are on non-disclosure agreements.

**Harriet SHING:** All right, Mr Davis, I will take you up on that interjection in a moment. But what I will say is that the draft structure plans, which were released on Monday, which are public documents, have built upon, again, just under 10,000 submissions, countless hours of discussion with groups like councils, community organisations, individuals, people who want to know more about how they can participate in the design and the futures of the neighbourhoods around them as they grow. What I am going to do, Mr Davis, is take you immediately to the next part of your interjection.

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, I asked why primary and secondary schools were excluded from the assessment. I understand the minister does not want to answer that question, but I ask you to bring her back to that specific question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I was trying to very closely follow the questions and the answers. The minister knows that she should try not to respond to interjections, but then interjections are unruly. I was listening intently. I believe the minister was relevant, but I will call her back to the question.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** Sessional order 101, Mr Davis – you have been here for long enough perhaps to have been able to memorise them, but obviously we have got a bit more work to do.

What I would say in relation to the draft structure plans is that we have developed a series of directions around priorities that communities have identified. Those priorities range from open space to wayfinding, access to community facilities and proximity to the sorts of things that make for an opportunity to live and to live well in communities where people want to live closer to where they grew up.

What I would also say to you, Mr Mulholland, for the avoidance of any doubt, is: planning for schools, planning for health care continues across the state as it always has. It is done by reference to demographic information, the acuity of need, the relevant populations that exist in and around certain areas of the state. That might be aged care, it might be retirement living, it might be community-based care, it might be clinical support. In a school setting, we are also looking at the sort of demand that will exist as the population grows – for example, in early childhood learning and development, primary and secondary schools. That is part of all of the planning that we do, Mr Mulholland. It continues alongside this work.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:19): The community infrastructure needs assessment report states that:

The assessment is based on desktop research. No site visits or facility surveys were undertaken, and no modelling was completed.

Why is the government relying on assessments which include no facility surveys or modelling?

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**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:19): Thank you very much for that supplementary question, Mr Mulholland. In my answer to the substantive question, I was very clear about the work that has happened in communities, with communities and from communities. That is happening on the ground; it is happening in homes, in streets, in communities and with councils. We will keep doing that work. What I would offer to you, Mr Mulholland, is the opportunity to talk with people who are part of those conversations, because you do a great disservice to the people – just under 10,000 people – who have made submissions to this process. You do a great disservice to the engagement and the conversations that people are having every single day with the Suburban Rail Loop Authority.

**Evan Mulholland:** Then you make them sign non-disparagement agreements.

**Harriet SHING:** I am going to take you up on that, Mr Mulholland. The agreements as part of allocating grants of between \$10,000 and \$80,000 delivered to around 71 different organisations were the same agreements that you lot had under the east–west link project. They are uniform agreements, Mr Mulholland.

### Ministers statements: gambling harm

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:21): I rise today to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s continued commitment to reducing gambling harm in our community. Last week we launched a new round of gambling harm research grants, providing \$250,000 to fund research projects that increase our understanding of gambling harm and inform effective harm minimisation strategies. The Allan Labor government is committed to tackling gambling harm and ensuring our policies and services are informed by the latest research. This round of grants focuses on five key themes: understanding gambling products and environments, the community impact of gambling, effective harm prevention, the influence of industry marketing and improving recovery and support services. This research will be guided by consultation with people with lived experience, public health experts and service providers to ensure it is targeted and impactful.

Our government has funded 18 research projects over the past five years, providing critical insights into how we can better prevent gambling harm. One example is research by Professor Nicki Dowling at Deakin University, which explored the experiences of those affected by someone else’s gambling. Another is Associate Professor Alex Russell at CQUniversity, who examined the risks of adolescent gaming habits transitioning into gambling-related harm. This work matters. Recent data shows that more than one in 10 Victorians who gamble may be experiencing gambling-related harm. That does not just affect them, it can also affect about 200,000 of their loved ones. Applications for these grants are now open and close in just over three weeks, on 27 March. For the researchers out there, I encourage you to try different angles with gambling and provide some great research for us. This is just one step in our government working towards protecting Victorians and reducing gambling-related harm in all our communities.

### Mental health workforce

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:23): (833) My question is directed to the Minister for Mental Health. Victorian mental health workers have resorted to industrial action after seven months of negotiations to get a decent deal for the public mental health EBA. Unfortunately, the Victorian government continues to utilise the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association as a bargaining agent instead of handling its own bargaining as the employer. Mental health workers are subject to increasing levels of occupational violence and are underpaid and overworked, and too many workers burn out and leave the sector. Along with provisions to address the stagnant wages, mental health workers are demanding improved staffing ratios and measures to ensure that their workplaces are safe. The response from this government is a substandard wages offer that does not even come

close to key staffing and safety issues. Can the minister explain why this vital sector is once again caught in protracted bargaining?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:24): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. As I have said in the Parliament and outside the Parliament many times, I have got nothing but the highest amount of respect for our mental health workforce. They are the backbone of our mental health system. They do incredibly challenging work and it is often when consumers are at the lowest point in their lives. So you will, as I have said before, never hear a bad word out of my mouth when it comes to the skills and the dedication of our mental health workforce. It is one of the reasons why we have invested over \$600 million to skill up, retain and attract new workers to this sector, and that has seen workforce growth of 25 per cent, which is I think around double historic averages. That is certainly evidence of our strong support as a government for the workforce in this sector. I absolutely support the right of those workers to collectively bargain through their unions, and that process is continuing in good faith.

In relation to the VHIA, what I would say to you, Mr Ettershank, about that is that it is appropriate that they are involved, given that there are 18 separate health services that are involved in the bargaining and that the employment relationship is directly between those workers and those health services, so they do play a role. But of course with all health industrial bargaining negotiations, we do have our departments involved, and the Department of Health officials are certainly in attendance at all of these meetings to ensure that the bargaining is continuing in good faith, is fair and the outcomes for our mental health workforce are appropriate. I am confident that the fortnightly meetings are continuing – or actually I think it is twice weekly that the meetings are continuing – and that we will be able to resolve this agreement in terms that are acceptable and reasonable and fair to this amazing workforce.

**David ETTERSANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:26): I thank the minister for her response. The 2020 EBA negotiations lasted for more than 2½ years as the VHIA dragged out these negotiations, with no consequences for them but painful consequences for the workers, who waited years for a pay rise. This time, unions asked that a former commissioner be present to speed up the bargaining process and ensure that no agreements or clauses get lost, as happens all too often. Unions and workers want to see this EBA give life to the recommendations of the royal commission – an outcome the government surely desires as well. Yet after seven months of negotiation, the current offer fails mental health workers and does not progress the objectives of the royal commission recommendations. Notwithstanding the range of health services involved, why does the government continue to outsource its bargaining responsibilities to the VHIA, who have well-demonstrated form in drawing out negotiations to the detriment of our health workers?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:27): I thank Mr Ettershank for his supplementary question, and I certainly would not characterise the role of the VHIA as some sort of outsourcing arrangement. There are direct employment relationships between the workforce covered by this particular industrial instrument and individual health services. It is not for me to say that the VHIA ought not to have a role, given that health services have supported their role as the peak in these negotiations. What I will say, though, is that following representations from the unions, I was very happy for former Fair Work commissioner Michelle Bissett, who is a highly regarded industrial relations practitioner, to be involved in the bargaining to facilitate those talks, because we all want to see a swift and fair and reasonable outcome to these negotiations.

#### **Youth justice system**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): (834) My question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, I refer to the youth justice section in the report on government services released in January. This reports that the average number of daily youth offenders in detention was only 54 and that the average number of daily youth offenders on community-based supervision was only 216 – a grand total of 268 offenders. These figures translate to 4.1 youth offenders per 10,000 young people –

the lowest nationally – with all other jurisdictions having rates per 10,000 young people in double digits. I therefore ask: Minister, does the low number and percentage of those in detention lead to more convicted criminals roaming free, with the consequence of those offenders committing various unsatisfactory acts while in the community?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:29): I thank Mr Davis for that interesting question and his reference to the report on government services. I think, Mr Davis, you may have a bit of older data, because there was a new –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Enver ERDOGAN**: January, yes. What I will say is that we are focused on ensuring that, as a government, community safety is at the heart of all our justice reforms and all our justice efforts. In relation to the amount of people in custody, I think I have been pretty clear on this a number of times in relation to other questions you have asked, Mr Davis, and even one last month, that as the Minister for Youth Justice or in adult corrections I do not necessarily determine who comes into our system. It is probably a question better addressed to the Attorney-General, to be frank, as she is the first law officer. If you are unhappy with sentencing or other matters, like the bail laws, they are probably better addressed to the Attorney-General.

What I will say is thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about the report on government services, because what we have seen is, for instance, a 17 percentage point decrease in people that come into youth justice and reoffend. So we are on the right –

**David Davis**: On a point of order, President, I have asked a very specific question about part of the report on government services. The minister is not entitled to answer an entirely different section of the report on government services. He can answer in his area that he is responsible for – that is released on 30 January.

**The PRESIDENT**: I believe the minister did indicate his responsibility and where other responsibilities may lie. Now he is adding context to that part of the preamble.

**Enver ERDOGAN**: Insofar as the question relates to my portfolio areas, we are committed to investing in our youth justice system to keep the community safe and give these young people the opportunity to turn their behaviour around, because when they are back out in the community we do not want them reoffending. I was pleased by the most recent report on government services, which shows that reoffending rates have gone down for those that enter our youth justice system. We do have the lowest incarceration rate. We have the lowest incarceration rate of Aboriginal young people, for example. I think that is something we should be proud of. That is the effort in closing the gap. That is the outcome of an Aboriginal justice agreement over 20 years of this government. We will continue to do that work. In relation to policies or laws around sentencing and about who enters the youth justice system, I think that is a question better addressed to the Attorney-General.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): Just for the minister's edification, it is table 17A.1, so he can go and look it up later. Minister, the total recurrent expenditure on youth justice services increased from \$151.8 million in 2014–15 to \$347.2 million in 2023–24, funding that has more than doubled while youth crime has increased and is out of control. Victorians are paying for youth detention beds that are empty – utilisation rates are the lowest since 2014–15 at 36.7 per cent. I ask therefore: Minister, is it government policy to keep youth detention beds empty whilst an epidemic of home invasions and violent crime is committed across the state by youth offenders roaming free?

**The PRESIDENT**: I am trying to work out how that supplementary is relevant to the substantive question, but I will call the minister.

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:33): As I said in my substantive, I make no

apologies for investing in keeping our community safe. The report on government services also, Mr Davis, because you pointed to a specific section –

**A member** interjected.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I will take up that interjection as well. Some of the figures are not directly comparable to other jurisdictions. For example, jurisdictions can treat the cost of health care differently. In our system it is incorporated into the youth justice cost. Also we know at the moment that in some jurisdictions young people are being kept in police watch houses, which is not factored into the cost of youth justice. I am proud of where our youth justice system is at in terms of our custodial facilities. The investments we have made in Cherry Creek and Parkville have modernised those facilities. We have supported our workforce, we have supported upgrades to the infrastructure. We will continue to do that work. But if you look at it on a per capita basis, we in fact spend less on youth justice than they do in other jurisdictions.

#### **Ministers statements: housing**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:34): I am pleased to update the chamber on some really important reforms that we are making to support Victorian homebuyers. These reforms will give Victorians peace of mind as they make the largest purchase and economic investment of their lives. We are proud to be a government that is not only building more homes for Victorians but also delivering a new building watchdog, the Building and Plumbing Commission. This will have tough new enforcement powers to order the rectification of defects. We are establishing new developer bonds set at 2 per cent of the cost of the building, just like in New South Wales, which will work just like a rental bond to ensure that there is no excuse not to fix defects. Like the New South Wales jurisdiction, we are starting the journey to transition that bond scheme to a 10-year liability insurance scheme to cover apartment owners. We are also establishing a first-resort insurance scheme so that home owners can make a claim on a building issue straightaway and do not have to wait for a builder to become insolvent, to die or to disappear. We are seeking feedback on new reforms to introduce building manuals for apartment buildings and proposing more mandatory inspections during construction.

These reforms are really important good news for Victorians who are looking to buy their first home, and they are a really important test for every single member of this Parliament, because we have heard too many excuses for too long from others about why we cannot build more homes and apartments. While we build them, you block them. This is where I would be inviting the opposition to put aside their excuses, back in Victorian consumers and homebuyers and support reforms as we introduce them. I would also challenge them to walk away from backing dodgy builders over those Victorians who risk losing everything so that they can run one more scare campaign. The work goes on. We are proud to support consumers.

#### **Bail laws**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): (835) My question today is also to the Minister for Corrections. Victoria's old bail laws prior to the recent reforms that were passed were described as a complete and unmitigated disaster, and the reforms that were passed were in part due to the death of Veronica Nelson. Many of your cabinet colleagues apologised to Veronica's mother based on those discriminatory laws, and stakeholders have been very clear that what we do not need now is knee jerk reform that will cost more lives. With regard to the recent government announcements on a possible review of Victoria's bail laws, as Minister for Corrections will you be advocating to the Premier that the bail review needs to implement the full recommendations of the Aboriginal deaths in custody royal commission, the coronial findings into the death of Veronica Nelson and those advocated for in the subsequent Poccum's law?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:37): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in our bail laws and our Bail Act. I think this, although very cleverly worded, is very similar to a question that Mr Davis asked me a couple of sitting weeks ago. That reform that the Premier has announced of our justice settings is being led by the Attorney-General and the police minister in the other place, and I will obviously be supporting them and having ongoing conversations. Although you are inviting me to reveal some of those private conversations I am having, I will resist the temptation to do that. But what I will say is the Premier has been very clear that our focus is on community safety, ensuring that we have the settings right – that they reflect what is occurring in the community – and responding to what the community has been saying to the government, because community safety is a whole-of-government priority. That work is being led by the Attorney-General and the police minister. As Minister for Corrections I am interested in seeing the outcomes, and I will have some input into that process and that review.

From a corrections perspective, we made big announcements last year about the configuration of our system – the closure of the private prison at Port Phillip and also the closure of the almost 60-year-old Dhurringile Prison in the Shepparton region. They were quite drastic in terms of the make-up. We will be opening our new modern, state-of-the-art Western Plains prison later this year. What I can say is that we are making the best use of our best facilities, and we have the ability to scale up and down as required.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): Minister, to your knowledge, were First Nations and legal specialist organisations consulted before the Premier announced the bail law review, and if not, how to your knowledge are they being meaningfully included and consulted in the review process now?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:39): I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question. As I said in my answer to Mr Davis on his previous question, we have a longstanding agreement, the Aboriginal justice agreement, with our Aboriginal community and partners – because they are not just stakeholders, they are partners in the justice space. As Minister for Corrections I have regular meetings with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus. In fact I had a meeting last week where they shared their feedback in relation to the Premier's announced review. I was very clear with them as well that that review is being led by the Attorney-General and the police minister, but they did share their concerns about what that might entail. I know the Attorney-General has met with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and heard their views, so they are involved in the consultation process; there are no outcomes. I look forward to the Attorney-General and police minister bringing these matters to cabinet, and on those matters I am sure that wherever it lands community safety will be at the heart of those reforms.

### Regional employment

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:40): (836) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. According to the current budget, the number of jobs the government expects to create in regional Victoria from its regional development programs is 250 this year, down from a target of 500 the previous year. Six years ago that target figure was 1800 jobs. With the highest unemployment rate in the nation, why has the government given up on creating jobs in our regions?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:41): Ms Bath, I just take a bit of issue with the characterisation in your question. Victoria's regional unemployment rate continues to be strong; it is 3.8 per cent, and that is largely thanks to a concerted effort of this government working hand in glove with communities and regional communities in particular as part of a regional jobs plan that underpins a lot of the work we do. Since coming to government we have created 150,000 jobs in regional Victoria, and that does not appear to be slowing down; those are the messages I am hearing from Labor representatives in country

regions. Despite the pandemic, there was not a single month when regional unemployment was higher under this government than in the time that the previous government was in power – so, your side. When you were last in office you barely created 10,000 jobs for the entire period. That is not even 7 per cent of what we have delivered, so I find it a little bit rich, Ms Bath, that you are standing there lecturing a government that has an incredibly strong record in job creation in regional Victoria. Because of the way you have characterised the question and the fact that I am concerned about your understanding of the data, I would be more than happy to take you through regional development efforts and job creation over the past 10 years.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:42): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, there are 18 grant programs listed on Regional Development Victoria's website which aim to:

... facilitate investment, create jobs and build regional ... communities.

All but two of them are closed; some have been closed since 2021. Why is the government prioritising the \$34.5 billion Suburban Rail Loop at the same time it has slashed programs to help regional Victorians get jobs?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:43): Ms Bath, again, I do not accept the premise of your question but also indicating that infrastructure projects do not benefit regional Victoria is a really narrow-minded and misleading view of it. If you like, you could come and visit the concrete plant in Benalla, which has created thousands of jobs to create materials to contribute to the infrastructure projects of the state. There are lots of jobs being created because of infrastructure projects that the Labor government is responsible for. You would not know this, because in coalition you do not build anything. So you did not create jobs, whether it was in metro Melbourne or regional Victoria. When it comes to the SRL, if you live in Bairnsdale and you want to go to Monash University, you will be able to do that without having to come into the city first once the SRL is in operation.

#### **Ministers statements: retail worker penalty rates**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:44): As the Minister for Industrial Relations, I am incredibly proud that our government supports and advocates for a fair and comprehensive safety net of minimum wages and conditions for workers, and we acknowledge that those who work unsociable and irregular hours should be compensated for such work. Penalty rates are a fundamental and inherent component of our industrial relations framework. That is why recently I coordinated the Victorian government's submission to the Fair Work Commission advocating that retail workers' entitlements to penalty rates be protected. We have consistently opposed the reduction of penalty rates because we know the impacts this would have particularly on vulnerable and low-paid workers. I want to acknowledge and commend the advocacy of the ACTU and the SDA, who represent workers in the retail sector who are heavily reliant on penalty rates. I have heard from the SDA stories of their members deeply concerned about the impact the decision to remove penalty rates could have on them and their families. Workers in major supermarkets have emphasised how critical penalty rates are to making ends meet, stating:

Wages are so important ... everything costs so much as it is.

Workers like Shaun told the union:

I bought a house with my wife; we have a mortgage and every dollar counts.

This makes clear that getting rid of penalty rates is not a fantastic deal for people like Shaun.

As minister I will always push for better wage outcomes for workers, something I am delighted to see was achieved recently with the Victoria Police enterprise agreement now being endorsed by members. It will see our hardworking police and PSOs receive a pay rise and improved conditions to acknowledge the critical work they do every day in keeping Victorians safe.

*Constituency questions***Western Victoria Region**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (12:46): (1424) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure Gabrielle Williams. Minister, last week the state and federal governments announced that they are investing more than \$4 billion towards transforming Sunshine station, including with extra platforms and a dedicated spur line that will make it the hub for regional rail services connecting to Melbourne Airport. We know this will alleviate the travel pressure for people coming from the west and indeed from all other parts of Victoria into the Melbourne Airport. It will take pressure off the reliance on car parking at the airport as well. This is very much welcomed. My question to the minister is: how will these investments benefit people from Western Victoria Region?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (1425) My question is for the Minister for Police. Will the minister commit to funding a new police station in the Whittlesea township in the 2025–26 state budget? Last week I attended a neighbourhood crime forum for the Whittlesea police service area, where concerned residents outlined the fear that exists in many parts of the municipality due to the rising levels of violent crime. The latest Crime Statistics Agency data shows that crime is up 28 per cent in the Whittlesea municipality. Victoria Police representatives said that one of the major obstacles to effectively tackling crime is resource constraints and that Whittlesea police station in particular was not fit for purpose and urgently needs to be replaced. The building is rickety, full of asbestos and lacks disabled access. Six years ago minor renovations that added some security features and replaced old doors were done, but that is not good enough. Last Friday a 14-year-old girl and a 19-year-old male received stab wounds in an incident at Epping shopping centre. The minister – (*Time expired*)

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1426) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituent is a resident of Narre Warren and has been following media reports about the proposed Hampton Park waste transfer station to be operated by Veolia. My constituent is aware that nine south-east councils have signed a deal to supply the proposed station with waste for 25 years. From reports, about half of the 500,000 tonnes of waste that will go to the transfer station will then be transported to the Maryvale waste-to-energy incinerator via trucks. My question from my constituent is: will hundreds of trucks be travelling to the Maryvale incinerator on local roads in Hampton Park and through Narre Warren, close to the home of my constituent?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1427) My question is for Minister Williams. Minister, just over a week ago the Albanese federal government announced it would partner 50–50 with the state government to overhaul the intersection of Thompsons Road and Clyde Road in Clyde North. This is an incredibly congested local intersection. It is a nightmare for local families, many of whom have raised their concerns about the intersection with me directly. The Allan Labor government is investing in a major road upgrade of this site, which will include converting it from a roundabout into a full set of traffic lights and a fully signalised junction. Minister, how does having a federal government that cares about Victorian infrastructure help us to deliver the infrastructure upgrades our growing outer suburbs need?

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1428) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Parents and staff from a number of schools in Mickleham have raised concerns with me about the route 525 bus from Donnybrook station to Craigieburn station. The bus route along St Georges Boulevard and Blackmore Road serves not only this growing community but also the schools within a kilometre of each other: Mickleham Secondary College,

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Gaayip-Yagila Primary School and Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, with around 1600 students. These bus routes sometimes operate only at around a 30-minute frequency and do not have adequate shelter from the elements. I ask the minister to take on board the feedback from my community and ask her whether she will install bus shelters and increase the frequency of this bus.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1429) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Last year, in both March and May, I asked questions about the public housing estate at 1–9 Alamein Avenue in Ashburton. The public housing on the site has been partially vacant for years and is now at 82 per cent vacancy, with only seven of the 40 units now occupied. There has been virtually no maintenance on the site, and the existing tenants are left to live around the empty, squalid units that are regularly occupied by squatters. We are in a housing crisis, and to me and the tenants and the local constituents in Ashburton it is beyond comprehension that Homes Victoria has been sitting on this valuable public housing resource for years without putting people in there and with seemingly no progress. What are the government's plans for this site?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1430) For the Minister for Environment, last Friday I had the privilege of speaking at the 14th annual Celebrating Women in Conservation Breakfast hosted by Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage Victoria. This year's theme 'March forward' was a reminder that gender equality and environmental conservation go hand in hand. With International Women's Day this Saturday, it is the perfect time to reflect on the incredible women leading conservation efforts. Their work is essential to protecting biodiversity, which is crucial in the fight against climate change. We know that safeguarding biodiversity is critical to keeping our planet healthy, and that includes diverse voices in conservation, which leads to better outcomes for our environment. We know that the conservation of our environment is absolutely critical to tackling climate change. My question is to the Minister for Environment in the other place on behalf of the local environment groups in my electorate: what is the Allan Labor government doing to support and protect the environment in the Northern Metropolitan Region?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (1431) My question is to the Minister for Health. Albury–Wodonga residents, local councillors, doctors and nurses have come to Parliament today to protest on the front steps. They are frustrated that the Labor state government reneged on their promise to build a new hospital for the rapidly growing region. I spoke with staff who start each shift facing ambulance ramping and a significant shortage of hospital beds. Time is wasted searching for a bed rather than caring for the patient. Over 3600 people are on the waitlist. The average wait time for category 2 patients is 430 days, and the region has the worst ambulance response times in the state. Locals are tired of raising the issues and being ignored as the state government ploughs ahead to redevelop the existing site with a master plan that fails to meet current needs, let alone future demand. I note the minister met with the key stakeholders in February this year. Will the government commit to reviewing the adequacy of existing plans to address the concerns being raised?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (1432) My question today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the consultations between Nillumbik Shire Council and Whittlesea council regarding the stage 2 upgrade of Yan Yean Road. Community members continue to have serious concerns about the Bridge Inn Road intersection and remain baffled about the decision to proceed with option B over option C. There was significant community support for option C, including from Nillumbik and Whittlesea councils. This option protected more beautiful old red gums and had a smaller footprint on this precious green wedge region. Nearby residents are deeply concerned that option B will funnel too much traffic onto smaller roads which are ill equipped

for heavy traffic flow. The local Labor member recently claimed that families do not have time to head to an endless cycle of meetings about the road. However, just last week 60 people attended a community meeting to voice their concerns, with a second online meeting last night. Minister, the community deserves to know why the government proceeded with option B of this intersection upgrade instead of option C, which seemingly had much more support. Will you release the justification and consultation results to justify option B as the best choice?

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1433) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, how many schools in the Southern Metropolitan Region participate in the school breakfast clubs program? Last week I visited Mentone Primary School, one of the schools in Southern Metro that participate in the school breakfast clubs program. It was great to visit and see the benefit that the students at the school gain from having a breakfast club provide cereal, toast and fruit cups to students before school. It was also great to see the student leaders volunteering in the organisation, handing out the food. I spoke to Sienna, Addison and Morgan, grade 6 school leaders who were helping their fellow students get some nutritious food into their bellies. I also chatted to the parents, who were buttering toast at a rate I have never seen anyone butter toast before, such was the demand from the students at that school. They loved it. It is a great program, and I am glad to see it supporting families right across the region.

#### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (12:56): (1434) My constituency question is for the minister representing the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Roads in the Western Metro region are congested and falling apart. The government has failed to release the completed business cases for the Calder Freeway upgrade and the Melton Highway upgrade from Melton to Caroline Springs. I ask the minister to immediately release these and any other road infrastructure business cases relevant to my area for the public and for council, so that they can plan.

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1435) My question is to the Minister for Police. One of the responsibilities of government is to keep the community safe. Victorians are living in fear in their own homes due to the increase in the number of aggravated burglaries that are literally being reported on every day. It has been raised on Melbourne radio station 3AW that these shocking crime stats should be released weekly. For so many of my constituents, the impacts of these crimes are significant and long-lasting. Victorians should not be living in fear and wondering when they go to bed at night if they will be another victim of a violent home invasion. Crime stats are released quarterly, but since the question was raised on radio a number of people have approached me and asked me why they are not being released weekly. The issue is of immense public interest, so in the interest of transparency and to know whether the government's strategies to address crime are working, I ask: will the government release the data on the number of aggravated burglaries each week?

**The PRESIDENT:** Is that question relevant to your electorate?

**Georgie CROZIER:** Most certainly it is. How many constituents have raised this issue with me.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am not going to argue with you. I am asking if you are tying it into the stats for your electorate.

**Georgie CROZIER:** My concerns are as my constituents' concerns are; they are being impacted.

**The PRESIDENT:** I know, but I am just trying to help, Ms Crozier, because –

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am happy for my electorate's stats to be released on a weekly basis. That would be very helpful.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is good.

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### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1436) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Police. The Box Hill Athletic Club in my electorate has been repeatedly targeted by thieves, with sheds broken into and valuable equipment stolen. Criminals are using metal grinders to force entry, and members fear they are being scoped out in advance. The club is run by volunteers, like most are. It cannot claim insurance and must replace the stolen items through fundraising – again, it is unsustainable. Increased police patrols, better lighting and security cameras are urgently needed to deter further crime. Stronger penalties for the offenders are a must. In the past 12 months total offender incidents in Whitehorse have risen by 27.8 per cent, showing a clear need for stronger enforcement. I ask the minister: what additional resources are being provided to stop these criminals before they strike again and to improve community security for the wonderful Box Hill Athletic Club?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:59): (1437) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. Libby Coker, your federal colleague, recently claimed that Torquay deserves an urgent care clinic. This is rather rich, given that the Victorian government pledged at the 2018 and 2022 elections to transform Torquay's health centre into a new community hospital. Mrs Coker, part of the Surf Coast Shire Council at the time, was well aware of this promise and the staged photo opportunities in hard hats and safety vests. But last year the Victorian government made it clear its priorities lie elsewhere, breaking a six-year promise to the people of Torquay. It seems this was nothing more than a political stunt, which now the federal member for Corangamite seems to be repeating. Minister, has your federal colleague discussed this policy with you, or is it another fake and empty promise from a Labor politician to the people of Torquay?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:00): (1438) My question is to the Minister for Education. The schools bonus rollout was botched, and quoting a frustrated Gippsland principal who asked to remain anonymous, the reconciliation at the school administration level is a nightmare. Shopping at separate suppliers for uniforms, stationery and textbooks, some families have actually overspent their \$400 figure per child. Some suppliers are also invoicing schools in bulk and not itemising those invoices. School admin is struggling to reconcile the funds and, afraid of having insufficient funds, they are holding off on paying suppliers. You can see where the mess comes in. There has been no guidance from the Department of Education, and my Gippsland principal wants to know how you will sort out this mess so that schools in my region are not left in debt and suppliers can actually receive their payments.

**Sitting suspended 1:01 pm until 2:02 pm.**

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#### Sessional orders

**Debate resumed.**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:02): I rise to make a contribution on the motion put forward by Mr Davis on amending the existing sessional orders – sessional orders that, I am quick to remind the chamber, were originally introduced by the member back in 2023. This is now the third time that those opposite have brought up a debate in this chamber about sessional orders. The government gave a very clear warning to the opposition then, and it will make it clear again now, that we should not be moving changes to sessional orders on the fly. It has the potential to disrupt the proceedings of the chamber and create chaos for everybody, and that is exactly what has happened.

When this motion was last debated in the Council in its original form, we on this side of the chamber raised certain questions and concerns about the outcomes of the motion. That motion in effect introduced restrictions to the debates. A limitation to two motions was introduced for Wednesdays,

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and further motions which exceeded this limit were shuffled onto subsequent days to be debated. In the third and latest instalment of the same sessional orders, debates on government and non-government matters are being divided up between different days.

The argument for this, along with the original time restrictions of up to 5 minutes per member, which essentially restricted the extent to which members may make their views or concerns known, was for the purpose of succinctness. Succinctness may sound perfectly well and good, but in practice we need to look at the actual impacts of these restrictions. I believe some of my colleagues – they being Mr Galea and Mr Batchelor – made several observations about the implications of moving those sessional orders and aired some concerns back when the motion was first moved by Mr Davis. For example, the 20-minute restriction that is in place for some motions was noted to potentially stifle competitive debate in this chamber.

It would be limited to just 5 minutes per member. Owing to the total duration of 20 minutes, that would mean a maximum of four speakers to debate it if their whole 5 minutes were used. In fact if we wanted every member in this chamber to raise a point or statement on a matter relating to the issue being discussed, each member would be left with 30 seconds or less. Thirty seconds is just not good enough. Each region of the Legislative Council represents 500,000 constituents, over four times the size of a federal electorate, all of whom we represent in this chamber. Thirty seconds is nowhere near adequate to reflect their views, questions and concerns over certain matters.

Another point I would like to touch on, which was raised in the first debate all those months ago, is the role of the committee in drafting these procedural matters. There are around 272 standing orders determining the procedure of this chamber. Any changes made to these orders are usually a matter for the Procedure Committee. That committee is tasked with the review of standing orders on a periodic basis, with the last review wrapping up just a few weeks back. Sessional orders, for all intents and purposes, act as an operational procedure for this place alongside the standing orders until the next session of Parliament is called, which will be late in 2026, yet the original draft of the sessional orders was not brought before the chamber from the Procedure Committee, which had not reviewed this in a meaningful way back in 2023. This is most likely why the opposition has had to drag it out into this chamber now three times, each time tweaking it ever so slightly.

It is further bizarre to see that no-one is willing to support the referral of this matter to the Procedure Committee. In that environment maybe some of the issues now being discussed on the floor could be fleshed out and debated. That way perhaps the opposition would not be in this current predicament of reintroducing a change to the sessional orders for a third time. While sessional orders may not carry from one term of Parliament to the next, they are nonetheless a critical piece of how this place operates on a day-to-day basis, with the same gravity as the standing orders. Something like that I believe should derive from the committee. After all, it is something which will have impact, quite severely it seems, on the operation of this place and the management of members' motions. There ought to be a process by which members can deliberate and discuss these matters and decide whether or not these changes will provide meaningful value to the standing orders or sessional orders, but that has not happened. Frankly, a motion which has not gone through the scrutiny of that committee and has not come through on the recommendation of anyone besides Mr Davis himself and those opposite should be rejected on that basis alone.

We cannot get into the habit in this place of changing up the sessional orders every so often when the proceedings are not unfolding exactly how we would like them to. After all, this model, which the opposition has now sought to amend three times, may need to be amended again in the future. We are more than happy on this side of the house to debate the fine details of the opposition's errors every Wednesday, but unfortunately this is not the Allan Labor government's top priority. That would be reserved for building and investing in schools across Victoria or building up our health services, building critical transport infrastructure and building more homes. But if the opposition wants to spend their day of non-government business flip-flopping on motions that they cannot seem to get the language right for, well, that is their call. We are focused on what matters to Victorians on the ground,

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not cleaning up the opposition's mistakes when they refuse the help of the Procedure Committee. The changes now being moved are as follows:

a maximum of two motions under this Sessional Order may be –  
moved by non-government members and debated each Wednesday;  
moved by government members and debated on Tuesday and Thursday ...

The motion further reads that:

a motion proposed to be debated under this Sessional Order will take precedence on –  
Tuesday and Thursday at the time prescribed for government business;  
Wednesday at the time prescribed for short form documents motions ...

What this effectively spells out is that the member has realised his original orders have backfired. Possibly, though I cannot know for certain, he was hoping that there may be more time for him to hear non-government motions in this chamber, but what has happened instead is that now we have a bottleneck of debate motions. Instead of taking a step back and reflecting, we now have a new amendment which will tighten the screws even further. It is still quite unclear how this will solve any of the issues that arise from the existing arrangements, and it may possibly exacerbate them.

When this was originally moved it was done to keep those matters as succinct as possible. Now they are dragging them out. Further, those opposite waste more and more time trying to fix their own mistakes. Instead of realising that perhaps something went wrong, they have now decided to tighten the screws further, which would mean more delays and more backlogs. Every member of this chamber is interested in ensuring that debate runs smoothly and is timely and that those who wish to make a contribution have the opportunity to do so. This, however, is not how we achieve that. This does not allow for more debate by members or for more motions to be heard in this chamber. As I said before, these matters are better served by being debated in the confines of the Procedure Committee rather than wasting valuable time on the floor. This is why the Allan Labor government maintains its opposition to the motion without it being referred to the Procedure Committee.

I would like to raise another concern of note with these changes, that being the impact on the length of these days. We already know that in the first two instances those opposite have messed up the execution of this change and that has caused unnecessary pressures and waste in our procedures. Consider the committees that meet on Wednesdays, usually after the day's matters on the floor have wrapped up. Those meetings may now be pushed back further and further, if not piled into different days, just like motions have been moved on. And what of the parliamentary staff, skipping lunch breaks to accommodate the demanding needs of the Council all because twice now, and maybe a third time, the opposition has failed to properly craft the motion? All this mess and commotion because those opposite are too proud to take this to the Procedure Committee.

I will note that in the last, or present, iteration of these orders, short-form documents motions were taken out of general business, and that inadvertently made it so that any member could move documents motions. The opposition repeatedly refused to listen to the government's warning of unintended consequences, and as a result the crossbench suffered. The crossbench and the government decided to withdraw our documents motions to correct the mishaps caused by the opposition. This is an entirely avoidable debacle. The crossbench should not be collateral in the opposition's incompetence. We should not be in the habit in this chamber of routinely changing sessional orders on a whim, and I hope that the lessons have now been learned. I hope, moving forward, that all sides of this chamber can come to an understanding that toying so loosely with the governing sessional orders is not good for the operations of this Parliament. I would certainly hope that those opposite take the advice on board and refer matters to the committee to review before wasting precious time on the parliamentary floor.

There are around 16 sitting weeks in Parliament of three days each, and as important as sessional orders are I do not think that spending one of those days per week on the opposition endlessly

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amending their own motions out of stubbornness not to go to the committee is a good use of time. I hope that the lesson has been learned firmly as we approach the third rendition of this motion and moving forward that we refer all these matters to the Procedure Committee.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:12): I am tempted to start quoting several of my colleagues, but I will refrain from doing that. This is a motion that is a source of frustration for the government side, and the main reason for that is because of the lack of review, consideration and thoughtfulness that has been put into the first, second and now, potentially, the third iteration of this motion in relation to sessional orders for this chamber.

What a perfect example of the law of unintended consequences. I do not think there is actually a law of unintended consequences, but if there was, that would be too generous for describing this issue, this mistake that was made by Mr Davis. It would be too generous because if it was an unintended consequence, it would be the unintended consequence of a due process of consideration, and that we certainly have lacking here. The most recent iteration of the sessional orders removed short-form documents motions from general business time on Wednesdays, which quite clearly meant that any other member of this chamber, including government members, could move these documents motions. Obviously that was not considered at all.

I just want to go through what a proper policy process might involve if it was going to consider a full range of impacts when we are thinking about changing something, particularly in this chamber when what we change here affects Victorian people, except of course what we are doing right here, right now in this motion. Let us have a look at what a good policy process entails – and the functional word here is ‘process’. The first step is consultation with the impacted community. So you would ask those impacted, ‘What do you think? How is it going to work for you?’ I would say that Minister Symes has definitely done that by raising the broader issues of adjournment and other issues that she is open to discussing changing with others in this chamber, not unilaterally going and moving a motion.

Then the next step in a good process is consultation with the related sector or the technical community related to the particular issue. Again, that is about asking the experts or the people that work in the sector what they think. Then you need to draw on some research; that is going to make sure that all of the knowledge we have got is actually up to date, is applicable to the issues that we are looking at and is relevant to the social dynamics. Then every policy process should include an expression of values, an aspiration of what might be. Values underpin everything we do, so ‘Why is it an issue? What is the problem?’ Then you start to get a bit more practical in the policy process. You start drafting some practical changes that might fix the problem, that might change the way something is done. It might include disenfranchised members of the community or society or redress an inequality, in the case of Labor’s values.

Then once you get some practical arrangements starting to shape up, you go back to consult again. You go and ask, ‘Would this be a possible solution? How would this work? What would this mean if we did it this way?’ And that is when you start to hear from those who oppose it, those who agree with it and those who support it but want it done another way, and you really start to refine how the change might happen. Then you might throw in a look from a regulatory and compliance perspective. Does this conflict with any other current legislation or regulations, and also, is it doable? Can we enforce it? That is always a really important question. There is no use changing a law, for instance, and not being able to enforce it. That is the point at which you start to come across unintended consequences.

But of course – here we go – we have not had a process. The appropriate process for this particular motion was the Procedure Committee. If it had gone through the Procedure Committee, we would have had proper consultation, we would have looked at the pros and cons, and we would have been able to understand all of the strengths and weaknesses. We might have even provided opportunities for others in the chamber across the crossbench and our side to add value to it as well as to address any of the problems that might be a part of it. Then the technical experts – the staff, attendants and clerks team – make sure that everything works properly. That is that technical expertise.

## MOTIONS

No, it has just been written up, thrown to the chamber and here we are, not considering – I do take exception to this – the impact on staff hours of work. In fact it would be my personal view that sessional orders ought not be changed in this chamber ever without the consideration of the impacts on staff who support this chamber. Gone are the days when it was not reasonable to provide safe working hours, a safe working environment and a healthy lifestyle when it comes to a meal break and a rest, because we do understand that people cannot work effectively if they do not get a break.

We have told those opposite not to try and change sessional orders without proper consultation and oversight by the Procedure Committee. The Procedure Committee does play a really important role. It:

... considers any matter regarding the practices and procedure of the House and may consider any matter referred to it by the Council or the President.

That is exactly what should have happened in this case.

I would like to reiterate much of what my colleagues have said in this debate. I am the last contribution on this – highly likely. This has really not been a very courteous and respectful process, to make this change without going through the Procedure Committee and thinking about what the implications might be. It really is embarrassing for those opposite. What we should have been able to look at is what are the efficiencies in the chamber that could have been achieved through any changes to reflect a house that is now far more diverse than when many of the rules were written. Does it reflect that? Does it better reflect the house's constitutional role as a house of review? Does it assist with improving and understanding the accessibility of house rules and the clarity of how the house works? Are there any contradictory or irrelevant rules that may make the application, explanation and interpretation of the standing orders difficult? Honestly that is exactly what the early iterations of this motion did, and it was very clever of our side to point out through our short-form docs motions that that was the error that was made.

I really think that this ought to be an opportunity to consider what other changes, particularly adjournment and other efficiencies, could be achieved by this. I appreciate Dr Mansfield expressing some similar sentiment in that space, which would be great conversation to have in the proper process so that we do not have to waste time in this chamber fixing up errors that really should not have been made in the first place. A fundamental rule of democracy is that all perspectives are considered and that there is no better place to demonstrate that than in this chamber, where the contest of ideas and concepts and values occurs on a regular basis, and that same principle ought to have been applied in this procedural change.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:22): I am pleased to rise to very briefly sum up on this motion and in doing so to thank members for their contributions. I do believe that the change will be supported. This does close a small loophole in the standing orders and the sessional orders, but I do think the government has filibustered through some of this, and I think that is the truth; I think that is a very mild way of putting it, but let us move on from that.

I will indicate that we are always happy to discuss things at the Procedure Committee, and indeed I have a list of items that could well be considered at the Procedure Committee. I have a small backlog of items that could be discussed there, and the President may decide to convene a meeting of the Procedure Committee for those discussions, but I think what these changes will do is give clarity about the ability for the non-government parties to go about their business on a Wednesday without undue fear that the government will use filibusters and other techniques to see particularly the last item on the agenda tampered with or obstructed, so we are happy to have that change.

I thank the crossbench for their support on this, in particular the Greens and the Animal Justice Party on this occasion, but all of the crossbench have seen the importance of having this clarity for the rest of the term.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:24): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 858, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Production of documents*

**Wildlife protection**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:25): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) the Wildlife Act 1975 established the rules around how people interact with wildlife in Victoria but has not been reviewed since becoming law 50 years ago;
  - (b) in May 2020, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change announced the independent review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975 (the review), which would consist of an independent expert advisory panel led by chairperson Jane Brockington, Dr Jack Pascoe and Dr John Hellstrom;
  - (c) the panel spent much of the following year working through more than 1,000 submissions to the review and consulted with 18 key stakeholders, and heard related concerns regarding the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, which identifies processes that threaten the health and survival of Victoria's biodiversity;
  - (d) the panel delivered their final report to the minister in December 2021;
  - (e) the government still has not tabled the panel's report or responded to their recommendations;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) the review of the Wildlife Act 1975 expert advisory panel report; and
  - (b) the government response to the expert review of the Wildlife Act 1975.

I stand to speak on motion 852 in my name. Victoria has two main pieces of legislation that cover protection of our native wildlife: the Wildlife Act 1975 and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Wildlife Act has not been reviewed since it was introduced 50 years ago. It is clearly out of date and not working to protect our precious native wildlife in Victoria. Back in 2018, people in this chamber might remember, hundreds of wedge-tailed eagles were poisoned on a farm in East Gippsland. The farm worker was prosecuted, but their boss, who instructed them to kill the birds, was not. Clearly, our laws were not sufficient to deal with this horrific situation. Hundreds of protected birds, which are incredibly culturally important to First Nations Victorians as well as to our biodiversity in Victoria, were killed with little repercussion.

In response the government announced a review of the Wildlife Act. An independent expert advisory panel was appointed, led by chairperson Jane Brockington and including Dr Jack Pascoe and Dr John Hellstrom. The panel worked through more than 1000 submissions, consulted with many key stakeholders and also looked at potential insufficiencies in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. They did a huge amount of great work and handed their report to the government in late 2021. Yet Labor put this report in a drawer and never released it and never responded to it. It has now been more than three years. The government keeps telling us, 'Don't worry. It's coming.' But it has been more than three years, and that delay has real impacts on our threatened species.

Now we are seeing the real-world impacts of our broken laws. Over the past few years developers have ripped up around 60 hectares of critically endangered grassland earmarked for the Western Grasslands Reserve. That is critical habitat Labor was meant to purchase outright by 2020 through the Melbourne strategic assessment program to create a special grassland reserve. Labor's inaction here

means that developers either do not think that they will be caught or are happy to cop a few hundred thousand dollars in council fines to make millions off land down the track. This is the devastating result – what happens because the government refused to act on improving our biodiversity and nature protection laws.

There is no reason why the government cannot release the report into the Wildlife Act; in fact it is the very least they should do to give the community transparency. They have buried this report, as I said, for three years, and it is far too long. That is why we are moving this motion today to force the release of this expert panel's report, so the public can see how we need to improve our nature protection laws to make sure that something like the western grasslands destruction or the killing of wedge-tailed eagles does not happen again.

So what are our nature protection laws in Victoria, and why aren't they working? The Wildlife Act 1975 regulates direct interactions between individuals and wildlife, whether that is culling of overabundant species – for example, kangaroos by farmers – hunting or licences for carers keeping native wildlife to limit the illegal wildlife trade, but they are clearly not working to protect our native species. Some examples of this include hundreds of thousands of native species being killed with culling permits in Victoria. Permits are pretty much unregulated, unlimited and rarely monitored or followed up. Some threatened species, like dingoes, do not even need permits to be killed in areas subject to unprotection orders. Native ducks, including some threatened species, are still killed through duck hunting with little repercussion for those who do the wrong thing. Feral deer are still classified as protected wildlife in Victoria, even though they are running riot across the state and destroying so much of our environment. They also present a huge risk to people, whether it is on the roads or just in people's backyards. Keeping deer as a protected species also creates confusion with other acts meant to regulate feral animals and pests, like the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. It makes no sense whatsoever. Penalties for killing native wildlife are often too low, not enforced or cannot be applied to the right people, such as in the case of the killing of the wedge-tailed eagles. There is nothing in the act that protects threatened habitat, despite the fact that habitat destruction is the key driver of species becoming threatened, endangered and extinct in Australia. The Wildlife Regulations 2013 include an offence to damage, disturb or destroy wildlife habitat except where the person is authorised under any other act, meaning miners, developers and others just need a permit and they are able to destroy threatened species habitat. This has got to change.

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1998, or FFG act, is meant to protect all native flora and fauna in the state. Mechanisms include listing threatened species, communities and threats to native species; establishment of a statewide biodiversity management strategy; requiring public authorities to take the act into account in their operations; and requiring permits for certain activities which may affect native plants and animals. However, one loophole is that the act itself does not require a permit to take protected flora from private land. Following criticism back in 2019 that the act was not working, Labor initiated a review. We acknowledge that they legislated some decent reforms in 2020; however, many of these are not being used. For example, there is something under the act called a 'critical habitat determination', which could force landowners into land management agreements for particularly important pieces of threatened species habitat. However, Labor has never actually used it. The laws are clearly not working to protect threatened species. Just one example of how our laws are broken is the destruction just two weeks ago of part of the Western Grassland Reserve. Labor's broken laws and disinterest in protecting nature have empowered developers to rip up critically engaged grassland in Melbourne's west. Volcanic plains grasslands are some of the rarest habitat in Victoria. Ninety-nine per cent has been destroyed since colonisation. The remaining 1 per cent provides habitat for endangered species like the striped legless lizard, the growling grass frog and the recently rediscovered grassland earless dragon.

In 2010 Labor made a deal with the federal government to protect what is left of this land under the Melbourne strategic assessment program. Labor was meant to buy 15,000 hectares under that deal by 2020. They managed just 10 per cent of that. After Labor missed that deadline, some developers paid

\$11 million for a piece of grassland in Truganina in 2021 and immediately began ripping up 19 hectares. The City of Melton pursued the developer and contractor through the courts, fining them just \$170,000 and \$210,000 respectively. Clearly that is just seen as the cost of doing business and will be a very small fine compared to the profit they will make on this land, because late last year developers began ripping up another 40 hectares down the road in Mount Cottrell. Our planning law, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, does not prioritise biodiversity. That act is by and large designed for developers and relies on council discretion for investigating breaches. Penalties for destroying critically endangered habitat are a slap on the wrist compared to the millions in profits that developers can make by destroying the grassland. Labor should have bought this land by 2020 and has since failed to apply any other protections, like critical habitat determinations, to stop these grasslands from being destroyed. They need to make an example of the developers, ensure they pay to rehabilitate the land and are not allowed to develop it, then purchase the remaining 75 per cent of the reserve that they promised to buy but never did.

In summary, all of these examples I have mentioned show how our nature protection laws are broken in Victoria. Either they are not strong enough or the government are not even using the small number of tools they do have under the law, because we are losing threatened habitat at an alarming rate. We have over 2000 threatened species and ecosystems listed in Victoria, and our recent state of the environment report shows that all the indicators in terms of biodiversity in Victoria are going backwards. This is not good enough. The least the government can do is release this review – done by experts – into our nature protection laws and their recommendations for how to fix them. The Labor minister has had these recommendations sitting in their drawer for more than three years. It is time to release them and fix our nature laws in Victoria.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:34): I rise to speak to the motion moved by Dr Mansfield, which seeks to ensure that the findings of the independent review of the Wildlife Act 1975 are made available to the public and the government responds to the recommendations contained therein. This is an important step in ensuring that our legislative framework continues to evolve to meet the needs of our wildlife, environment and communities. The Wildlife Act 1975 has provided a foundation for wildlife protection in Victoria for nearly 50 years. However, as our understanding of conservation, biodiversity and animal welfare has progressed, so too must our laws.

The Victorian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental protection, and this review presents an opportunity to build on the important work already underway. Announced in May 2020, this was a proactive step in modernising the approach to wildlife conservation. I take a moment to acknowledge the work of the expert panel led by Jane Brockington, Dr Jack Pascoe and Dr John Hellstrom, who conducted really extensive consultation with the stakeholders, receiving over 1000 public submissions and consulting key experts across the fields to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the issues at hand. It is worth noting that the government remains committed to ensuring and carefully considering the panel's final report and ensuring that any reforms align with our broader biodiversity strategy. By bringing forward this motion – I again thank Dr Mansfield for that – it gives me an opportunity to speak to and reaffirm the importance of transparency and informed decision-making as we move towards our next step in wildlife protection.

It is also worth taking a moment to reflect on the Allan Labor government and the historic investments made in environmental protection and biodiversity. In 2014 – which I know was some time ago, but the investment was so staggering that it is worth repeating here – a \$609 million investment was made to dedicate ourselves to safeguarding Victorian biodiversity. It really was an unprecedented commitment to conservation and ecological restoration. There were initiatives contained within that, including *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037*. Within that it reaffirmed the government's commitment to a really strong ambition to have a thriving natural environment that is valued and actively cared for by the community. Programs such as the Nature Fund and BushBank have been instrumental in mobilising resources for high-impact conservation efforts and projects. By working in partnerships with traditional owners, environment groups and private investors, we

continue to expand protected habitats, restore ecosystems and improve biodiversity resilience across the state. Additionally, closer to us here is the Port Phillip Bay Fund, which has supported vital marine conservation efforts, investing \$17.1 million in 215 projects aimed at preserving the precious marine biodiversity. Projects like ReefWatch's underwater weeding trial have removed some invasive kelp species, demonstrating the government's commitment to maintaining the health of our coastal areas. I know that there are a few speakers that will follow here that represent our coastal environments – as I do, only for a little bit.

To complement these efforts, it is worth taking some time to honour the fact that the government has introduced new policies to promote sustainable land management and ecological resilience. Investments in regenerative farming practices and native vegetation restoration ensure that our landscape remains productive while also supporting biodiversity. These initiatives help mitigate the impact of climate change while enhancing the long-term sustainability of our agriculture and of course our natural systems. Victoria's native species face increased threats from habitat loss, invasive species and climate change. The government has taken steps to address these challenges, including the dedicated conservation programs for endangered species, such as the brush-tailed rock-wallaby and the spotted tree frog. There are efforts of course to control invasive species, and I would like to particularly highlight those in culturally significant areas, such as the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. There are collaborations between government agencies, traditional owners and conservation groups which have led to important progress in restoring these really unique and world-recognised ecosystems.

The current fire system is something I am reflecting on. What that has highlighted is the importance of rapid response during emergencies for animal welfare. Rapid responses to emergencies during bushfire season would not have been possible without, in recent years, the success of the Victorian Landcare program, which has invested over \$100 million to support environmental volunteers and conservation efforts, highlighting the importance of community-driven conservation. By working alongside these local groups, the government ensures conservation efforts are both effective and inclusive. I am particularly keen to highlight that the work that we can and should do moving forward in protecting and enhancing our biodiversity and conservation efforts must include a true partnership with not only traditional owners but also environmental organisations and local communities. Conservation is a shared responsibility. The collective efforts of government, non-government organisations and individuals are key to ensuring that wildlife and ecosystems thrive for generations to come. I think this government certainly has placed significant emphasis on traditional owner-led conservation efforts and the invaluable role that they play, with Indigenous knowledge, for ongoing land and wildlife management, supporting traditional owners in managing country, not only strengthening conservation outcomes but advancing self-determination.

The government has also made a significant advancement in animal welfare, and I know that there are other speakers from our side that would want to speak to our efforts against animal cruelty in the state. One thing that I was excited to learn about – and I remember conversations happening in this place about it – was the establishment of a new wildlife hospital. A commitment was made of \$4.7 million towards the establishment of this wildlife hospital, which will provide critical care for injured and endangered animals, expanding the support available for wildlife carers and veterinary professionals and ensuring that Victoria remains at the forefront of compassionate and science-based animal welfare.

I will finish my remarks by thanking all of those involved in the Wildlife Act review process for their dedication and expertise – and all of those involved in our conservation efforts. I did speak to this in my constituency question earlier today, having recently attended the Celebrating Women in Conservation Breakfast put on by Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage only last Friday, when I had the good fortune to be around so many of our women warriors for conservation. Standing there, meeting them and knowing very directly from them about their ambition for the thriving biodiversity here in our state, not just now but many generations into the future, was certainly very uplifting and something that I took a lot from.

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To all the women in conservation, all the women in biodiversity management, all the women who help keep our community so strong, can I take a moment to shout you out before International Women's Day. Thank you for all your efforts. I know that anything that we can do as a government to support gender equality in all aspects of government, including making sure that we have got gender-responsive systems in our environment department and amongst the various projects and programs that we are working on in environment, biodiversity and conservation management, is a good thing. To all of them, with a particular shout-out to Corinne and the team – Ash and others – from Trust for Nature, thank you so much for all that you do for country here in Victoria. Thanks for forging some really important partnerships – longstanding, deeply trusted partnerships – with organisations right across our state and also with individuals, landholders and folks that care for the future of Victoria. To you I say thank you.

I look forward to hearing other contributions being made that continue to highlight our efforts in protecting and preserving Victoria's unique biodiversity. Again, I take a moment to thank Dr Mansfield for bringing this matter to our chamber, and I look forward to hearing other contributions from further speakers on this motion this afternoon.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:44): I am pleased to rise today to be the first speaker for the Liberals and Nationals on Dr Mansfield's motion 852. As is the normal protocol in this house, we certainly will not be opposing the request of the Greens to table the review of the Wildlife Act 1975, the expert panel report and the government's response to that report. It is really refreshing and pleasing to see that the Greens are actually talking about the environment for a change in this place rather than other international events and foreign affairs. I am very pleased. In this case, we are actually on a unity ticket today. We may come from separate directions, the Nationals and the Liberals meeting the Greens, but we do have the same focus. We actually want our threatened species to survive and to thrive. We want our public land and private land to be well managed. And we want to ensure that there are healthy ecosystems right across this vast state.

We know that the government has some 8 million hectares of public land, and around 4 million of those hectares are under national parks. We support national parks. In fact, we lament the fact that this government has left national parks as a second-class entity. I can only see that it will continue to be that way when we have such interesting wastes of money, like the Commonwealth Games at \$600 million; free fishing rods – what a great idea they were or were not, as we love fishing, but I do not know that people had to be given a rod; New Year's Eve Foo Fighter events; and a pet census. I think – and maybe the Greens will come with me on this idea – that some of that money that was directed out there could have been redirected into protecting conservation areas, protecting vulnerable species and ensuring that the 11 per cent of the field officers that are out there under the department, working in the forests, working on our public land and our grasslands, are actually able to do their job. They could have some friends come out of Melbourne, come out of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action – 60 per cent of the department of environment actually sits in metropolitan Melbourne. My contention would be that we could take some of those people – maybe they might like a holiday – who are passionate about the environment and get them out in the environment looking after public land and looking after our wildlife and threatened species.

There was a beautiful lady I had the privilege of knowing, and her name was Rita Bentley. She passed away in 2020 and we could not go to her funeral because we were all in lockdown. She was an OAM and a former president of the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria. She rang me in the early morning in early 2020 and said we needed to revive the slogan 'Fuel reduction saves lives'. I was sitting in Bairnsdale Airport at the time, and I had actually just finished speaking with wildlife officers who were going out to Mallacoota to euthanise animals.

In the 2019–20 fire, there were approximately – I think there have been some estimates – 3 billion fauna, or animals, killed because of that inferno, incinerated. I would be very interested to know whether or not part of that wildlife review spoke to mitigation and protection of wildlife in relation to reducing the risk of out-of-control bushfires. We will always have bushfires, we always have in this

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country had bushfires, lightning strikes et cetera, but this government has taken a wilful blade to the idea of active management. There would have been nothing more devastating, I would think, for those wildlife managers than going out to Mallacoota at that time to have to euthanise burnt animals. I put that on record.

The other thing that I would like to put on record is that we had the opportunity to meet and listen to Dr Jack Pascoe from the Conservation Ecology Centre when there was, I think in the former Parliament, the inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria. That was a Greens-inspired investigation through the Environment and Planning Committee. We had him there, and we listened intently. He spoke about upside-down forests, where there is so much fuel load on the bottom of the ground that it forms a ladder that goes up to the canopy, and when that gets lit, in certain situations, there is an intensity. But Dr Jack Pascoe spoke about cool Indigenous burns, and he said:

I think low-intensity fire does nourish the soil, and I have heard many old elders talk about the right colour charcoal being a blanket for country throughout the winter.

Thank you, Dr Jack Pascoe, for your very interesting and wise comments.

The Wildlife Act certainly looks at protecting native wildlife, regulatory framework, the creation and management of wildlife reserves and sanctuaries, the permits required to handle protected wildlife, penalties for illegal activities and the legislative basis for the conservation programs. We certainly do not have any problem with that. What we do want to see is a refresher, and the production of these documents would be able to help.

The other thing that I often find so frustrating is that the government will come out and say, 'We're doing this.' We heard the government speaker just there: 'We're saving the environment.' Well, there is a little thing called the *State of the Forests* report. The *State of the Forests* report is supposed to come out every five years. The last one came out in 2018. The next due date was 2023. We are now two years overdue, so it has been seven years between when the last report from the state government came out and now. What is that doing? First of all, we actually cannot assess the progress towards sustainable forest management, and forest management means the ecosystem, which includes flora and fauna, and so therein lies the trickery of this. We actually cannot see what the government is doing. It is keeping its own report card, if it is doing anything, very close to its chest.

The report tracks health and conditions of forest systems, it monitors threatened species, it evaluates effectiveness of conservation measures and it provides essential data for evidence-based policy development. Wouldn't that be good? Wouldn't that actually be helpful to all of us in here – government, Greens, Nationals and Liberals – so that we actually could have an understanding about what the report card is for our forest systems and their habitats? In fact the 2018 report found fragmentation of native forest cover was rated 'poor', with poor habitat available for forest-dependent indicator species. The number of forest-dependent species at risk from isolation was just unknown – they just did not know about it; they had not looked at it – and others were the same. It is almost impossible for the population, the Victorian people, to have an understanding about what is going on in our forests and our broader ecosystems – grasslands, coastal areas and the like. So I call on the government to get its act together and actually produce this report. I think the report card is going to be very shoddy and therefore the government is just kicking the tin down the road on this issue.

The other thing – we do know this, and we could list them all off – is the vulnerable species. In the past when I have spoken about the timber industry, it is always gobsmacking when it is all going in a terrible way, but there has never been a species that actually has gone to extinction due to the timber industry. No-one has ever documented that or proved that. Funnily enough, one of our very tender and special species the Leadbeater's possum quite often occurs in flourishing numbers in regrowth post timber harvesting. But I will leave that comment for today.

My issue with this government is that we do not know what it is doing to support threatened species. We do not know what it is doing to evaluate and monitor and do the science behind the surveys and

outcomes. They are not looking at landscape-wide protection of species. If they are, they are not sharing it with us – where, when and how. They are actually failing to prepare these threatened species action plans. So all is well because we are all kept in ignorance, and I think that is totally unfair.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (14:55): I support this motion as I am always happy to see data come out. Governments should be actually putting out a lot of stuff rather than requiring FOIs or motions, but here we are. What I am going to do is correct some misconceptions, mainly about deer. Deer are a bit of a vexed subject for some. First of all, they are called feral. At the risk of being pedantic, they cannot be feral because they were released as a game animal. To be feral they have to have escaped from domestication or from being used as a beast of burden or a farmed animal. To get to the guts of the matter, we are told we should make them a pest. They are not actually a protected species; I must say that. They are not protected in any way, shape or form. They are game animals, and as a game animal they are able to be hunted in a number of ways where if they were pests you could not. That sounds a bit contradictory, but you cannot hunt pests in a national park, whereas you can hunt some game animals in some parts of some national parks. You cannot hunt with dogs in national parks at all. You cannot have dogs in national parks, let alone hunt with them.

I have had it put to me that farmers need the ability, if they are pests, to be able to do more. That is wrong. Farmers now, subject to animal welfare concerns and the usual calibre restrictions, can do anything they want to a deer on their property – except possibly hog deer, but that is a separate story. That is, they can spotlight them, they can use thermals, they can do anything they need to get them off their property. So making them a pest then introduces another problem for the farmers. As with anything that is declared a pest, the farmer is responsible for controlling it, whether it is rabbits, blackberries, whatever. At the moment the farmer can control the deer himself if he wants, or he can get someone in to do it or whatever. Outside of there, if it is declared a pest, he or she is responsible for reducing the action and can get themselves into legal trouble. Obviously if you have a blackberry infestation on your farm and you do not deal with it, you can end up getting whatever the regulatory push is to deal with it, whereas as it is at the moment, they do not have to, they are not required to. They obviously will, but as a farmer they can do it, they might do it. They might like the deer; it might be up to them. If they are a pest, they must do it or else they will face repercussions.

Right now we have people paying to hunt deer. As part of that paying to hunt deer, we also have regulation. We have people having to have a game licence; we have people giving money to the government. God knows they could do with more at the moment, but I do not support any increases, just for anyone that is wondering. But if it is a pest, there are no controls, there are no licences, there is no barrier – when I say barrier to entry, you have to go and pay for a game licence, but it means you have to be serious about it. If you make it a pest, everyone can do it, and that means anyone can just be out there having a go and start having a shot. But as it is at the moment you are getting serious people doing serious work getting a serious amount of deer out of the environment, and I think we just need to take a really good look at the whole desire to create a pest thing. It is counter productive. It will not help. It will make it worse. Leave them as game animals as part of the review. We can look into that or not look into that. That is up to the government; that is why we want these documents. But education about deer, of all things, is critical because we could make it far worse, not better.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:59): Long have we called for reform to the Wildlife Act 1975 and long have our wildlife died at the hands of insufficient protections in this state. Finally, in 2020, following a mass poisoning of 406 wedge-tailed eagles which resulted in a fine of \$6 per bird, the Victorian Labor government announced that they would review and modernise our state's broken wildlife laws. Five years later they have failed to deliver these laws. Not only that, but as part of this reform they created an expert advisory committee to give them advice on how the Wildlife Act could be improved as part of this work. It cost taxpayers \$3 million to do this work. They handed down their findings in 2021, four years ago and five years since the promise. Four years and three ministers have gone by since then. The report is gathering dust on someone's desk out there, and they refuse to release it. It has not seen the light of day. This documents motion seeks to change that. The government's

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actions when it comes to this commitment show its ongoing disdain for Australia's wildlife, which is so severe that they will not even turn their minds to our broken wildlife laws – the ones that they acknowledged are broken and the ones that they promised to fix.

It was a year ago to the day of this debate when I raised this topic in this place, as I have multiple times, and I was told by the Minister for Environment that the Allan government was just taking the time to get this right, that it just needed time to get this right. But you would really think the beginning of this process, of apparently trying to get our wildlife laws right, would involve releasing the report and responding to it. The government's inaction and delay have even been criticised by some of the very experts they put on this panel and tasked with advising them on this vital piece of work. One of them is Jack Pascoe, an Aboriginal man with ecological research and conservation management expertise. He said in an interview:

There's no such thing as an iron clad commitment in politics but there was a commitment to reform this legislation that was drawn up in 1975 ...

That is how long it has been since these laws were reviewed. But I guess we probably should not be surprised by this, because it certainly would not be the first time that this government, the Allan Labor government, has ignored expert advice that has come through the wildlife space. I am sure this chamber is absolutely sick of me talking about duck shooting – it is not even the first time that I have done it today – but what I am actually sick of is the government treating Australia's native wildlife as nothing more than disposable targets.

There have only been a limited number of offences prosecuted under the Wildlife Act in the past decade. I really wish this was because crimes against wildlife are rare, but rescuers and wildlife carers that I speak to and my office speaks to almost every single day know all too well that this lack of prosecution is not a reflection of the extreme amount of cruelty and crime against our wildlife that they witness daily. I stand here in this chamber every sitting week and raise horrific cases of cruelty to our native animals: kangaroos being shot through the skull with bows and arrows, deliberate road strikes, koala deaths from plantation harvesting, stonker trout deaths and mass habitat destruction, not to mention the permitted slaughter of wildlife through the kangaroo harvest management plan and the authority-to-control-wildlife scheme. We all know why the government does not want to release this report. It is because it is absolutely impossible to reform our wildlife laws in this state in a way that does not conflict with the current policy to destroy every native animal that we have here. The low numbers of prosecutions could be due to the insufficient enforcement mechanisms or the lack of powers for authorised officers to enter and search, barriers to charging perpetrators under the act or even a reluctance by the Allan government to take crimes against wildlife seriously. That said, it is unequivocally a result of this poorly drafted, archaic legislation they know will be a nightmare to fix.

Still to this day not one thing has been done about 84 kangaroos killed and mowed down by a vehicle in Horsham in June last year, nor has anyone been held to account for the penguin in St Kilda that was brutally bashed by three men in 2023, despite there being CCTV footage of it. And we all know that the Game Management Authority would rather prosecute wildlife rescue volunteers than cruelty breaches by shooters themselves. I know this because I have experienced it myself. They have absolutely no issue whatsoever with arresting, fining and banning rescuers, but they throw their hands up in the air when it comes to prosecuting shooters for killing protected species and for wounding birds and not retrieving them. Even when we give them the footage, give them the licence plate or know the name of the shooter, the GMA suddenly cannot do anything about it. Our wildlife laws are completely in conflict with what is going on in this state. In the rare event that a prosecution is made, the penalties are wholly disproportionate to the crime and do not act as adequate deterrents. As I mentioned earlier in this speech, a review of the act was promised after a mass poisoning of wedge-tailed eagles occurred in 2020, equating to \$6 per bird. That is the price placed on wildlife under the penalties in this current legislation.

Our kangaroos are treated as pests in this state, despite being a national emblem. They are slaughtered and exported en masse for their skins or in many cases simply killed for the shooter's pleasure, as we see regularly. Almost every single day in my electorate there is illegal shooting of kangaroos.

Our native waterbirds are of course protected until the duck-shooting season rolls around each year. It is extra long this year, as the Allan Labor government wilfully ignores all evidence of the need for a ban. We live in a state where a duck is protected in November out of recognition for its declining population, but not in March – not in a few weeks time. That duck, which is protected right now, will not be protected under our wildlife laws – they will become free game.

Under the Wildlife Act, individuals are able to kill just about any native animal in this state. They do not even need to show a gun licence to be granted the permission to do that. The Wildlife Act permits this scheme whereby there are no reporting requirements whatsoever.

We know only that the Labor government permitted almost 120,000 native animals to be killed in 2023 – that is the only detail that we have of this. Neither we nor the government themselves actually know how many were killed, because there is no system where the permit holder has to report back on what or how many animals they actually killed under their permit.

The current Wildlife Act is set up perfectly for this unbridled killing and cruelty, with old licensing and permit schemes having no accountability, transparency or reporting requirements. This state is a deadly place for our wildlife. Our native animals are more likely to be deliberately killed than protected, and it is absolutely shameful.

It is important to acknowledge that the Wildlife Act also neglects to recognise the interests of traditional owners and First Peoples, who have unique connections with wildlife and the land. Instead, a white coloniser's view is legislated into the handling and protection of wildlife in Victoria. Any reform to this act must ensure that this relationship is respected and reflected in the legislation. This topic was actually considered by the expert advisory committee, which makes it all the more valuable of a report for us to receive.

What is perhaps most shocking about the Wildlife Act is that it does not account for one of the largest threats to all species: the destruction of habitat. Ecologists and animal advocates have been asking for decades for wildlife and habitat preservation to be a consideration in planning and development laws. Instead, the Wildlife Act is more focused on the killing and displacement of wildlife seen as a nuisance than it is on their protection.

It is clear that our wildlife laws are completely broken. They are not fit for purpose. It has been an incredibly long time since they were reviewed and updated, and the government made the commitment to us and to the people of Victoria that they would do exactly that. They need to keep their promise, and that starts with releasing this report that will tell all of us what they have known for a long time and what they have been told to do about our broken wildlife laws four years ago.

I really want to thank my colleagues in the Greens for bringing this important documents motion today. It is of great value to me, my party and my office as well, and I commend it to the house.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (15:09): I rise to speak on Dr Mansfield's motion. I am pleased to do so, and I am pleased to support it. I am a total fan of transparency and accountability, as you would know. It does seem extraordinary that the panel delivered its final report to the minister in December 2021, but we have not heard anything more about it. The government have not responded to it – nothing. Dr Mansfield quite rightly asks for the review of the Wildlife Life Act 1975 expert advisory panel report to be given to us, along with the government's response to the expert review of the Wildlife Act 1975. Cannot be too hard, you people over there. Can you not –

**Jeff Bourman** interjected.

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**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, sorry, Mr Bourman – you are in the wrong place. But respond to the report or table it – what are you trying to hide, team Labor? I mean, seriously, get your act together and give us the report, give us your response. 2021 – that is how many years ago? I can barely add it up; it is so long ago. You have got the report and you cannot –

*Members interjecting.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** I can do numbers, don't you worry about that. But you cannot get a report tabled, you cannot give us a response, and you are clearly hiding something so get your act together and do what Dr Mansfield is asking and get with it. Anyway, get with the program; get with the reservation. Actually I have got a bit of a clue here. I reckon the real reason why the minister refuses to release the independent review is because it will expose the environmental hypocrisy of this government. They bow down to green ideologies and environmental sycophants, but they are determined to cover up any attempts to reveal how environmentally destructive their new green energy projects actually are. Now let us go to how you are absolutely wrecking the environment.

*Members interjecting.*

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr McIntosh is making a contribution not from his seat.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** The point of order is upheld. We ask for Mrs McArthur to be heard, thank you.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Mr McIntosh, just stay in your box over there. I want to go to this whole green ideology stuff. For example, the proposed Navarre green power hub, a wind farm and battery storage project in central Victoria, would have a devastating and catastrophic environmental impact, destroying more than 18,000 hectares. According to the project's own report it would affect flora and fauna in the Kara Kara National Park, Mount Bolangum Flora and Fauna Reserve, the Morrl Morrl Nature Conservation Reserve –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Just listen, Mr McIntosh – and in close proximity to Stuart Mill and the Big Tottington nature reserve and the Little Tottington State Forest, no less. Furthermore, the destructive transmission towers set to be built in western and northern Victoria will devastate vast areas of flora and fauna, with significant damage, especially to the Pyrene Ranges to Long Forest Biolink. You talk about biodiversity in the environment – just get with the program and look at what you are doing to the environment. This area has a diverse range of landscapes covering two bioregions – Central Victorian uplands and Victorian volcanic plains – and five endangered vulnerable ecological vegetation classes. The area encompasses the Lerderderg State Park, the Pyrene Range, Merrimur Reservoir and Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve.

Clearly there is danger being done to the environment. I am sure that is why they do not want to release any reports, because we will be able to expose exactly what this government is doing with their green energy ideology. This biolink, and I have been out there, provides crucial wildlife corridors connecting fragmented national habitats and allowing animals to move freely across a landscape to access food, shelter, breeding partners and new areas to live. This area hosts over 400 indigenous plants and over 17 species that are considered rare or threatened. You are going to wipe them out, team. However, the area will suffer a catastrophic loss of biodiversity if Labor's bulldozers clear the way for their massive transmission towers. All of these are internationally recognised key biodiversity areas between which species, particularly birds, travel.

I will just give you a bit of a lesson here. The following rare and endangered birds face turbine strike and devastating habitat loss: the swift parrot, the barking owl, the bush stone-curlew, the black falcon – all critically endangered according to the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 listings. You are going to

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wipe them out. The speckled warbler and the hooded robin are considered endangered. The powerful owl, the brown treecreeper, the diamond firetail and the painted honeyeater are listed as vulnerable. Migratory birds are threatened too and other animals endangered – tree goannas, vulnerable pink-tailed worm lizards, golden sun moths, eastern bent-wing bats and squirrel gliders. Vast swathes of their habitats face destruction. Populations face extinction too. Never mind the animals, what about the people?

Plant life too faces destruction, including many endangered orchids. The wipe-out of native vegetation is extraordinary: 135 hectares, no less. This includes 23 hectares of grey box and native south-east Australian grasslands, 5 hectares of white box, yellow box, Blakely's red gum grassy woodland, and the list continues.

Closer to home there is a proposal for a battery farm at Little River on very good farming land, acres of it, right next door to a national park – or a park; I do not know whether it is a national park or whatever. Anyway, the neighbouring farmer generously looks after this whole bushland area, this area of fabulous native vegetation, but with a battery right next door to it, goodness me, what is going to happen when the fire starts? You cannot put these batteries out. So this whole fabulous native forest area, which is being maintained generously by the farmer, Mr Pettit, will be gone for all and sundry.

Ms Bath referred to the incineration of animals that happens in a bushfire.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Mr McIntosh, about the animals that get incinerated in a bushfire: you have done away with cold burning thanks to some ideologues who think you cannot do any cold burning – ‘We don’t light fires’ or whatever. But let me tell you, if you have an intense bushfire, you will destroy millions of native animals. Do not worry about how they are going to get lost crossing the road. What are we doing, Ms Purcell?

**Georgie Purcell** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** The roadkill inquiry – the poor old kangaroos do not know how to look right, left and right again as they cross the road. They are getting wiped out in the bushfires because you lot do not want to do cold burning – I mean, seriously.

Also, at every opportunity you are locking up the forests and throwing away the keys. You have just sacked a whole lot of parks officers who were looking after your forests.

*Members interjecting.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** You have sacked them. Meanwhile you have got a massive number sitting here in Spring Street or somewhere, probably at home in their pyjamas, who are meant to be involved in looking after the parks. You have done away with the people out in the field who actually do something about noxious weeds and vermin, but you are not decreasing the numbers in head office. You are absolutely hopeless. You have sacked the field staff. You are also sacking all the fisheries officers. They actually do a fantastic job at making sure there is not illegal fishing and catching –

**Richard Welch:** On a point of order, Acting President, the interjections are almost constant. There is absolutely no gap in between them whatsoever. Can we just have some silence so Mrs McArthur can deliver her speech?

**Michael Galea:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, given that Mr Welch has just taken up the last few seconds of Mrs McArthur's time, I move, by leave:

That Mrs McArthur's time be extended by 5 minutes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bev McARTHUR:** I thank the house. What a privilege, team. I can just wax lyrical about –

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*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Order! Unless you want another 5 minutes, I would suggest there is silence.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I thank my colleagues. It is very generous. I am sure they are absolutely riveted by my exposure of the fact that there is green hypocrisy left, right and centre in this place.

**A member** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It is over there, because you are locking up the forests and throwing away the keys. There are noxious weeds and vermin out of control. Some people here want to introduce dingoes into the show. Let me tell you what happens when you introduce dingoes into the farming areas. Have you ever seen a lamb slaughtered by a dingo? It is catastrophic. We cannot be having dingoes introduced into areas. Ms Purcell, we do not need any dingoes anywhere. Who talked about the kangaroos? Ms Purcell as well. The kangaroos are a serious problem. They are out of control. I did do an adjournment last night. I do not know where you all were; you should have been listening.

**Tom McIntosh:** What about nuclear?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, then we will not need all those transmission towers, Mr McIntosh.

**Tom McIntosh:** Do you want a nuclear reactor?

**Bev McARTHUR:** If we have nuclear energy, you will not need all those transmission towers wrecking the biolink.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Have you been out to the biolink, where you are going to cut a swathe through this fabulous area? Forty-five farmers gave up their land for a biolink so you could put a transmission tower through it. That is not looking after the environment. That is not about biodiversity. You are just wrecking a biolink.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You are meant to be looking after the environment. Do what Dr Mansfield is asking: give her the reports. Give us all the reports so we can find out exactly what the two reports were about. But we also want to know what your response is. Since 2021 you have not been able to respond to this. You are just sitting on it. There is obviously something to hide here. What are you hiding? It must be something very secretive that you have got locked away in your bottom drawer that you do not want to tell us.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** This is about the environment, Mr McIntosh. This is about wrecking the environment –

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, Acting President, these are just unruly interjections from the other side.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I uphold that point of order.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It is a great pleasure to be speaking on this motion, because we do need these documents and we do need your response. 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 – heavens. It is five, four years you have had to produce this report.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I cannot add up, Mr Batchelor. Who is sitting on it? What are you doing if you cannot produce a report in this time? We all know how you are absolutely inept at looking after the

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environment. We know that, and you are going to wreck it further. You do not allow the custodians of the environment, who want to care about it, to do anything useful. You would lock it up even further if you had half a chance. We have got a problem up there in all your parks and state forests. We have got vermin totally out of control. You wanted to shoot all the brumbies because you said that would solve the problem. That was just an ideological frolic as well. It was a cruel, absolutely shocking effort at trying to solve the environment.

But my time is nearly running out. Congratulations, Dr Mansfield, for bringing this motion forward. Just do as we ask, produce the documents, and for goodness sake, give us your answer, government.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:25): The Libertarian Party normally always supports documents motions on principle, but this particular one I am very enthusiastically supporting because there are many things, which I will point out shortly if the government will allow me to talk, that have been brought to my attention that are causing all sorts of problems across the state caused by the very Wildlife Act 1975 that has been reviewed. As has been pointed out, the report was done back in 2021, and for some weird reason the government has been sitting on it. We can only speculate as to why, and I have got a few ideas that I will outline in a moment.

Let us look at some of the consequences of the current insane laws that we have around wildlife. One of the things that I have brought up here and have engaged on with people is around herpetology, the keeping of reptiles. There are many enthusiastic herpetologists throughout the state, and at the moment some of them are getting knocks on their door early in the morning and being inspected by the department for apparently breaching ancient regulations that are no longer suitable. It is to do with dimensions and sizes of boxes – whether or not they are a certain height or width and this sort of thing. Apparently they are hopelessly out of date, have not been reviewed and definitely need reviewing. It is just nuts that they will spend more effort on enforcement and fining people than they will on updating the regulations. It just seems crazy to me.

The second issue, which is even more insane, as I brought up in this place and in the media, is around Sunset Sanctuary. Roy Pails has spent his own money and purchased land that was basically denuded by mining; there was just nothing there. He has fenced it all off from ferals, shot all the ferals on the property, put feral-proof fencing in, revegetated it and brought in native wildlife – many of the animals are close to extinction – and is managing it, and the department comes in and says, ‘Well, you’re not counting these animals, because it is a nearly wild environment,’ and it does not suit all the regulations that they have got, because it is not really a zoo and it is not really putting them in cages and stuff. Basically he was given the option of either figuring out a way to count these wild animals, which is pretty hard on a great big property when it is virtually wild there; killing them all, which would comply with regulations; tearing down the fencing, which is just killing them slowly by exposing them to cats and foxes and other predators; or putting them in cages. These are the options. We are still waiting on a response from the department on this, and I would really like them to come up with a solution, but I cannot believe that any of those solutions are better than what he is doing now. This just seems like crazy, crazy regulations that we have here, and the government needs to do something to fix this.

But let us speculate a little bit on why this has been held for so long. I know that Ms Purcell has had her own reasons why, and the Greens have been speculating over their own reasons. My team went to a presentation recently – a few members of my team – and it was talking about wildlife conservation and endangered species and this sort of thing. One of the things that they brought up is brolgas – and also peregrine falcons, but mostly brolgas – and one of the things that is causing a massive, potentially extinction-level threat in Victoria to brolgas is wind turbines. I know others have brought this up in Parliament before, but it would be very concerning if this report that was looking into threats to wildlife concluded that some of the threats are not only people breaking the law, as Ms Purcell has pointed out, but also government actions themselves. One can sort of understand why the government might not want to release that.

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I fully support Dr Mansfield's motion here to release this report, because as has been pointed out, \$3 million of taxpayers money was spent on it. I assume that these esteemed people working on it did a good job, but let us have a look and read it and find out, because it seems very odd and very suspicious that something like this would be kept under wraps for such a long time. Many of us here have an interest in looking at this. I think Ms Purcell and I might not agree what the solution is, but we may agree that the regulations are vastly out of date and need updating. I think we can agree at least on that. So let us have a look at this and see what these experts actually thought were threats to wildlife in Victoria, because we do not know. On that, I conclude, but the Libertarian Party will be supporting Dr Mansfield's motion.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:31): I also rise to add my voice to what has been a fairly wideranging debate today on motion 852. I will acknowledge Dr Mansfield at the outset for raising this important subject today of wildlife regulations, indeed with reference to the review that has been undertaken, and note that in accordance with other such motions of this type the government will not be opposing the motion today.

Broad ranging is probably a subtle way of describing what we have discussed today in this motion. We have heard from Mr Bourman, Ms Purcell in particular and indeed from Mrs McArthur. I am not sure, I certainly learned a lot from your contribution, Mrs McArthur, though perhaps nothing that is actually relevant to what we are talking about here. I will aim to add some comments that touch on both this government's investment in this space and also of course the importance of having these regulations updated, which I know is an objective of this government. Indeed, Mrs McArthur, I will do my very best to get with the program in my remarks today, noting that we have had fairly strange unity in some places as well. When Mrs McArthur is praising Ms Purcell, it always gives me cause for concern as to what is happening – has the sky fallen from above? She did qualify it by attacking the forthcoming Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into wildlife road strikes. I am not sure if she was saying at one point that it does not matter anyway because bushfires do far more damage. I am sure we would all agree, Mrs McArthur, that we do not want bushfires. I do not think you will find any member in this place that does want bushfires, but certainly when you do have those horrific events that do befall our part of the world from time to time, in addition to the incredible and horrific loss of life, property and everything else at the time and the trauma that lives on from those events, it does have a lasting impact on things such as our wildlife numbers. In light of that and in light of the fact that we do not have a magic wand to be able to stop bushfires – I am sure we would all be grabbing it to use it if we did – we should be reducing the impacts of things such as wildlife loss. That is why we have had a few contributions that have touched on various different parts of that already.

There has been some discussion around deer hunting, in particular from Mr Bourman, but without going too far into that space, I obviously note that the government does have a number of programs with regard to deer control. I know in regions like mine in the outskirts of the south-east we do have significant issues with deer populations in places like Beaconsfield and Beaconsfield Upper in particular in my patch, and I know from my regional colleagues it is even more so in other places too. We have Parks Victoria programs that target deer specifically, and we know it is a keen interest of many in the hunting community to be able to hunt deer as well, as Mr Bourman so well put it.

We do have a litany of things that this government has done when it comes to investment in our biodiversity, in our wildlife. In fact since coming to office the government has invested more than \$600 million in protecting biodiversity, supporting animal welfare, assisting private land conservation and looking after the natural environment. This is the largest ever investment in biodiversity by any government. Through the *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037* initiative we aim for the state's biodiversity to be healthy, valued and actively cared for by our communities. It seeks not only to enhance the natural environment but also to improve the health and wellbeing of all communities through their connection to nature.

The Nature Fund, as part of that, has contributed \$13.5 million for high-impact conservation projects, attracting co-investment from private groups to drive collective action for threatened species and their

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habitats. Additionally, look at things such as the \$77 million BushBank program in collaboration with Cassinia Environmental and incredible organisations like Trust for Nature. I know Ms Terpstra is in the chamber and recently made a statement on a report in relation to the terrific work that Trust for Nature does. I have had some connection with them over various periods of time and can speak about some of their sites that they have in the Pakenham area and some of the incredible work that they do in protecting not just our native environment but, as flows with that, our native fauna as well. It is not just for those organisations, the support is also extended to private landholders. That funding through BushBank has led to around 20,000 hectares of private land in Victoria being touched by that investment. That is a very significant number when we are talking about the sorts of things that we need to be doing in order to keep looking after our native wildlife.

We know that invasive species do pose a significant threat to our state's flora and fauna and that contributes to their decline, as does, as I referred to in a separate motion this morning, land use patterns and climate change. We have implemented large-scale invasive species management projects to build biodiversity resilience and adapt to those climate change impacts. In addition to the considerable work that we are doing on climate change as a state, we also recognise the fact that the impacts are not some hypothetical thing in the future. They are here, they are happening now, and you only have to look at the severity of horrific weather events to see them play out all too tragically and all too often for us.

Separately to our state, I was quite surprised to hear a few days ago that there is a cyclone on the way towards south-east Queensland. I am sure all members in this place will be sending our very best wishes to the people of south-east Queensland and far-northern New South Wales as they are facing a particularly challenging day tomorrow. We do live in a country that poses many, many threats of natural disasters.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Droughts and flooding rain – exactly right, Ms Terpstra – and all manner of disasters in between. With the frequency and severity of those events only escalating further, it is all the more important that we do this work and make these investments, such as the investments that have been made by this government in our wildlife to support our vulnerable species.

There is a significant amount of work that is also done in relation to the Wildlife Emergency Support Network. I know there has been a considerable amount of funding to all manner of wildlife support services. One particular organisation that I have already mentioned today and have mentioned once or twice in this place is Wildlife Victoria, the state's largest protection agency for our native wildlife. In addition to the things I referenced this morning – their work with regard to the native duck-hunting season – the bread and butter of their work is supporting Victorian communities. Victorians on the road or out and about see an animal, wildlife or a native species in distress, and they provide outstanding support. They have a very impressive contact centre, which I had the privilege of visiting, with a combination of staff and volunteers. To see the professionalism of that centre was very, very impressive indeed.

On my visit I had the opportunity of going out on a rescue. It was a very hot day. It was even hotter than it is today, and there was a possum that had some heat stress and had been stuck under a pipe. I believe it possibly had a head injury as well. It had possibly fallen and had got stuck under this pipe in Prahran. We were able to rescue the possum. I am not the most hands-on with possums, but I was a supportive bystander as the experts did their thing best, and we escorted it off to one of their urgent veterinary clinics. As I understand it, the possum made a full recovery a few days later. It was very good to be part of a good story. Obviously these amazing people, whether paid or volunteers, go out day in, day out looking after and having to deal with very tragic circumstances where there is not always a happy ending. They do sometimes have to put animals down. It is a very, very hard thing. I would probably struggle enormously with that. There are amazing people like that in our community who do this sort of work. I am excited to be doing my bit wherever I can as part of the Allan Labor

government's continuing support of the work of wonderful organisations such as Wildlife Victoria and smaller organisations who operate right across the state as well.

In concluding, we have had a delightful range of contributions today, and I have very much appreciated the chance to listen in on all of them. However, at the heart of it is an important subject, and as I say, the government will not be opposing this motion today.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:40): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Dr Mansfield's motion with respect to the Wildlife Act 1975, which is seeking a range of materials relating to the review of the Wildlife Act that the government announced in May 2020 – an independent review of the Wildlife Act undertaken and completed by an independent expert advisory panel led by Jane Brockington with Dr Jack Pascoe and Dr John Hellstrom. The panel delivered their final report, as the motion notes, to the minister in December 2021, and the motion seeks production of that report. The government's response, as is convention, as we have said many times – the government does not oppose motions requesting the production of documents and will consider them in due course.

It has obviously been a pretty lively debate, and there have been a lot of things said. One point I just wanted to make was to note when the report was delivered to the government: December 2021. In her lengthy and extended contribution, Mrs McArthur tried to make a point about just how long it has been since the government received this report. She started out thinking it had been five years and then had to go through a process of counting and re-counting to see exactly how many years it has been. The period of time between December 2021 and March 2025 is not five years. December 2022 would be one year, December 2023 would be two years, December 2024 would be three years, and it has been three months on from that. Basically we have got a problem, because Mrs McArthur seems to be a couple of years short in her claim. Somewhat confused, she has not been able to understand the difference between three and five – two years short. I am sorry, Mrs McArthur, if you cannot find those extra two years. Maybe they are somewhere with the extra two votes that you needed to knock off Mr Mulholland from his job as deputy leader in this chamber.

I think that this debate, for all its frivolity –

**A member** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: No, it was quicker than that. For all of its frivolity, this debate goes to an important question, which is: has this government got a record of supporting biodiversity? Has this government got a record of supporting wildlife in our environment? And I think fundamentally you can say that we have. We absolutely have. Protection of the environment, protecting animal welfare, supporting volunteering and supporting Landcare programs is critical for managing the health of our ecosystems and critical for ensuring that we have got clean air, clean water, productive soils and pest controls. There are a range of great organisations, a range of great programs – my colleague Mr Galea went through some of them in a lot of detail – aimed at supporting biodiversity.

I just want to give a shout-out quickly, before I sit down so my colleague can make a brief contribution as well, to the exceptional work that the wildlife groups do at the Yalukit Willam wildlife reserve at the old Elsternwick golf course. Dedicated volunteers work day in and day out to protect local species. Particularly in the last week there was some emergency action that needed to be undertaken to prevent the destruction of a habitat of a threatened frog species in that reserve. The work that volunteers like those in the Elsternwick community and right around this state do to support and protect wildlife, to support and protect biodiversity, should be applauded. I join my colleagues and I join many in the chamber who have congratulated the volunteers across this state on the wonderful work that they do to protect our unique and important wildlife. This is an important task, it is an important topic, and I am sure, should this motion be passed, the government will consider the request for the production of these documents very, very carefully.

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**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:45): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion seeking the production of documents in regard to the Wildlife Act 1975, and there are a number of things being sought. I have had the benefit of listening to the contributions. I must say there is a strong level of cooperation amongst the backbenchers here in order to make sure we all get a chance to have a say on this very important motion, because despite the frivolity that has prevailed in the chamber today, I think we all do care about our natural environment. As the former chair of the Environment and Planning Committee I chaired one of the biggest inquiries that this Parliament has seen, the ecosystem decline inquiry. I can recall the many, many witnesses that gave evidence on a whole range of matters. They were experts in relation to our ecosystems, and that included our biodiversity, our natural environment and our flora and fauna – all manner of things. I learned a terrible lot, as you often do in inquiries. It was a very interesting inquiry.

Some of the things sought in this motion are things that are not new to this Parliament. There are certainly things that were discussed in the context of that inquiry. I also note Ms Purcell's and of course the Greens' interest in this area. They are obviously passionate advocates for a whole range of things; reviewing the Wildlife Act and seeking the release of the expert advisory panel report are things that they also have an interest in seeing.

As has been mentioned before, the government will not be opposing this documents motion. That is our position on it. That is the convention that we adopt. It is an area that our government has heavily invested in, despite what may be said. We can always come under fire and criticism from those who think we should be doing more, but we have invested over \$13.3 million over three years in the 2024–25 budget to deliver critical animal welfare regulatory services. Some of the things that we have funded include banning puppy farms, making it an offence to sell pets without a valid microchip, removing the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public, Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, giving renters the right to keep a pet, reforming the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure government receives expert evidence, becoming the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds and launching the targeted cat desexing program. There are lots of other things that we have done and that we have funded, and we continue to work on animal welfare reforms.

I am a passionate advocate for animals. You would have heard me speak earlier about my involvement with the RSPCA and I think probably one of the first pet food banks for people in my community. Rather than surrender their pets because they cannot afford to feed them, they can actually have free food. The RSPCA does run desexing clinics that are at low cost to people as well. There is a lot of stuff that is happening in this space. However, I do understand the point: that the Greens and Ms Purcell obviously have an interest in seeing this.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I am not critical of you, Mrs McArthur, for not being able to do math at certain periods of time. I myself confess to having had the same problem at various points in time. I think we all have gone there at some point, but nevertheless I can see what the point of this motion is. As I said, the government does not oppose documents motions. It is something that we are happy to look at.

I will go on. There is lots of stuff that is happening. We did public consultations in 2021–22, which were about the draft Animal Care and Protection Bill – there was a 14-week public consultation there. We got a tremendous response to that, with over 1300 submissions and more than 2000 surveys. What we do see in this space whenever we talk about animal welfare reforms is that there is a high level of engagement, whether it be from farming communities, animal activist communities or anyone else, because I think Victorians do care deeply about their pets and about nature and wildlife.

We are fortunate to live in a country like Australia, where we are megadiverse. We have lots of critters running around, whether they be feathered, furred or reptiles. Whatever it is, you name it, we have got

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it here in Australia. It is one of our strengths. As I said, the government will not be opposing this motion. Nevertheless, we have a strong track record on ensuring animal welfare reforms.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (15:50): I would like to thank all my colleagues for their contributions to this debate. I love nothing more than being able to bring people with diverse views together around a common cause, and we seem to have done that today, so that brings me a lot of pleasure. I have to say that some of the contributions were certainly interesting, but I appreciate the support to get these documents released. I particularly want to acknowledge the advocacy around this issue from my colleague Ms Purcell. I know that she has been calling for the release of this report for some time as well, and she probably has quite similar interests in this report to us.

I would highlight that, despite the somewhat entertaining debate we have had here today, biodiversity decline is really serious. We are facing mass extinctions across a whole host of species around the world, and that includes in Victoria. It is something we have to take much more seriously than we are, and strengthening our laws when it comes to protecting nature is a critical part of slowing down that biodiversity decline. It is something we need to do urgently, because once these species are gone, they do not come back. We do not get another chance. It is a huge loss to all of us when we see our native species, our native wildlife, our native flora and fauna, being destroyed and potentially lost forever. I once again thank my colleagues for their support on this motion. We look forward to a positive response from the government in releasing this report. Ultimately, what we would really like to see is action taken to strengthen our environmental laws.

**Motion agreed to.**

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#### **Building electrification**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:53): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) the Victorian government's building electrification regulatory impact statement (RIS), if implemented, will have a significant effect on households and businesses;
- (2) submissions to the:
  - (a) building electrification RIS closed on 28 February 2025;
  - (b) minimum standards for rental properties and rooming houses regulatory impact statement closed on 1 July 2024;
- (3) submissions to both paragraph (2)(a) and (b) have not been made public;
- (4) the Deloitte modelling which informed and guided the building electrification RIS has not been released publicly, in particular assumptions underlying the modelling;
- (5) the Energy Networks Australia submission that has been released lists as its key findings:
  - (a) Victorians will pay an additional \$22 billion over the next 20 years;
  - (b) no real emissions reduction, as any savings are largely wiped out in the first five years, with minimal long-term impact;
  - (c) inadequate supply of renewables and storage, and increased demand will push up prices, especially during peak periods when gas traditionally provides reliability;
  - (d) families will be forced to transition off gas, regardless of their financial situation or market conditions;
- (6) a proper and open RIS process would see the release of the submissions and modelling to enable the contest of proposals, ideas and assumptions underlying the submissions to the building electrification RIS;
- (7) Infrastructure Victoria's planning document, including associated appendices, was released on 4 March 2025;

and calls on the government to conduct an open and transparent RIS process on its electrification plans which would see a release, at the earliest possible time, of the items outlined in paragraphs (3) and (4).

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I rise to speak on this motion. In the best style of Mr Davis, I will say that this is a very simple motion, a very simple and a very reasonable motion that I ask the house to consider. It is a motion that talks to transparency and it talks to enabling the community to make sensible decisions on an informed basis. This is a government with a track record of deciding what it wants and then pretending to consult the community or the industry, gaming the system through information flow where it releases information in salami slices or breaks up the information between different departments so that no-one can get a true universal picture of what the information is, let alone marshal it to understand it properly. We have seen that particularly with the Suburban Rail Loop and the activity centres. They do it by dividing responsibilities so no one person is the voice of the project or the policy, so therefore you cannot get the whole piece. If you ask one group, they will say, 'That's not my responsibility. That's someone else's responsibility.' And if you ask them, a little bit of that will be over there as well.

The other one which came up the other day is the sham consultancy, where they will create a website and ask for opinions. I reckon those opinions all get gathered in through the internet, through the website, and go to the bottom drawer. That is where they go. Everything in Labor goes to the bottom drawer if they do not want to have to deal with it. Community consulting is a sham. They then also use taxpayer money to promote their ideas, and we particularly see this with the Suburban Rail Loop – using taxpayer money for advertising or consultancy to buy favour. Then we see the sponsoring of organisations and the requiring of them to have non-disclosure agreements in there.

We also see the now-infamous NDAs: I think if we had a dollar for every NDA this government has forced on the community, we would probably be able to pay our way out of debt – out of \$180 billion of debt. There are NDAs on councils, there are NDAs on clubs, there are NDAs on individuals ad nauseum. What this all amounts to and how this is relevant to the motion is that it erodes trust. The community basically does not trust this government. There would be a time when people give governments a benefit of doubt that they are doing the right thing and trying to, but it is a tired government. You have broken too many promises. You have been too economical with the truth too often. Whether it is on rail extensions you have promised or on the Commonwealth Games or on the Maroondah Hospital or on fixing roads or indeed on duck hunting or anything like that, it is economical with the truth, and that erodes trust. Therefore quite naturally when the government comes out and says it is going to do XYZ, people say, 'Well, actually, we'd like to scrutinise that a little bit closer. We'd like to have a little look at how you reached that decision, because we're going to see how reliable your policy is – whether your policy will survive or whether it will implode.'

**Tom McIntosh:** On a point of order, Acting President, I understand – I do this a little bit humbly – that Mr Welch has stood up and taken one for the team, but he has not actually mentioned anything to do with the motion at this point and we are 4½ minutes in. We are talking about electrification, and relevance to the motion would be great.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Mr Welch, as lead speaker you have some leniency with the motion.

**Richard Welch:** Thank you, Mr McIntosh, for that guidance. It is relevant to the bill because of why the motion exists in the first place. In the first place it is because we do not trust you. We do not trust you, and in fact the community do not trust you. They do not trust you on electricity, they do not trust you on the transition, and therefore quite reasonably and quite sensibly they would like to know whether this transition and whether these things are built on stone or built on sand. The deep suspicion of the community is it is built on sand, like so many other things that the government does. That is why the motion is being called for.

The things they want to know – it comes from a different perspective, but if you are a business, of course the one thing business needs is certainty. It needs to know, if it is going to invest in Victoria, what the costs are going to be. Is it an environment that they can securely risk their capital in? At the moment they cannot trust the government on that. If you are a manufacturer of course equally it is the same story – you cannot trust. If you do not know what the energy policy is going to be, you do not

know how the transition is being managed and you do not trust how the transition is being managed, you are not going to invest either. The doubts around at times of straitened circumstances, the costs around the transition itself, the estimations under some modelling that it is going to be \$22 billion over the next 20 years – well, we would certainly like to understand that a bit better, and I would like to understand what modelling the government has done around that, because we are a heavily indebted state, indebted to the point of unsustainability. If we are further burdening the state with debt, we would like to know how, when, why and the extent of that and what the ramifications and opportunity costs are of that debt.

Naturally enough the community wants to understand the cost of living, because we heard last year and recently that if we force electrification upon the community the transition from gas in households is not cheap; some put it at around up to \$27,000 per household, and you have to just wonder where the government thinks people are going to get that money from. Where do you get \$27,000 if you have to rip out your gas cooker and your central heating because you are being forced to under these policies? So, naturally the community are desperate to know why we are doing that, and if you are running a restaurant or have any other reliance on gas, why are we doing this? Why are we being forced down this route with very little opportunity to understand the whys, wherefores, and what the other costs are? So we of course would like to see the modelling released.

We will be paying \$22 billion over the next 20 years. It does not offer any real emissions reduction. If there is inadequate supply of renewables and storage, increased demand will push up prices, and families will be forced to transition off gas regardless of their financial situation or market conditions. These are things that are worthy of scrutiny. Earlier, even today, we saw the government spend a good hour complaining about changes to sessional orders and for an hour and a half how that would stop them from doing their jobs because they cannot ask the right questions and they cannot do things. I looked; their pupils were dilated, and they were sweating with their best impressions of sincerity, reading out speeches written by somebody else for them. Yet 5 minutes later here we are with them saying, ‘Well, no, you’re not entitled to know these things. We’ll keep these things close to our chest, probably in our bottom drawer.’ Because when it comes to the community or anyone outside the government having knowledge and being able to scrutinise the government or actually having genuine input into the narrative, the government does not want to know anything about that, because the way this government operates, as I said at the top, is they control the narrative, they control consultation, they do salami cutting of information and as a result we are all the poorer for it.

The motion says, quite sensibly, let us release the information and let us release the modelling that the government relied on for it. The regulatory impact statement is pretty sensible stuff. I think I will conclude my admirable 9.5-minute contribution – I think that is a fine effort – and hand over to my colleagues.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:03): So I speak on Mr Davis’s motion –

**Richard Welch:** No, it is my motion.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** yes, sure – and I really do feel like we are being taken back to the past again. It is really quite a sentimental day when it comes to those opposite, I think: the past, where fossil fuel gas reserves were conveniently cheaper and abundant; the past, where climate change was not an issue; and back when coalmines were not at the end of their productive lives are simply no longer the case. Gas in 2025 is a finite resource in this state, and the reality is that Victoria’s supplies are depleting rapidly, and if we do not act there will not be enough. Any responsible government has to take account of that, because the first thing that a community will do is ask the government: what have you done? That is what I say to those opposite: what have you done? They have done nothing but block and say no and dismiss the reality of fossil fuel shortages, the end of life of coal energy production and climate change. The credibility in this space is so low.

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In contrast, on our side there has been an enormous amount of work in this space. As always, less supply versus a growing demand will ultimately lead to higher prices for Victorian families, not to mention that gas use contributes to around 16 per cent of Victoria's emissions, and we also have climate change targets that we are committed to. This really is a global effort. We are not the only ones doing this.

In fact Victoria, because of its geological nature, did rely on coal and gas historically. It was there, proximate to us and affordable at the time – not any longer. Electrification offers a dual advantage. It lowers harmful emissions and it saves money, and if I could turn it into a triple advantage, it is actually healthier – not just healthier for the climate but healthier for households. We now know that gas is not that good to have floating around your house, so there are benefits there as well.

What this position reminds me of is the tobacco industry, who like these lobbyists for fossil fuels, have used all these strategies to try and stay alive, to continue to make money out of their companies, knowing full well that tobacco and cigarette smoking are not healthy. We all know that gas is not healthy for our climate and it is not healthy in our households, and of course it is becoming less and less affordable, or more and more expensive, every year.

This transition is inevitable. It is going to happen. The coal-fired power plants are closing down. They are scheduled to close; they are at their end of life. Their owners are making their own decisions – business decisions, market-based decisions – about whether or not they should invest in a brand new coal-fired energy production plant, and the business case says no. They are not doing that. Irrespective of government policy, it is end of life for this fossil fuel energy production, from a climate perspective and a market perspective.

The difference here is that this Labor government is not going to leave consumers – gas consumers, energy consumers, residents of Victoria and businesses – in the lurch as the transition occurs. We intend to support the transition as it goes – the inevitable transition. We are going to protect not just vulnerable consumers, who do not want to be ripped off, but also businesses who need to remain connected to gas, and that is the role of government in this space. And you can see all of the policy settings that we have in place, such as the reformation of the SEC – again, a government-owned entity who will be retailing and owning renewable energy production.

Then of course you have got our subsidies for solar panels and batteries – and you only need to look at Victorian rooftops. Victorian communities have voted with their rooftops. We have some of the highest take-up of solar energy in the world. And some people argue, 'It's a bit cold down here. We can't do it down here. That's why we have got gas.' That is not true. There is so much successful solar energy. Victorians are already saving millions of dollars in total off their energy bills by government-subsidised investments in solar panels on their rooftops. Now we see batteries coming along, and if you want to buy from the grid, it is cheaper to buy renewable energy from the grid. I do not know really where this data and this modelling is coming from. As I said, it is like the tobacco industry trying to hold on to the last vestiges of cigarette smoking for consumers.

Our Minister for Energy and Resources, Lily D'Ambrosio, is guiding a massive transformation of this state. What would happen if we did not have Lily D'Ambrosio guiding the energy transition in this state? We would have those opposite just letting it go to the marketplace, and what would happen if the marketplace controlled the energy transition? Prices would go up. Some areas would literally lose supply because there is no money in providing every single area with a supply of energy. This is an important role that any government should play to make sure there is energy equality – access to an affordable, essential service. We all need to be able to cook, we all need to be able to use hot water, we all need to be able to cool our homes and we all need to be able to heat our homes. These are unquestionably essential services that our community expects us to navigate. As a state we have been through the trouble of privatisation of our energy grid, the consequent rises in prices from privately owned energy companies and the lack of accountability. Talk about a lack of accountability – people were really left in the lurch in terms of their energy prices.

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I feel very, very proud that we have got a strategy in place and that it is so clearly and confidently guided by Lily D'Ambrosio and supported by my colleague Ms Watt here too. They are guiding this state through the rough waters of the transition and where those waters are rough, smooth the policy to give certainty to private investors and government. What we need is energy policy certainty for this state, and we are providing that.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:13): At the outset I just want to flag that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Greens will not be supporting the motion before us today. I will keep my comments relatively brief –

**Harriet Shing**: You must have common ground somewhere.

**Sarah MANSFIELD**: No. Unfortunately, the motion we are debating here is one where I think the coalition are showing us some of their true colours. They go in to bat for their fossil fuel industry mates, even if it means the wholesale destruction of our one and only planet.

In actual fact Victorians want to phase out dangerous, expensive fossil fuels. Victorians know gas is bad for our environment, our wallets and our health. We are in a climate crisis and that means we need to get off fossil fuels as fast as humanly possible. Do not listen to the gas lobby spin the coalition is going to be churning out. Whether they want to call it ‘renewable gas’ or ‘low-carbon gas’ or ‘magic gas’, the amount of methane we burn in a year equates to about 15 megatons of carbon dioxide – about 18 per cent of our state’s greenhouse gas emissions, and that is only if you do not count the gas we are exporting up north or leaking from a network built several decades ago.

There is simply no comparing the cost of renewable electricity as opposed to fossil gas in Victoria, the latter of which is skyrocketing thanks to the combined impacts of diminishing wells, Australia’s unlimited offshore exports and an economic system that means Russia’s war on Ukraine forces Australians to pay more for gas drilled in Australia. The only reason the Liberals, Nationals and Gina Rineharts of the world will tell you it is cheap is because it is a finite resource the fossil fuel cartels can make billions in profit from, while solar and wind are not. This regulatory impact statement is welcome, but it does not go far enough. Labor still want to exempt existing commercial buildings and not even include gas cooktops – a depressing sign that they too succumb to fossil fuel lobbying.

An ABC report last week noted an organisation called InfluenceMap, which found that the global gas lobby has tailored pro-gas messages for different contexts, including here in Victoria, especially fearmongering about household costs. We know many Victorians are struggling with the cost of living imposed on them by profit-seeking corporations. In late 2024 the Climate Council found that two in three families have cut back on heating and cooling their homes. Meanwhile, energy companies are raking it in. The Australia Institute found that \$755 of an average AGL customer’s yearly energy bill goes directly to company profit. The gas industry death spiral means that as more affluent people disconnect from gas to save themselves money, gas companies will raise their prices for those customers who are left, meaning that households who are already struggling the most with the cost of living will be the ones who end up paying the most because they have been left behind. Why is the government allowing the fossil fuel lobby to dictate outdated and expensive policy in Victoria when we could be saving money for households by getting them fully off gas?

In 2023 the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis calculated that an average household would save about \$1200 each year if it replaced gas appliances with efficient electrical alternatives at the end of their lives. Helping households get off gas entirely would be a much more effective long-term cost-of-living measure than the government’s previous \$250 power saving bonus, which effectively served as a subsidy to private power companies. Of the four electrification options identified by the government in their public engagement survey, we urge them to choose option 2 – ‘electrification of all new and existing residential buildings and all new and existing commercial buildings, excluding existing commercial kitchens’ – and to go further by including all gas cooktops.

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In short, we cannot delay the rollout of electrification if we are going to have any chance of mitigating the worst impacts of global warming, so the Greens cannot support the motion before us today.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:17): I am pleased to rise and talk to this motion directly, and I am going to step through the clauses. Despite what Dr Mansfield had to say today, she may not disagree with everything I am going to say. It is a fact that the Victorian government's building electrification regulatory impact statement, if implemented, will have a significant impact and effect on households and businesses – there is no question of that. There is no question that even if you are the most stringent person wanting the fastest transition, the transition process still needs to be transparent and still needs to reduce the impact on households and families to the greatest extent possible. The second point I make here is submissions to the building electrification RIS, the regulatory impact statement, closed last Friday.

**Sheena Watt** interjected.

**David DAVIS**: Yes, that is right. They closed.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS**: I am just saying that is a fact. The minimum standards for rental properties and rooming houses closed on 1 July. People may not understand that a number of the key points in the rental proposals have now been kicked into this larger set of proposals at (2)(a) of the motion. A key point here is submissions in relation to both (2)(a) and (2)(b) have not been made public.

**Sheena Watt** interjected.

**David DAVIS**: They should just be put up as time goes by, as they are submitted. Some of the submitters have made their own submissions public, and I will quote one of them a bit later, but the government to date has not released these and they ought to. If you are a strong believer in fast action in this area, you would want to see this information made public so that people can actually see it, so industries and others can contest points, so those who are going to be impacted are able to be assisted and so those who are going to be unfairly impacted can be even more greatly assisted. You would not want to actually make this secret. You would not want to hold this stuff internally. That is where the government is at the moment. They have not released all of the information on the rental RIS that I have referred to here, and that is a pointer. They have not released these submissions as they have come forward into the main regulatory impact statement.

Further, the building electrification RIS has deep in it a whole set of presumptions that have been made by the Deloitte consulting group. I have nothing against the Deloitte consulting group. I think they are generally quite a professional group, and I make that point quite clearly. But the government and Deloitte will not release the underpinnings, the modelling and the assumptions that have been made by Deloitte. How can anyone – a business, for example, or an industry group or those in a different area – actually examine this properly if the modelling and assumptions are not in the public domain? A regulatory impact statement is meant to be a public process.

The bill has gone through the Parliament – and I pick up a point made by Dr Mansfield before about cooking. When confronted with a vote on cooking, the government members took the power to ban cooking. This is cooktops. They took that power even though the Premier said, 'We're not going to do cookers. We're not going to ban reinstatement of cookers.' That is what the Premier and others said. However, when confronted with a vote in this chamber to protect cooktops and the choice of families, including migrant families, on cooktops, the government voted that amendment down. You can work out what the government's intention is here. They hate gas, they want to ban gas and they are going for bans of every type. Banning is what they want to do. It is a gas ban.

The Deloitte modelling is not public, and it should be public. That is the point I make in point 4 in this motion. How can it be that you have got a supposedly open process where you can contest and argue about points if the modelling is not made public? The government has refused FOIs on this and it is

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now deep into the VCAT process, but none of that will be quick enough to help people see what assumptions and presumptions the government and Deloitte have made in this RIS.

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** What is there to fear? If you have got nothing to hide there, you should have nothing to fear in releasing that material. If you have got something to hide as a government, if the impact is greater than you are saying – many industry groups have told me that the modelling makes it more glossy on the upside – then when it comes to the negatives they minimise those. I think that is what is going on. I think this is not a truthful RIS. I think it is a flawed RIS.

Ms Watt, you are shaking your head, but actually you should support transparency here. I have listened to your views on these sorts of topics, these sorts of energy issues, before in the chamber. If you support a faster transition, which I think you do, then you should support honesty, openness and transparency on this. You should not support secret modelling. You should not support the closure of these RIS documents so that people cannot see them and challenge them.

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am hoping that that is not what she supports.

I want to make another point here. At point 7, Infrastructure Victoria released its documents yesterday, its 30-year plan – they are very important documents – and the associated appendices. I think it is instructive reading, and I draw the chamber's attention to this. This is the Aurora document. This is deep in the appendices. Squirrelled away deep at the back of the appendices is this Aurora material from November 2024, the energy transition analysis. It is chilling if you read page 18 and you look at the eight scenarios that have been examined by the Labor government. This is November last year that this work was done. The Allan Labor government's eight scenarios all show that the energy costs move from 2025 at around 50 megawatts per hour of electricity up to 2030 – this is the government's own document released yesterday. You can go online and look at it. Look for the Aurora modelling. You will see that it ranges between about \$120 and \$140 per megawatt hour in 2030. That is a 120 to 140 per cent increase in the wholesale cost of electricity. This does not include additional costs for transmission and all of those key points, but it does have the very large increases in energy costs that are going to hit households and businesses. If you read further, at page 29 for those who are interested to go and follow my references up, they say on the closure of coal plants:

The closure of coal plants in Victoria, beginning with Yallourn, is expected to significantly increase prices due to a reduced supply of reliable electricity –

that is what the government's own document says, Ms Watt –

forcing a greater reliance on more expensive generation sources; this is exacerbated by the market's increased volatility ...

It goes on to talk about fluctuations and weather and so forth. But that chart on page 29 is instructive reading. We are going to see a massive increase in costs. We have got a war on gas going on now. The government wants to ban gas. They want to stop gas being used. Gas has got an important role in delivering peaking electricity. In the recent Griffith study –

**Tom McIntosh:** You're a genius, Mr Davis!

**David DAVIS:** Well, you should go and read this study, if you would like to.

**Tom McIntosh:** Have you read it?

**David DAVIS:** I have read it, and I can provide it to you later if you would like.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

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**David DAVIS:** I actually enjoyed it; it was very interesting. The Griffith study made it clear that moving to an electrification agenda will actually increase the demand for gas, because you will need peaking power at the times when the electricity supply is lower. Actually, there is a perverse set of points there, and I think they are very important.

The essence of this motion, though, is calling on the government to conduct an open and transparent RIS process on its electrification plans, and that would see it release those items (3) and (4), which are the submissions to the RIS process and the Deloitte modelling and its underpinnings. I do not think that that is too much to ask. We know from what Energy Networks Australia have told us that we will pay an extra \$22 billion over the next 20 years. That has not been put up on the government website; that has been left off the government website. It is only because Energy Networks Australia released it themselves, and they say the emissions reductions are illusory as well.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:28): I am sure Mr Davis would have had more to contribute. Had he been in the chamber for his slot, he would have been able to fully take advantage of all the remarks that I assume he had prepared. I just want to draw the chamber's attention to some notices of motion that have been moved by me and sit on the notice paper which do in fact speak to electrification and all our efforts to reduce electricity bills, including notice of motion 806, which talks about us having the lowest wholesale energy prices in the country, and notice of motion 822, which also talks about all of our efforts to support those vulnerable energy consumers. I include the notice of motion moved today, which also speaks to that. But I am not going to go into that, because I know that what you really want to hear is the position of the government on the notice of motion brought forward by Mr Davis and spoken about so passionately by Mr Welch earlier.

It will be no secret that the government and I strongly oppose the motion. It is not only misleading, but it really, to my mind, seeks to obstruct a necessary and well-considered transition towards a sustainable and of course, I have got to tell you, affordable energy future for all Victorians. The building electrification regulatory impact statement (RIS) is part of our broader commitment to ensuring that households and businesses can benefit from the economic and environmental advantages of electrification. The transition is not about making life harder for Victorians but about securing a better future – one that is cleaner, one that is more cost effective and one that is less reliant on fossil fuels. Let me be clear, because I think it has been lost on those opposite: gas reserves in Victoria are depleting. This is not a matter of ideology but a reality that we must confront. Who is telling us this? That would be the scientists and those folks that are out there looking for it, and they are telling us it is absolutely depleting. The cost of gas will continue to rise as reserves diminish. Make no mistake, this will put undue financial strain on families and businesses that absolutely rely on it. Doing nothing is not an option, and nor should it ever be considered an option, because pretending that delaying the transition will somehow make the problem disappear is a deep fantasy. We must act decisively and responsibly. That is why the Allan Labor government is working to ensure an orderly transition, one that prioritises affordability, reliability and sustainability and supports households in switching to electricity. We are actively reducing the cost of that transition while ensuring that our industry sector that needs the gas supply, and we do acknowledge that, does not go short.

This motion argues that the RIS process has lacked transparency, and that was additionally supported in the remarks by Mr Davis. Let me set the record straight. We have followed standard procedure in managing regulatory impact statement submissions. They closed recently. Yes, that was on Friday, and as I understand it, because some folks have reached out to me, they are still very keen to make a submission. It is fantastic and exciting that this is being taken up with so much gusto right across the state, and as with every RIS process, they will be made public in due course. It has only been three business days. 'Hold your horses,' I say to those opposite. The suggestion that we are hiding it is simply false. The motion that speaks to Deloitte modelling is before VCAT. I am not going to make any comments on that; it is before VCAT. Frankly, I do not have anything to say. I am not going to be the one fronting up to VCAT, so I will leave it with them.

I will go to the remarks made about Energy Networks Australia and the report released by them that alleges that Victorians will pay an additional \$22 billion over the next 20 years. I have got to tell you, to my mind, this is a deeply flawed analysis from an organisation that has vested interests in maintaining gas consumption in our state. There are independent reports from organisations that are considered incredibly credible, such as Monash University and the CSIRO and the Grattan Institute, for example, and even Energy Consumers Australia, that tell us a very different story, one that shows time and time again that electrification will save householders thousands of dollars in the long run. In fact it is saving some in the short run, let me tell you. I have met those folks recently.

It is not just a policy choice to electrify your home and electrify the state; it is also an economic win, one that has been enjoyed by many thousands of Victorians right across the state. Let me tell you, there is research that goes to that. Independent research has demonstrated that moving away from gas in your home will save you money on your household energy bills. There is the fact that a new all-electric home can save you 1800 bucks per year if solar is installed. In fact an existing all-electric home with solar can save just over 2000 bucks a year, which I know makes a great difference. And I have got to tell you, it is tough, and I do acknowledge that, to find the time and effort to find somebody out there that can install it. But do you know what, the SEC is working with consumers to make that possible. We know that switching to energy-efficient electric heating and cooling can save you over 1000 bucks a year. Upgrading to electric energy-efficient heat pumps – they are very popular right across the state for your hot water – can reduce your bills by \$300 per year. There are real tangible savings everyone is taking advantage of.

Last week I had the good fortune to meet an aged pensioner with the wonderful member for Broadmeadows Kathleen Matthews-Ward. She and I popped in to see the solar panels that had been installed, the induction cooktop that was happening and out the back the heat pump. I have got to tell you, that home owner was absolutely pumped about it. He spoke about all the differences in his bills and all the savings he was reaping, and he was loving it. He was putting that money towards getting his grannies on a good holiday coming up in wintertime. I have got to tell you he was very excited indeed.

I want to know why those opposite are standing in the way of Victorians enjoying these benefits, because so many of them are. Supported by the Victorian energy upgrades program, there are significant discounts on energy-efficient electric appliances, helping households save thousands of dollars. The Solar Homes program – I have spoken about it many, many times before – has helped over 300,000 Victorians to install solar panels. Everywhere in the state they are taking up the good fortune of the Solar Homes program to install solar panels, batteries and electric hot-water systems. I have got to tell you, we know that committing to a fair, affordable and reasonable transition is absolutely good for everyone. The scaremongering that is happening from those opposite is only delaying progress, and it harms those wanting to benefit from cheaper and cleaner energy.

I also want to go into the credibility of the Energy Networks Australia report that was spoken about so enthusiastically by Mr Davis. Unlike the rigorous independent studies from those organisations I mentioned, like the CSIRO and the university there, the analysis by Energy Networks Australia fails to account for the long-term downward trend in electricity costs as more and more Victorians take on renewable energy. There is an assumption there of flat gas prices, ignoring the inevitable supply shortages and what they will do for prices – they will drive them higher, make no doubt about it. This report misrepresents the electricity market trends to artificially inflate the cost of electrification. There are flaws and flaws and flaws in this report. I am happy to call them out, and I know that others on this side will be too. These are fundamental and they undermine the work being done. The reality is that staying on gas will only become more expensive while electrification offers very real long-term financial relief, enjoyed by pensioners in Broadmeadows and right across the state.

I have got to tell you, you have got to look at history. It is clear who has been fighting for lower energy prices and who has been working against them. I will give you a hint: they are right over the other side of the chamber. Whilst the previous Liberal government refused to invest in renewable energy and did everything possible to hinder progress, it is no surprise that those of us on this side are very proud to

stand up for policies that lower bills and reduce emissions for each and every Victorian. We have delivered projects, including 4.5 gigawatts of new renewable capacity. There are nine projects under construction. There are households right across the state taking advantage to get off costly gas dependence. This motion is not about transparency, it is not about affordability, it is about fearmongering and delaying real action that is in the best interests of Victorians. Our plan for electrification is responsible, it is fair and it economically benefits the back pockets of Victorians. It will cut energy costs for families. It will reduce reliance on expensive gas and position Victoria as a leader in sustainable energy. I urge my colleagues to reject this motion and stand in support of a smarter, more affordable and more sustainable future for all Victorians.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:38): I rise to support Mr Davis's motion. This is again about transparency. You people are running a secret state here. For goodness sake, give us the information. What are you trying to hide? All we are asking for is the work you have done to come to the conclusion that everybody has got to shift over from gas. We need a cocktail of energy.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** The minister needs a cocktail. Help her out, Mr McIntosh, will you? I just happened to look at where the energy is being supplied from at the moment. Have you got your PocketNEM app, Mr McIntosh? It will tell you that at the moment Victoria's energy generation is coming from brown coal. The vast majority is coming from brown coal. It is not coming from renewables. You have got an ideological objection to gas, to coal, to nuclear. You want Victorians to pay more for electricity. There is no doubt we are going to be paying more, because this Infrastructure Victoria energy transition analysis report does show us that at the moment we are being charged \$50 per megawatt hour, and that will move up to \$120 to \$140 per megawatt hour in 2030. That is not reducing the cost of energy, that is increasing the cost of energy. But you also seem to have an objection to Victorians being able to choose how they might like to heat or cool their homes or how they might like to cook their food. Why are you such scrooges on that side of the fence? You do not like choice. Let Victorians choose whether they want gas or electricity. What is so hard about that? Really, what is so hard about being able to choose whether you want gas or electricity?

What is more, you are moving into the commercial sector as well. I do not know whether you know, because most of you do not really move outside the tram tracks, but out there in the real world, out there in the country, we need gas. You cannot process the milk and you cannot process the milk powder without electricity. You cannot kiln-dry timber. You have done away with native hardwood forests. We have to kiln-dry timber, and you need gas for that. There are a lot of commercial industries that you are now forcing to move over to electricity.

**Sheena Watt:** We're not forcing them.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You are. There are commercial enterprises that are having to replace their existing gas boilers or whatever and they are being forced, at huge expense, to move to electricity. It is just unsustainable.

But apart from that, to get this vast amount of renewable energy that you need, you need vast tracts of transmission lines criss-crossing this country like a spider web, ruining pristine farmland and environmental areas, charging through biolinks and wrecking the environment. We just talked, in Dr Mansfield's motion, about what you are doing to the environment to ensure that you will have all this renewable energy. You have got to transmit it somehow, and that is your problem. Last year, in 2024, you were meant to have completed the Western Renewables Link transmission line. There is not a spade in the ground. You cannot connect all this renewable energy because it is just unsustainable to be charging through farmland and environmental areas with transmission lines 88 metres high, as high as the MCG lights. They are an obscene obstruction, but apart from that they are wrecking the environment and they are wrecking farming opportunities.

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We are calling on the government to conduct an open and transparent regulatory impact statement process on its electrification plans which would see a release, at the earliest possible time, of the items outlined in paragraphs (3) and (4), which are to do with the submissions to both the things that you have not made public, including the Deloitte modelling which informed and guided the building electrification RIS. It has not been released. Why can't you release these things? What is the problem? Why are you trying to be secretive here in this place? We need the information so we can properly decide whether your whole electrification operation is legitimate. It is clearly not. At the moment you are saying that somebody has just got new rooftop solar panels. Well, did you tell them that they are not actually going to be able to get a cent out of them if they put any power back into the grid? At the moment you cannot get any rebates out of your solar panels on your roof. Did you also tell them that they are going to have to clean them every few years or else they will not be viable? Have you told them that? We do not want people going up on their roofs. Your pensioner friend will be falling off –

*Members interjecting.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, were you suggesting that the lovely pensioner lady that Ms Watt met is going up on the roof to clean the solar panel?

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I am sure she does not. I certainly do not service my car. So that is another huge expense for people.

You said it was chilling. We will all be frozen here or we will be overheated, because not everybody can afford to totally transition their whole house to electricity. I had a case out in the electorate where they were building a new house. It was only a two-bedroom, modest house out in a country town, but it was going to cost an extra \$100,000 to upgrade the power into the Powernet transformer to actually become an all-electric household. And that was without being able to plug the Tesla in. It is extremely expensive to get enough power to build the house, Minister. You cannot –

**Harriet Shing:** Hang on, you love Elon?

**Bev McARTHUR:** I love air conditioning, but you cannot –

**Harriet Shing:** You love Elon Musk?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Excuse me, what has Elon got to do with solar panels?

**Harriet Shing:** The Tesla.

**Bev McARTHUR:** A Tesla – the problem is you cannot afford to charge a Tesla out in the country if you have got to spend \$100,000 to upgrade the power to your house – that is what it costs to increase the energy supply into a house to make it all electric. That is before you buy the all-electric imported appliances. We had an industry in this state which produced gas appliances. They are probably all going out of business because you have basically killed them off, but we need to have a mixture. We need to have gas, we need to have renewables and down the track we certainly should lift the moratorium – well, you have lifted the moratorium; no, you have not. You need to lift the moratorium on nuclear energy so that we can all investigate whether that is feasible as well.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes. Why wouldn't you do that? Let us have a mixture. Let us have a cocktail of energy so we can make sure we have got baseload power when we need it. I have still got farmers using diesel generators because there is not enough power to run the rotary dairy, the milling of the grain and everything else. This is a very sensible motion for you to release the information but also to have a proper process so we can all investigate how good your policy is.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (16:47): I rise to speak against this motion. I am really glad that the gallery is full, because this is an incredibly important conversation. We are talking about two

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things that are important to us as a state, as a nation and indeed as an entire world: we are talking about energy, which is so important to be able to power our businesses and to be able to power our homes, and we need affordable energy, but what we also need to do is ensure that each and every one of us is not being impacted by climate change. There has been a lot of talk about farmers – farmers and their crops get smashed by climate change. Residents' homes get smashed by climate change, and what that does is cause an increase in our insurance bills. Last year there was a 16 per cent increase in our insurance bills.

We see coastal erosion. We see floods. We see these events as increases in temperature – it is pretty simple science that I think was identified, I do not know, 150 to 200 years ago, the impacts of carbon being trapped in the atmosphere and the increase in temperature. That is seeing more and more erratic weather events. We have seen it with windstorms. We have seen it in Eastern Victoria. In the electorate that I represent we have seen windstorms, we have seen erosion, we have seen so much just in the last 12 months. If we look at Australia and the world more broadly, it is happening more and more. Let us be very clear that there are two things we need to do: we need to provide that energy, as we said, with reliability and affordability, but we also need to decarbonise our economy.

Victoria has traditionally had a highly carbon intensive economy. Tasmania has hydro, you know, and others around the world, Canada and other places, have used that technology; we have used coal. I am really proud to be part of a government, a Labor government, that has prioritised reducing our emissions, and the first cab off the rank is to reduce our emissions in energy. It does not mean that is the only thing we have got to deal with. We have to deal with transport emissions. We have got to look at agriculture. We have got to look at sequestration – keeping carbon in place. There are a variety of things we need to do if we are going to keep global temperatures down. Those global temperatures – I do not know if the opposition have even mentioned the words 'climate change' – are already 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial levels of 150, 160 years ago. I talked about the impacts that has.

We know that we need to reduce the carbon going into our atmosphere, and to do that, a sustained plan has been made in renewables. Mr Welch in his contribution talked about how business needs certainty, business needs certainty. What did not give business certainty was when the Liberals and Nationals were in government federally having something like 16 to 20 different energy policies. Seriously, it was almost to the point where the energy minister would be walking out and the media adviser would give them the release for the day and that is what their energy policy was. We need clear, consistent energy policies, and I am proud that the government has done that. In doing so, you give certainty to investment. It is really interesting, the full circle that goes on in the political spectrum.

I do not want to talk too much about nuclear. However, we should, because as an alternative government, their answer to energy is a nuclear reactor. There are a lot of problems with nuclear: one, where is the investment going to come from? The lovers of the free market cannot find anyone in the free market who wants to invest in it. The technology is not here. We know there are so many problems. Where is the water going to come from? The cost is astronomical. It is all of these sorts of things. But the other major problem is it will see a gap in supply. We simply are not going to have a nuclear reactor up and running when we do not have the expertise, when we do not have anyone who wants to invest in it and when we do not have consensus within this country about going forward with that technology. When you talk about business certainty, Labor, business and indeed voters have a very clear policy – it is that we will invest through renewables to provide electricity.

People often come up to me and say, 'Yeah, but we can't do it. It's all a fairytale or a fantasy.' I say, 'How much do you think our renewable supply currently is?' 'Oh, 5 per cent.' No. Forty per cent of our power is coming from renewables, and by 2035, it will be 95 per cent. Mr Davis stands over there saying, 'Yeah, but what about peaking gas?' Yes, we understand there is a role for peaking gas, Mr Davis. And Mrs McArthur stands over there saying, 'What about gas?' There is a dwindling supply of gas, Mrs McArthur. We need to face up to realities that these are not –

**Bev McArthur:** No, you have got it wrong. There is plenty of gas.

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**Tom McIntosh:** Unless the sun is going to implode, we have an endless supply of solar, and we have wind moving around the globe on a pretty consistent basis. Mrs McArthur talked about ideological opposition. When you look at a form of technology that has no cost inputs to generate electricity, when you look at a form of generation that gives owners independence to generate, consume and store their own electricity, that is a wonderful thing, and that is why in Victoria, through Solar Homes Victoria, we have 2 gigawatts of solar on Victorians' roofs, because Victorians have said, 'Yes, we want to be able to generate our own power.' Mrs McArthur and those opposite might like people to be trapped in and only have one way to go, and that is to buy it all in, but Victorians are more and more taking the opportunity to generate and consume their own electricity.

On the energy efficiency side, we have seen the energy efficiency measures, which drop consumption within this state, which save people money. We have seen PV, we are seeing hot water, we are seeing electrification of transport. It is technology. The technology is moving out, and it is better. For us to stand in the way of technology that is cleaner and more cost effective just does not make any sense to me. We hear the scaremongering of Mr Davis and Mrs McArthur, the absolute fearmongering, and they do not bring a plan. We have these debates probably every second week, and I almost plead with Mr Davis as the shadow energy spokesperson, who was not even here to start this debate – he has had a pretty bad few weeks since he became Leader of the Opposition, when you take in this morning and now not being here – where are the policies? What do you want to put forward? Because what conclusion can you draw if we are going to have 20 years without any new energy generation coming on board and you are not going to build a new coal plant? Where is the energy going to come from? You are going to have to frack. To get the gas, you are going to have to rip up farms. Rather than seeing the opportunity for diversity of income, you would rather see fracking going into waterways, ripping gas out of farmers' lands. I think you need to come clean with landholders about where you going to get your energy from. Come clean about where you are going to get your energy from. It is either going to be nuclear, which we know is too expensive and will not happen, or it is going to be gas, which is going to come from fracking.

While you have got your fearmongering, while you have got effectively no values in this area and no interest in the policy, which is why we have this sort of chaotic semblance of policies that roll out one after another every six to 12 months, I am proud to be in a party that has a clear vision, both state and federal. It sees affordable and reliable energy for all Victorians, and indeed all Australians, while at the same time decarbonising our economy and giving us energy security. I for one, Mrs McArthur, do not want to be reliant on other countries regarding the energy needs of our state. I want the jobs to be here, I want the income and the profits to stay here, and I want the energy reliability to be right here. So whenever a Victorian turns on a light or a business is using power, they know that it is generated here, the workforce is here and the profits are here, and whatever may come in the decades to come, when they need that power that power will flow from right here in Victoria.

**Trung Luu** (Western Metropolitan) (16:57): I rise today to speak on Mr Davis's motion 858 noting that the Victorian government's building electrification regulatory impact statement, if implemented, will have significant effects on households and businesses. I will go further. Since coming to this place I have witnessed the Andrews and Allan Labor governments' complete failure to understand the issues Victorians are facing right now with secrecy and lack of transparency. As my colleagues and Mr Davis mentioned earlier, if you have such strong support for electrification, what have you got to hide?

The modelling and the submissions to the regulatory impact statement process have yet to be released to the public. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis the Allan Labor government has been tinkering at the edges of so-called cost-of-living relief while at the same time promoting the crisis by forcing Victorians to rely solely on electrical appliances in their houses. This Allan Labor government wants every appliance in your home to be powered by electricity. Think of that. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, at a time when the state is not ready to have the storage capacity or fully provide renewable energy to our residents, they want every appliance in households to be electrified.

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We are a nation blessed with an abundance of natural resources and yet our energy costs are one of the biggest concerns raised by our constituents. They are genuinely concerned about how this plan will work, not because our gas resources are exhausted but because of persistent radical and illogical policies and legislation. It has been said before, and I say it again: forcing households to electrify their appliances at the end of the cycle of an appliance will drive up the cost of electricity for all Victorians, forcing them to pay more at a time they can least afford it. Electrifying a household costs money – money that households simply cannot afford – and those in my constituency in the outer west are bearing the brunt of it. Especially in a state like Victoria, which has the highest reliance on gas for heating homes, more than any other state or territory, how can this government think that a policy like this will work for Victorians at this stage in time? In the near future or in the distant future, we can consider it, but not at this very moment. To rely on utilising only electrical appliances might be fine for the member for Mill Park, Minister D'Ambrosio in the other place, but it is not fine for the people in the suburbs in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region, who I represent and who are struggling to pay their gas bills and their power bills every month. Whether it is in Werribee, Williamstown, Footscray or Point Cook, the cost of living is a massive issue. I speak to my constituents regularly about energy costs. They want cheap, reliable, efficient energy sources.

Throwing all natural resources, like gas, out the window is a recklessly short-sighted policy. This crazy decision by the Allan Labor government will also strain an already stretched energy grid and will fail to deliver the emissions reductions this government thinks it will. As Mr Davis has already eloquently detailed, the recent findings of the 2025 report *Victoria's Power Shift: The Hidden Cost of Forced Electrification in Victoria* show dire consequences, but it is necessary to repeat it to reinforce it to those opposite, who have failed to understand what would happen if this policy were implemented. Firstly, as I already said, it would drive up costs for all Victorians – \$22 billion in extra costs imposed on every Victorian over the next two decades, to be precise. Your power bills will increase every year for the next 20 years under this Labor policy to phase out gas before households have the renewable energy or storage capacity that can be relied on. This is going to create a massive spike in wholesale electricity prices, and every Victorian will pay the price. Just imagine your power bill every year for the next 20 years and seeing your amount increase again and again. No doubt those opposite are trying to bandage the problem with gimmicks, power relief bonuses and now this one bill, but it will not cut down the costs over a length of time. This is the legacy of those opposite for future generations.

How can Victorians pay for higher energy bills? Some of them will tell you that they will not be able to at all. The Allan Labor government love to gaslight Victorians with their plan to reduce emissions. The irony of this gaslighting is that the policy does not exactly do that. They are gaslighting Victorians into thinking they are doing something about reducing emissions when in fact they are doing exactly the opposite. The policy of forcing consumers to electrify their households could only have the opposite effect. This is a really concerning policy and will lead to increasing emissions by relying on high-emission backups during peak periods – for heating during the winter months, especially during peak periods, like the early mornings or those cold evenings. The problem with the government's plan is it will increase pressure on an already strained energy system that we have further stretched due to an inadequate supply of renewable energy and storage capacity.

This side of the chamber is supportive of giving Victorians a say in what appliances they use in their households. We support choice. We support bringing down the cost of your energy bills. We support a voluntary approach to electrification. We do not oppose it. We support a voluntary approach of letting households transition on their own terms if they wish to do so or when they can afford to do it. This policy by the government is yet another example of Victorians having their choices and freedom stripped away by an ideological left-wing government. I thank Mr Davis for bringing this motion about. It is an important motion to place for debate, and I stand with him and my colleagues supporting this motion. I sincerely hope the government revisits this policy before it is too late, because it is about transparency and choice. When you are doing a transition from gas to electricity, make sure it is open and transparent for everybody to see, for the public to see. If you strongly support it, make it available for the public.

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**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:05): I am pleased to rise and speak on the motion in Mr Davis's name, moved by Mr Welch, about electrification.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: He did an admirable job given he was left in the lurch by his leader with no notes. Substantively, rather than being distracted by a discussion of what happened when the motion was moved earlier, I want to get into a brief contribution today about the substance of the issues that are before us and the contrast that exists between the approach that the government is taking, which is about setting this state and Victorians up for the future, and an opposition that is living in the past.

We know Victoria has had cheap and plentiful supplies of gas that were easy to access and exploit. On the back of that supply, Victorians, and particularly Victorian households were better supplied with gas than many of our interstate counterparts. But the thing about gas is that it is a finite resource. Once the gas fields that have helped warm the homes of our state are exhausted, they will not replenish. I know some people criticise this statement, but fossil fuels do not just regenerate. They are not renewable, unlike other sources of electricity that we might suggest would be a better part of our future energy mix.

You have got a choice between thinking that we can just live in the past or actually confronting the challenges that exist today and planning for the future, and that is the contrast that exists in this debate. The crux of Mr Davis's motion today is it seeks to entrench the Liberal Party in the past. If we do not act with the sort of electrification agenda that Minister Lily D'Ambrosio has been determinedly pursuing for this state, there is not going to be enough gas to go around. If we do not move those who can move from gas to electricity in their homes or indeed in their businesses, then gas prices, due to lower supply, will keep rising and rising, putting increasing pressure on households as bills rise. What we have got to do is bring on, where we can, new transitional gas supply and storage as the first thing – we are working on that – and secondly, help those Victorians who can get off gas to do so, so there is more gas for those who cannot. What that transition will do is lower power bills for Victorians and set them up for a renewable future, and that is the heart of what we are trying to achieve with this policy.

Briefly, before I conclude my remarks – we have had a long day of contributions – I just want to pass on a story of a couple of constituents of mine who have been on this electrification journey and reflect on their experience of the benefits. They are an elderly couple – I will not go into just how old, but an elderly, retiree couple living in Hampton – Pat and Bob, who Minister D'Ambrosio and I visited last year in July to see how their electrification journey was going and the support they were receiving from the Victorian government through the Victorian energy upgrades program. A couple of years ago Pat and Bob shifted from their old gas cooktop to an induction stove. They loved it. This time, when their gas boiler for their heating broke, what did they decide to do? They decided to install a heat pump, and with support from the Victorian energy upgrades program they put a new heat pump in, they got new, better insulated ducting and they are set to save hundreds of dollars on their household energy bills. The feedback we got was that they were loving the transition. Pat and Bob spoke very clearly about the benefits that electrification was bringing to their household. They loved it, and they wanted other people to know just how successful their transition had been so that others could achieve it too. I should also point out that all the work was being done by Coldflow Heating and Cooling, based in Clayton South – local businesses creating jobs. I do not have time to go into that here and now.

The crux of this debate is about whether Victoria's energy policy should live in the past with the Liberal Party or in a renewable future, which is where Labor thinks our energy policy should go. The choice is very clear: a renewable future with cheaper power or a Liberal Party stuck in the past.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:11): This is a very, very simple motion. This motion lays out the details of the government's regulatory impact statement and its electrification approach. But what the government has not done is make the submissions public and what the government has not done is make the Deloitte modelling that underpins its whole regulatory impact statement public.

In essence, whether you support electrification or whether you do not support forced electrification, in either case you would want to see the underpinnings and the submissions that have been made to this regulatory impact statement process. This is simply, at the end of the day, about transparency and openness.

If you want to accelerate the electrification, you would want to understand how you are doing it and the impact on the community. If you wanted to make sure that people are not injured or hurt, as businesses and families, by the rising costs, by the surging costs that we have seen – and I went through the Aurora modelling earlier, which shows a lift in the megawatt hours of wholesale power from \$50 to \$120, \$130 and \$140 by 2030; that is what the government's own document released yesterday shows – you would want to understand all of this modelling before you went headlong into a particular direction. Otherwise you are just seeking to put your head in the sand and cover up the government's and the minister's mismanagement. This is transparency, pure and simple.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (19):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negated.***Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:20): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.***Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action***Report 2023–24*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:21): President, thank you so very much for giving me the opportunity this evening to speak on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's (DEECA) annual report 2023–24, which reflects on a year of remarkable progress and is one that I am sure will be eclipsed only by the 2024–25 report, which will be released later this year. This report is a testament to the Allan Labor government's bold leadership in creating an affordable, renewable and secure energy future for all Victorians, under the direction of a Labor government which is committed to tackling both cost-of-living pressures and climate action.

DEECA is taking nation-leading action to drive down household energy bills and reduce our state's carbon emissions. This past year we brought forward Victoria's net zero target from 2050 to 2045. We had the confidence to make this change partly because of the strong uptake of the Victorian energy upgrades program and Solar Victoria discounts and loans, which will save Victorians thousands of dollars in yearly energy bills while also reducing their household emissions. In the period covered by this report we approved a record 78,626 rebate applications for households to install solar panels and energy-efficient hot-water systems.

We also brought back the SEC, and everyone here knows how proud I was to vote to enshrine the SEC in the Victorian constitution late last year. In fact just last week I joined a team from the SEC at the Buninyong Smart Living Expo, and it was so encouraging, I must say, to chat with so many locals at the expo and share in their excitement about the revived SEC. So many people shared fond memories of the SEC before it was broken up and sold off by those opposite. Quite a few people could even sing the jingle from the old SEC ads. That was quite a hoot, I have got to tell you. People in Buninyong were particularly excited about the SEC's new one-stop shop. I will spare you all my singing voice, but I will tell you that folks were excited by already taking advantage of the pilot areas in the one-stop shop in Merri-bek, Casey and Ballarat to make the switch to cheaper electric power when they are ready to replace their old home appliances. The one-stop shop offers personalised support via the electric home planner tool, which can tell you what government discounts you might be eligible for and link consumers with the SEC's verified installer network, which helps them make a stress-free switch to cheaper electric power to start slashing their bills from day one. The bill savings generated by the SEC and the one-stop shop are so important because cost-of-living support and energy affordability are at the heart of our renewable energy transition.

In addition to spreading the good news about the SEC and Buninyong, last week I had the privilege of observing another Labor government cost-of-living support scheme when I visited a Cohealth team who administer the government's energy assistance program in Victoria's public housing complexes. The energy assistance program is a free service which provides personalised support to households struggling with energy bills. Whether it is applying for concessions, accessing hardship programs or understanding energy bills, the program ensures that no-one is left behind. Let me just say I am personally very grateful to Steven from the Cohealth team who volunteered some of his time to review my energy bills using the Victorian government's Energy Compare website. In the space of just a short conversation Steven's energy assistance program expertise saved me hundreds of dollars per year on my energy bills. I talked to a number of residents in that public housing tower who absolutely raved about the support they had received from the Cohealth team. A big shout-out to workers like Steven. You enjoy my deep thanks. You make a difference to our great state each and every day. As Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action, I have a lot of interactions with DEECA staff, and I know firsthand just how dedicated they are. Let me give a special shout-out to Jess and the team from the Buninyong stall, who were champions for the SEC, and to Naomi, Karl and Aaron who helped facilitate my time at the Cohealth site. This state is a better place because of your service, and the DEECA annual report is a testament to that fact.

### Fyansford Paper Mill

#### *Petition*

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:25): Last sitting week I had the privilege of presenting Legislative Council petition 538 to this chamber, a call to restore the Fyansford Paper Mill water race wall. As you might remember, it carried the weight of 2018 signatures – just over 1000 on paper and just under 1000 online. I want to thank all the signatories for their support, with particular thanks to the Fyansford Paper Mill precinct group and the Rotary Club of Highton, who led this effort with passion and purpose. The heart of this is about the paper mill itself. Built in 1878, it is Australia's only intact heritage paper mill, perched above Buckley Falls on the Barwon River near Geelong. Classified by the National Trust as state significant and listed on Victoria's heritage register, it is a treasure. It has a 957-metre water race, a channel that once powered the mill's waterwheel. It is a marvel of engineering. In June 2021 an 11-metre breach broke the flow, damaging a piece of our history and disrupting a significant platypus breeding habitat. Repairing it is not just about heritage; it is about ecology as well. It is telling the story, the full story, of this site, which served as a World War II sea mine facility.

Today the mill thrives, with tourism, hospitality and artisanal businesses drawing thousands annually. Volunteers from the Highton Rotary Club guide visitors through the mill's rich past. Restoring the water race would advance this even further. Imagine water cascading 15 metres over the spillway,

boosting tourism and bringing history back to life. Decades of neglect on this Crown land should end. An independent assessment confirms restoring the flow will revive ecological values. There are no cons, only pros. There has been some good news, however. The Hamilton Group, the high-quality, heritage-minded developers in Geelong, purchased the mill in December. They are keen to restore all 950 metres of the water race on Crown land, working alongside the City of Greater Geelong, who manage 657 metres of it. This could be transformative, but we need approvals to move forward, so I ask the Minister for Water to intercede with the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority to grant the permissions needed for this repair. I understand there is an opportunity to incorporate fish ladders into the restoration and existing CCMA priorities, so I hope this might make it even more acceptable.

I further understand, anecdotally I admit, that the lack of water has now caused a serious knock-on impact on the number of small birds present on the site. This is a real opportunity to combine positive ecology and heritage, and it does not need taxpayer money – there are multiple volunteers and groups standing by ready to fundraise. I ask the Minister for Water to please do her best to ask the CCMA to look at this favourably and help this community vision become a reality.

### Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

#### *Victorian Renewable Energy Target 2023–24 Progress Report*

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:29): I rise to make a statement on the *Victorian Renewable Energy Target 2023–24 Progress Report*. It outlines how the state government is not only meeting but beating our targets, whether that is in energy generation or emission reductions. Victoria’s Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 was amended in March 2024 to legislate Victoria’s renewable energy targets of 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035, Victoria’s energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts of energy storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035, and Victoria’s offshore wind targets of at least 2 gigawatts of offshore wind generation capacity by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. This report presents an assessment of progress towards these targets and statewide investment and employment in Victoria in relation to renewable energy generation and energy storage.

On the energy generation front, over the 2023–24 financial year renewable energy sources accounted for approximately 37.8 per cent of Victoria’s electricity generation. As at 30 June 2024, there were 13 renewable energy generation projects under construction or undergoing commissioning in Victoria, with a combined capacity of nearly 2.2 megawatts. Over 2023–24 Victorian households and businesses installed 630 megawatts of rooftop solar systems, which saw rooftop solar provide 9.3 per cent of Victoria’s electricity generation in 2023–24, up from 7.9 per cent in 2022–23. This volume of Victorian renewable energy projects under construction or undergoing commissioning, as well as the continuing strong investment in rooftop PV systems by Victorian homes and businesses, has Victoria well placed to achieve its 2025 renewable energy targets.

On the storage front, as of 30 June 2024, Victoria had 557 megawatts of commissioned energy storage capacity and 12 utility-scale storage projects, with a combined capacity of over 1 megawatt under construction or undergoing commissioning. A strong storage project pipeline will contribute to Victoria’s 2030 energy storage target of at least 2.6 gigawatts. Key milestones achieved in relation to our energy storage targets in 2023–24 include the commencement of construction at the SEC’s 600 megawatt/1600 megawatt-hour Melbourne renewable energy hub, and at the 185 megawatt/365 megawatt-hour Koorangie energy storage system, supported under the Victorian government’s Renewable Energy Zone Fund. Over the whole period, from project commencement to completion, our renewable energy and energy storage projects are estimated to support \$8.41 billion in capital expenditure and 3882 jobs. In addition to the jobs supported through the construction of large-scale renewable energy projects, rooftop PV installations completed in 2023–24 are estimated to have supported a further 2641 jobs.

We can see here that renewable electricity generation grows from strength to strength in our state. The jobs that it provides also do the same in our state, ensuring we have electricity generation going into the future with jobs here providing reliable and affordable electricity to Victorian households and businesses. I just note the work Homes Victoria have done on solar PV, hot water and batteries in people's homes, supporting them to take control of their own energy generation and storage and be able to drive their energy costs down going forward.

### Department of Transport and Planning

*Report 2023–24*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:34): I rise to speak on the Department of Transport and Planning's annual report 2023–24. I actually spoke on this report in the last sitting week. I started out speaking about the number of roads that need to be improved in my area, and I ran out of time. So I am back here again speaking on that report. While there are a lot of roads that need improvements, today I want to focus on three big projects that actually do need to be delivered in Northern Victoria Region. They are all bypasses of major towns.

The first of those is the Shepparton bypass. This is a project that has been in the planning for over three decades. In fact long before I was elected to this Parliament, in the 1990s, I was part of a committee that was advocating for the route of the Shepparton bypass to be decided. The bypass was part of a promise to duplicate the Goulburn Valley Highway, and the highway has been duplicated all the way to Shepparton now, but the stalemate starts at Shepparton, where this government will not commit to the bypass. The Liberal and National parties actually made a commitment at the last election that we would commence this bypass, but we have seen nothing from Labor. We need to remember that Labor have been in power for 22 of the last 26 years in this state, and so all of these projects not being built fall at the feet of Labor. The bypass around Shepparton was to be built as a single-stage construction, but the community realised quite a while ago that governments were not interested because it was a large project. So the community volunteered to stage that project; they did that because it is vital for us to get a second river crossing, which will provide a connection between Shepparton and Mooroopna during times of flood. Our two communities were completely cut off from each other during the floods of 2022. In fact the east and west of the state were cut because the Midland Highway could not connect Shepparton and Mooroopna.

We need to take the trucks out of High Street in Shepparton; at the moment we have B-doubles tearing through the middle of our town. In 2022 when we were standing at polling booths in High Street we saw a number of near misses as trucks locked up their wheels because cars were stopped to park, all because the traffic lights for the walkway across from Target would change. It is only a matter of time before we have a major accident if this bypass is not built, but we see no commitment from this government.

The town of Rutherglen is another town that needs a major bypass, and they have been talking about their bypass for at least 20 years. This is the Murray Valley Highway, running right through Main Street, Rutherglen, which is an 1800s streetscape not built to have large trucks and B-doubles and things running through it. Last year we had three major accidents – tragically a local pedestrian was killed in one, and the other two could have been much worse. But the government needs to commit to that bypass at Rutherglen to make the tourist town of Rutherglen much safer and to provide for safer passage for trucks also as they travel on the Murray Valley Highway.

The last one that I want to mention is the Kilmore-Wallan bypass, and again this is one that has been probably over three decades in the planning. In fact congestion in the main street of Kilmore was talked about in 1938 – they were saying how congested that main street was. The Kennett government first committed to building a bypass of Kilmore and Wallan in 1999, but of course then they did not win the election; the Labor government did, and they did not do anything about it. The Baillieu government committed \$130 million to construct that bypass, but again when Labor got back in they scrapped that project. In 2018–19 Labor finally committed \$20 million, but I am told that money has

not been spent yet, and that was for land acquisition. So this is a project that is desperately needed because the population in this area is set to triple in the next 20 years.

### Department of Education

#### *The Education State: Excellence in Every Classroom*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to make a contribution on an important document that outlines a vision for the future of education in Victoria, *The Education State: Excellence in Every Classroom*, authored by the Department of Education. This report reflects on our commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to a world-class education. This report presents a clear and ambitious vision, one that aspires to excellence in every Victorian classroom, and at its core is the recognition that great education starts with great teaching. Victoria has long been a national leader in literacy and numeracy outcomes, and the Allan Labor government continues to invest in evidence-based teaching practices to ensure our students develop foundational skills. Professional learning communities are providing teachers with valuable opportunities to collaborate and refine their craft, ensuring that the best teaching methods are in every classroom. However, excellence in education is about more than just academic achievement. Every student must feel safe, included and supported to thrive. That is why the government has made significant investments in student wellbeing, including ensuring every government secondary school has access to a dedicated mental health practitioner. We know that when students feel supported, respected and valued they are better equipped to engage in learning and achieve their full potential.

One of the key challenges we continue to address is engaging in secondary education. Too many students disengage from traditional schooling because it does not align with their interests, skills or career aspirations. That is why we have introduced the VCE vocational major, an important reform that allows students to explore vocational pathways while still achieving a senior secondary qualification. By giving students the flexibility to pursue academic and practical learning side by side, we are ensuring that students leave school job ready and prepared for the future. Our investment in tech schools is also making a real difference, giving students hands-on experience in STEM industries and equipping them with the skills needed for emerging jobs in rapidly evolving economies.

At the heart of our education system are our teachers, and we must continue to invest in them. We know that attracting and retaining high-quality educators is essential, which is why we have introduced scholarships, professional development programs and initiatives to reduce the administrative burdens that often take teachers away from what they do best, which is teaching. Our commitment to supporting teachers is a commitment to lifting student outcomes across the state.

Of course education does not exist in isolation from the wider community. Schools are more than just places of learning. They are hubs of connection, support and opportunity. That is why we have undertaken the largest school building program in Australia, delivering 121 new schools since 2017. This includes the Wirrigirri Primary School in the north-west of the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Every Victorian community deserves access to high-quality educational facilities, and we are ensuring that families, no matter where they live, have access to modern, well-resourced schools.

This report is more than just a statement of intent. It is a road map for the future of education in Victoria. It reflects our shared aspiration to create a system that not only delivers academic excellence but also nurtures, supports and empowers every student to thrive. The work we do today will shape the opportunities available to future generations, and it is imperative that we remain committed to delivering the best possible education for every Victorian child. As we move forward, let us continue to work together – students, parents, educators and community members – to build an education system that meets the needs of today and prepares students for the challenges of tomorrow. The future of Victoria depends on the strength of our education system. As we all know, education and public education changes lives, but this report sets out a clear path to achieving excellence in every classroom.

**Department of the Legislative Council**

*Report 2023–24*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:43): I rise to speak on the annual report of the Department of the Legislative Council. I have referred to it in a few previous statements on reports. It outlines the very many and varied things that we do as part of our work in this place and indeed the very many ways in which the incredible staff of this place help to make everything work. One of the smaller components of the parliamentary life is the concept of parliamentary friendship groups. There are many of them that exist. In fact I believe there have been three that have been formed just this week. They are often formed for particular countries that we have close relationships with as the state of Victoria, they can be named for other concepts or they can be named for football teams. Some members wish to show how misguided and foolish they are by aligning themselves publicly with certain football teams.

One of the parliamentary friendship groups that I am personally affiliated with is the Parliamentary Friends of Ukraine. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, as I said this morning, did not start three years ago. It started 11 years ago with the invasion and annexation of Crimea. There has been a continued campaign against that country, a democratic country, by a non-democratic neighbour ever since that culminated in the horrific attempted full-scale invasion of Ukraine back in 2022. Like many in this chamber, I was not yet elected to Parliament at that time, but as an outside observer I was stunned and horrified by what I was seeing on my screens. I was so greatly impressed by the resilience of the Ukrainian people in the face of unimaginable horror, of unimaginable evil – the incredible determination and resilience. One particular example that will stay with me for a very long time is the report of a very elderly woman who approached an invading soldier in the street and thrust into his pocket a handful of sunflower seeds, sunflowers being one of the most potent symbols of Ukraine's independence. She said to him, 'At least when you are in the ground something beautiful will grow out of it.' We know that many of the invading soldiers from Russia are not there voluntarily – in many cases they too are victims of this war – but the Ukrainian people have so gravely suffered as a result of the evil actions of a foreign dictator.

The Western world has come together. We have stood strong, and most parts of the Western world still stand strong with Ukraine. I spoke this morning of some very distressing things that we have seen emanating out of one supposed ally of Ukraine in the past few days. To treat a people who have been through such unimaginable horror with such disdain and disrespect – to effectively bully these people at their time of greatest need – is despicable. It is pathetic, and it is the act of a coward. You can comment all you want about the clothes that someone wears to a meeting and say that a man should wear a suit, but I think in that meeting we saw a man who was not wearing a suit who was dignified and strong and a suit in search of a man.

There is still much to come, and I still hold onto the hope that all Western allies will come back fully in support of this brave democratic nation. There are many constituents in my region in particular who proudly claim Ukrainian heritage. Indeed there are many people living in my constituency right now who have themselves fled the horrors of the war. I know that when I say that in this chamber and in this Parliament we stand with Ukraine, we are united in doing so. It is my fervent hope that that will always remain the case in this Parliament and in this nation. Slava Ukraini.

*Petitions*

**Residential planning zones**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:48): I move:

That the petitions be taken into consideration.

I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this petition debate, a new form that has been introduced to the house which means, where there are a large number of petition signatures, either electronically

or in this case in hard copy – hard copy petitions with 4145 signatures have been tabled – there is an opportunity to debate that petition in the house and to take note of what has occurred. I want to thank my colleagues Ms Crozier and Mr Mulholland, who have helped table these petitions in waves over the last period, and I want to thank those in the community, the Boroondara heritage group and many others in the community, who have helped with this process. This is a cry from the heart. This is about the Melbourne we love. This is about ensuring that the Melbourne that was built by our forebears is protected. This petition is about the future of our suburbs, it is about the livability of our suburbs and it is about our democratic way of life and whether we are prepared, as democrats in this state, to stand up and say, ‘We don’t want our planning system controlled by the minister alone. We don’t want our planning system controlled by faceless bureaucrats. We want a proper planning system where councils that are elected by our communities are in charge and a proper process where our councils are able to listen to communities and communities are able to put their views forward openly, honestly and in a democratic way.’

What we have seen with a number of the steps taken by the government in the recent period is nothing short of an authoritarian approach. What we have seen is that the minister has begun to take control of our planning system in a way that is completely and utterly undemocratic. Of the 10 large pilot activity centres, three of them are in Southern Metro, the electorate that Ms Crozier and I represent. Those three areas have risen up as one and said they do not want this imposed on them without their consent, without the opportunity to speak and without the opportunity to make their points and design the community that they want. People have moved into these areas and have done that because they want a quality of life. Some say the developers should have more certainty. I say those who live in the area, those who are part of an area and those who are part of the genuine community in an area should actually have the certainty and the clarity. Over here I am quite happy to see what can be done to smooth processes, to make things quicker and to make things more straightforward. But that does not mean the removal of protections. It does not mean the removal of a democratic opportunity for people to have their say and for councils in a local sense to not make decisions. It is not just the 10 large activity centres either; it is the 50 nominated activity centres. Some are near stations, some are not. A huge number are in the region I represent in Southern Metropolitan.

It is also about the imposed dwelling targets. I am going to pick the example of Boroondara, but I could pick Stonnington, I could pick Glen Eira, I could pick others across the state. 190 years of European settlement has seen 70,000 dwellings in the City of Boroondara, and this government says that within 25 or 30 years it now wants to add another 65,500 dwellings – more than a 90 per cent increase. Where are the schools? Where are the hospitals? Where are the parks and the open space? Where are the ovals that would possibly deal with this enormous and frightening number that will irrevocably change our community? The same is true of Glen Eira and Stonnington. These are the two municipalities in Melbourne that have the lowest amount of open space per head, yet these are two of the municipalities that have been targeted for special attention, with high levels of density being forced upon them.

This is a dystopian dream. It is a dream that the government is wanting to force on people. It will see shocking high-rise wind tunnels without the proper support and open space.

*Interjections from gallery.*

**The PRESIDENT:** I warn the gallery: that is your one clap. If you clap again or you cheer or you boo or whatever, I will leave here. This will end today. Today’s sitting will end, and I might come back tomorrow.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:53): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis’s petition. Obviously there is a great deal of interest in housing in our communities. Like Mr Davis, I represent the Southern Metropolitan Region. I have spoken with many of the people who are sitting in the gallery today who have signed these petitions and who are concerned about these issues. I will say today what I have said to them already, which is that I support policies that will give

more Victorians the opportunity to own a home in the communities that we all love, in the communities that our families live in, that we may have grown up in and that have access to great schools, great jobs and transport infrastructure. I think it is an obligation that we all have as Victorians to think about how we can best provide more homes to others who seek to also live in this great state. Creating the opportunity for those people to have a place to call home in the communities that so many of us dearly love is at the core of what this government is attempting to do with its housing policies, because there are too many people who cannot get a home where they want to live. This government wants to make sure that Victorians have a place to call home.

What I think has been unfortunate about the way this debate has rolled out since the pilot activity centres were first announced in October 2023 is the degree of misinformation and fear that has characterised some of the material that has been put out in communities – images on social media that are just not true and falsely represent the draft plans the government has put out, the use of phrases like ‘authoritarian and undemocratic’ that seek to whip up insecurity amongst those in the community, when what we did in October 2023 was announce some pilots. We put out draft plans, and throughout the course of 2024 consulted with the community on those draft plans. We listened to the community, and those plans were changed in the latest versions that were released last week. I do not have time, because of the time limits in the debate, to go into all of these matters in detail. I have done this in conversations that I have had outside the chamber, and I am more than willing to continue to have those conversations.

I think there are a few key points. Despite the misinformation that might be spread by the Liberal Party to suit their own political ends, the heritage and landscape overlays in these activity centres will not change. That is clear. The minister has said this quite clearly. The feedback we have received from the community, and this was certainly the feedback that was given to me when I was out – for example, the people I spoke to in some of the heritage groups for the City of Boroondara’s Camberwell Junction activity centre – was that they were generally supportive of the plans at the core, because they were based on structure plans that had been developed by the City of Boroondara in the years prior. They had some concerns about the catchment areas, concerns about height and concerns about distance, and over the course of the consultation process, what did the government do? We listened. The heights in the final plans were reduced. The walkable catchment areas were put back in and refined. That is exactly the kind of approach that people should be able to expect, where governments propose drafts and engage with the community. There have been more than 10,000 consultations, submissions and engagements with members of the community about the 10 pilot activity centres since they were first announced in October 2023. Here we are 16 months later continuing that conversation. But the fundamental point is that we need more homes here in Victoria because we need places for our family members to live. That is the fundamental issue.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (17:58): I welcome the opportunity to speak to this petition. I guess I speak informed by my 13 years as the president or secretary of the Kensington Residents’ Association, so I have certainly experienced the utter frustration with the propensity of the Department of Transport and Planning to simply walk away from extended consultations between residents and local government and unilaterally overrule both.

The petition before the chamber is not without merit, but I guess somewhat misses the mark in places as well. Firstly, it is not just the activity centres or centre programs that are removing third-party rights and deeming certain types of development to comply, meaning that they will not be subject to advertising and a full planning assessment if the cookie-cutter planning controls are adhered to. So it is a bit disingenuous, if I may say so, to single out the activity centres as the thing that should be reviewed. I suspect it is actually much broader. Secondly, the loss of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties is perhaps a bit of a stretch, but hey, let us just put a pin in that. Victoria is facing enormous population growth in the years ahead and we need to plan for it, and we need to build a lot more homes within established urban settlement boundaries. While we are broadly supportive of the government’s objectives, I would caution the government against implementing policies that alienate

communities and ignore local knowledge. How these objectives are executed will make the difference between communities that are well serviced, with decent amenity, open space and infrastructure, and communities that are not great places to live. This concern is well founded; let us face it, our city is littered with lost opportunities and planning disaster stories. Southbank is a concrete canyon, overshadowed and lacking amenity; Docklands, an extraordinary opportunity to engineer community, is a largely lifeless failure; and perhaps most recently the Joseph Road precinct in Footscray, which is still a work in progress, is a planning disaster, with closely stacked high-rises, no meaningful open space and a streetscape that is reminiscent of a war zone.

In this context of the abject failure of the Department of Transport and Planning to be able to craft community-rich precincts, the concerns of the petitioners are entirely reasonable. The connection they feel for the neighbourhoods where they have made their homes is something the government must consider and must understand. Across Victoria communities want to know that their values and the things that make each community special will be included in structure plans and activity centre planning controls and pieces of public policy, for that matter. In my electorate there is one activity centre slated so far – that is the Niddrie Keilor Road and North Essendon activity centre – although there are two more flagged in *Plan for Victoria* as well as three metropolitan activity centres, 25 or so other activity centres and one day perhaps – that is a long way away – three or more Suburban Rail Loop precincts. I do not think that will be my problem.

How these precincts are planned is important. The government's greatest asset is the local knowledge held in these communities, and when those things that make local communities special are recognised and built on it adds great value to the planning process. That means real consultation, giving local residents and community groups access to the process as well as councils and traditional owners. It means draft proposals with details that can be meaningfully engaged with, not just cookie-cutter planning controls. The government's plan for Victoria and target for 70 per cent of new homes being built inside established areas is a massive change, but it is possible and it is desirable. But will it be done in a way that retains the diversity and individuality that make our communities different and special and matches housing growth with infrastructure and amenity? Only if the planning is done with, not to, local communities. With a bit of time and openness and a lot more detail these precincts could be a great success. If communities feel some ownership and connection to the plans, it will pay dividends in the long term, both politically and in terms of policy implementation. I encourage the government to ensure that this round of planning for the next 50 activity centres is more open than for the first 10. Bring locals along; listen to locals and listen to their local councils and planners, and you will build great places and great communities.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:03): I rise to speak to the debate on the petition that has been tabled by Mr Davis in Mr Davis's name, but I have also contributed to that –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** and Mr Mulholland has as well. As we have been speaking to members of our community, and as Mr Ettershank has just said, the local knowledge is terribly important; I think that I completely concur with you in relation to many people who have expressed their concerns around what the government plans to do.

Professor Michael Buxton, who is eminently renowned in this area – in environment and planning at RMIT University and as a former senior bureaucrat in the department of planning here in this state – has said about these activity centres:

It's not going to achieve affordable housing. It's going to achieve a city that's very difficult to live in, and it's incomprehensible the government would throw away what makes Melbourne so great.

This plan that the government has thrust upon the Victorian community was never taken to the people. It was not taken to the election just over two years ago, and so much has occurred in that time given the government's plans and announcements that was never known. You have people that have

questioned what are the activity centres. People have no idea, and when they learn of what is going on, they are absolutely horrified.

There have been a lot of concerns in the area that Mr Davis spoke of, our electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, which takes in Bayside, Stonnington, Glen Eira, parts of Kingston and Boroondara. Many, many constituents have expressed their concerns around the government's plans. At a Boroondara meeting where the government's bureaucrat came and spoke to that meeting, when the issue around heritage was raised, there were no guarantees from that bureaucrat, despite what Mr Batchelor has said. It was 'to be considered'. That is not a guarantee. The heritage is incredibly important, like the local knowledge is incredibly important, and that is I think where the Labor Party and the likes of Mr Batchelor are trying to brush over the concerns of tens of thousands of Victorians.

This petition will not stop today. This petition will continue, because I have an e-petition and it is gathering signatures from more Victorians, because they too are concerned about the government's processes and the way it has gone about thrusting these developments, these activity centres, on a city that we all love and we all want to see thrive. We do not want to see it destroyed, as Professor Buxton has described. He goes on to say in some of his comments:

We'll end up with a completely different city ...

We'll end up with a standardised high-rise, medium-rise city based on apartments.

We'll lose much of what attracts people to Melbourne and makes Melbourne a liveable city.

That is the point. We want our city to be liveable, we want our city to be great, we want to attract tourists, we want to attract people to come to this city and live in this city and make it their home. We do not want to trash this city, and these activity centres and the plans that the government has thrust upon the community will do exactly that. That is why this petition is so important. That is why the likes of Bayside council, when they have gone out and expressed concerns, speak about the forums that they have had where they have had presenters and panellists, people that are renowned and specialised in urban design, specialised planning, all aspects of law around environment and local government, looking at city planning and amenity. Mr Davis talked about amenity and the services that are going to be required. It is an enormous undertaking to get services like education, water and sewage, electricity, health, policing – all of these services that governments are responsible for.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I said water and sewerage. All of these issues have not been considered by the government. I say again, this is an important petition and an important debate that will continue.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:08): I could speak for probably an hour on this topic, because it has certainly been on the minds of my community in North-Eastern Metro, particularly those in Whitehorse where we have equivalent petitions of equivalent scale and bigger because we have seen the premonition, we have seen the advance view of this when dealing with the government in the Suburban Rail Loop precincts. Everything that is coming to pass in these activity centres was foreshadowed in the way the government misled the community through the SRL process. They said it would only be 20-storey towers, but then shortly changed that to 40-storey towers, then changed it to 50-storey towers and six-storey apartments in residential streets.

But I will start somewhere earlier than that. I will start back in the 1920s. One of the reasons for Melbourne's great success as a multicultural city is because we were a low-density city. We were the Garden State. The reason we were a low-density city was because in the 1920s and 30s, coming out of the Great Depression, we looked at places like the Richmond slums and said never again. Never again will people have to live side by side in these situations. We will put planning processes in place that mean people have the dignity of their own homes with their own gardens, with their own entrance, where families can grow and where health and education outcomes are maximised. That is a social technology that we have lived and benefited from for many generations. The middle suburbs of

Melbourne did not happen by accident. They were a template that said that this leads to a good society, a healthy society, a good life, a sustainable city.

Yet bizarrely we are consciously moving from that model to a model where we say we want the families of the future to live in tower blocks. Instead of having a back garden with all its utility or a front garden and the infrastructure that is calibrated to the scale of the community, we are going to one where we want to maximise density on the existing infrastructure, completely out of kilter with the infrastructure that is there. But worse than that, we are actually planning for the worst of all possible worlds, because not only are we going to overwhelm the infrastructure in the middle suburbs, but there are communities across the fringes of this community that have never received the infrastructure in the first place. We are going to have overwhelmed infrastructure in the middle of Melbourne and we are going to have no infrastructure on the outer ends of Melbourne. The arrogance and the hubris of this government to say there will be no consequences, that we are not layering up vulnerabilities in our community – vulnerabilities in education, where the outcomes are worse; vulnerabilities in health; vulnerabilities in social isolation, because we saw through the 1960s and 70s when we put people in tower blocks in Carlton, Fitzroy and other places that people became isolated from their communities, became distant from their educational and career opportunities and we decided to knock them down. But here we are back again doing the same thing.

Within the time limit I also say there is a fundamental underlying economic problem with this. They say that this is in order to build new homes. It is untrue, because on one hand they are saying that by liberating all these planning zones we are inviting developers to come in and build, but in order to do so they want to take a windfall gains tax, so the incentive has vanished. The only properties you could build are high-yield properties – high-end, high-yield properties – where they can absorb that tax. There is no affordable housing coming to middle Melbourne – no young couples, no families, no backyards, no social infrastructure, no extra schools planned, no extra hospitals planned, no more open space and in fact far less open space. This is bad urban planning. It is bad design. It is bad economics at a time when we cannot afford bad economics any longer.

The last consideration, the people who are considered least and last, are the people who already live there, where these fantasy properties are going to go. This is a nothing policy. It is a hoax. It is a policy that is trying to serve two masters: one, to build homes – allegedly – but the true master is to raise tax. The only reason these activity centres exist is to raise tax from the community and raise tax from developers to fill up and backfill their losses in other things, especially the Suburban Rail Loop.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:14): I rise to speak on this petition debate, and I am glad to contribute to the petition debate from my constituents in the north-west, particularly in Essendon but also in Niddrie. I was at the Moonee Valley Festival a couple of weeks ago, and a few tents down from my tent was one Danny Pearson and one Ben Carroll. The interesting thing is that many residents came up to me and spoke to me about the activity centres and asked me questions about the activity centres and then made their way down to Ben Carroll and Danny Pearson. It was quite amusing, because they all reported back to me, obviously, and they were saying they are also concerned, they are advocating to the Minister for Planning and have raised their concerns to the Minister for Planning because they do not agree with the current activity centres. They were very quick last week when this all came out to post some videos on their websites, claiming credit for the fact that their activity centres would be reduced in scale and go from 12 storeys to 10 storeys – so not even the Deputy Premier agrees with the Premier's plan. But what does it say to those communities, particularly those communities that are not in Labor-held electorates? That because of where you live, the Labor Party will not listen to you. You do not get a say. You do not get a say at all, just like you will not get a say in what happens in your community. Mr Welch was right that this is all a revenue exercise. The government wants to build 70,000 homes around the outside of the SRL East. In order to do that, in order to gain \$11 billion-plus of value capture, the government would have to charge \$160,000 per home. No developer is going to agree to that. This is a revenue-raising exercise – *(Time expired)*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:16): I want to make a very clear point in summing up: this is about democracy. It is about the future of our city. It is about what sort of city we want to live in. But it is also about our heritage too. I was shocked that one of the government officials at the large City of Boroondara sponsored meeting said that heritage ‘will be considered’ in the future – that is all he said. So layer, layer, layer, planning overlay, planning overlay, planning overlay and many of them at tension including, as was pointed out earlier, the ResCode changes. All of those are at tension but overwhelmingly pushing in one direction: height, density and control of the area. Height and density, unfortunately, will likely overwhelm the heritage protections that are so important for our city.

We know, for example, that the Victorian Planning Authority has been modelling a 50 per cent removal of heritage protection – that is what they have modelled. That is a disaster. We will lose those important streets, those important streetscapes, those important heritage properties that are part of our city – they are part of us. Local built environment is a part of us, and I say it has got to be protected. I thank all those who have contributed to this debate, but this is an opportunity to go forward and to actually try and protect our city, to try and look into the future and say, ‘What sort of city do we want?’ I do not want a dense, unfriendly, cold city without proper open space and without what we would regard as the proper heritage protections. That is why this petition is so important.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:18): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Transport infrastructure**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:18): (1473) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek relates to Infrastructure Victoria’s 30-year infrastructure strategy, which was published this week. The action I seek is actually a recommendation in this, which is to commit to electrifying the Craigieburn line towards Kalkallo. It does recommend electrifying the Craigieburn line to Kalkallo, by extending the Upfield line to Roxburgh Park and allowing trains to run towards Kalkallo via Upfield and building two new stations. These are the kinds of opportunities that we would be able to build if the government was not so stubborn in its pursuit of its Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs. How would you feel being a member for Western Metro or a member for Northern Metro and being content with your government spending \$35 billion, minimum, on a rail tunnel in the eastern suburbs? They are not doing their job in advocating for their community, so I will.

The Upfield line desperately needs to be duplicated, and we know the level crossings that Ms Watt and others advocated for were pushed back to after the next election – the ones on the Upfield line – but we desperately need them. The Infrastructure Victoria report makes its priorities very clear. It mentions the Suburban Rail Loop twice – and they are passing mentions. It is mentioned four times in footnotes, and one of those was referencing the enormous cost as outlined in the independent Parliamentary Budget Office report. The government really needs to get on board with electrifying up to Kalkallo and actually building infrastructure in our growth areas. The government are doing all these activity centres in the inner city because they have raised the white flag on delivering for our growth areas. I have areas in my electorate like Beveridge, where it takes over 45 minutes to get onto Lithgow Street to the Hume Highway. It is an island of housing estates that has no shopping centre or supermarket. It has got two childcare centres but not much else besides the golf course. In Kalkallo you are stuck for about half an hour to 40 minutes in your housing estate to get onto Donnybrook Road, which is a single-lane farm track that goes onto the Hume. You are spending another 20 minutes, at least, on Donnybrook Road to get to the Hume. The government need to take a good read of this Infrastructure Victoria report – they clearly have not – and pause their reckless Suburban Rail Loop.

**RMIT Trades Innovation Centre**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:21): (1474) My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide some information on what the new RMIT Trades Innovation Centre will mean for my community and the types of courses that this centre will offer. Recently I had the opportunity to join my colleagues the member for Mill Park Lily D'Ambrosio, the member for Bundoora Colin Brooks and the federal Minister for Skills and Training Andrew Giles at the official launch of the RMIT Trades Innovation Centre at the Bundoora campus. This exciting development marks a significant step forward in training and education for the future workforce in Victoria. This is state-of-the-art facility will provide students with the advanced skills and experience needed to tackle the critical skills shortages in our state, and it will support key initiatives like Victoria's Big Build and contribute to Australia's transition to renewable energy.

It is fantastic that this also represents a bold and forward-thinking vision for the future of vocational education and the industries that will define our economy for many years to come. At the heart of this centre is a focus on practical, hands-on training that mirrors real-world challenges. Onsite training at this centre will simulate the timeframes and multidisciplinary nature of actual construction projects, offering students the opportunity to hone both technical skills and essential non-technical skills like communication and collaboration. These soft skills are increasingly recognised as critical in modern workplaces, where effective teamwork and clear communication can make all the difference in achieving success. One of the most exciting aspects of this centre is the purpose-built training bays and cutting-edge equipment it offers to students. This allows them to engage with the latest industry technology and work in environments designed to replicate the demands of actual job sites. It is an incredible opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of their chosen trade, all while having access to some of the best resources available.

What is even more encouraging is that this facility aligns with the Allan Labor government's vision of tackling workforce shortages and driving future growth. We know that addressing skills gaps and training workers in high-demand fields like construction and renewable energy is critical to Victoria's future economic success and the construction of more homes and more opportunity. This centre not only is a place for students to learn but also plays an important role in helping us meet the needs of our industries as they continue to grow and evolve. Free TAFE and subsidised training have already had a transformative impact on our state, opening doors for Victorians to get the skills they need to get a job for life. This centre's opening represents opportunities for students to get a quality vocational education at low or no cost.

Given the commitment of the government to expanding access to quality vocational education, I am asking the minister to provide information on what this centre will mean for my community and what type of courses it will offer.

**V/Line services**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:24): (1475) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I demand is an explanation as to why the V/Line rail communication systems keep failing, leaving thousands of regional travellers stranded. This evening at 4 pm the V/Line train services to Geelong, Ballarat, Gippsland and Seymour were cancelled without notice due to a major equipment failure. Thousands of people were stranded and told to navigate the metro system to other stations, where a few coaches would be waiting. This system is used by elderly people, school groups, workers and regional people who rarely use public transport outside of trips on V/Line. How are they supposed to navigate this? How are they supposed to find their way home? This is not the first time this has happened either. There have been numerous reports of this happening in the last few weeks, some caused by incidents on the tracks like the grassfire near Wandong on Monday. This evening's event seems to have no explanation. Minister, I demand an explanation for my constituents as to why the V/Line communication systems keep failing.

**Transport infrastructure**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:25): (1476) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government. Minister, the people of Newport and Hobsons Bay are up in arms over your government's Level Crossing Removal Project, which would permanently close Champion Road and split their community. The reason this concerns me, however, is not the detail of the project, it is what it says about the Allan Labor government's attitude to local councils. As the *Age* reports, Hobsons Bay council staff were pressured to sign confidentiality agreements just to access basic project details. The council's infrastructure director refused to sign because the information did not warrant secrecy.

This follows a disturbing pattern of your government's Big Build projects burying the truth, with thousands of gag orders on the North East Link and now even charities silenced on the Suburban Rail Loop. Even local Labor state and federal members are questioning this project. The Premier claimed to be listening to the people following Labor's collapse in the Werribee by-election, so why the gag orders? Even Labor MPs Tim Watts and Melissa Horne are now begging you to rethink this flawed plan, but your government seems hell-bent on steamrolling ahead. Ms Horne is a cabinet minister here in Victoria, not a backbench MP, and yet even she is criticising the Level Crossing Removal Project's efforts to gag Hobson Bay council officers. She said:

Clear communication and transparency with the local community should be key to delivering this project and anything less is unacceptable ...

Minister, local councillors unanimously voted to cut meetings with the level crossing removal team because their input has been ignored and will now be interacting with them only in writing. Given the army of spin doctors, consultants and community relations managers the Level Crossing Removal Project employs, is it not disgraceful that they cannot manage their relationship with a single significant stakeholder, the council?

The North East Link Program's 7000 non-disclosure agreements include local governments like Banyule and Whitehorse. The SRL proposed bribing local councils, including Hume city and Casey city, with agreements barring criticism of the project in exchange for grants. Minister, you rightly require local governments to be transparent in their dealings. The action I seek is for you to request that each Victorian local council provides a list of all the non-disclosure agreements signed with the state government agencies and to then work with your cabinet colleagues to ensure this list is cut and local councils are once more treated as respected partners, not opponents, by this state government.

**Early childhood education and care**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:29): (1477) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children Lizzie Blandthorn. Minister, the Allan Labor government is investing \$14 billion in our Best Start, Best Life reforms, which are transforming early childhood education, saving families money and supporting parents and carers to return to work and study. The latest milestone in those reforms is the creation of more than 6500 kinder places, with 65 new or expanded services welcoming children this year. I recently had the pleasure of opening new kindergarten facilities at Dimboola and Nhill. The new Dimboola Primary School Kindergarten and the Nhill early childhood centre were both celebrated by their communities. These facilities and others across Victoria are helping to provide world-class kinder close to home for the more than 70,000 children starting three-year-old kindergarten this year, as well as the 80,000 children joining four-year-old kinder. Over 2500 new kinder places are being created and parents are being spared the double drop-off through 20 new kindergartens at government schools. Free kinder continues to save over 150,000 families up to \$2627 in fees per child at sessional kindergartens and up to \$2101 per child at long day care centres – that is a significant amount in a family budget. In Western Victoria pre-prep has arrived in the local government areas of Ararat, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians and Yarriambiack. Pre-prep extends four-year-old kindergarten programs up to 30 hours of play-based learning each week. My request to the minister is: can you please provide details of how many new kindergarten places have been created in my electorate of Western Victoria Region since 2022?

**Child sexual abuse**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:31): (1478) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for vicarious liability laws to be reformed as a matter of urgency in response to the recent High Court decision of *Bird v DP*. This decision held that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat could not be held vicariously liable for known historical child sexual abuse because Father Coffey was not an employee. For many survivors of historical child sexual abuse committed in the church or other non-employment settings like foster care and Scouts, this decision limits their ability to access justice.

I would like to share a handful of the many stories of victim-survivors who have attempted to access justice. These cases have been graciously shared with me by members of the Australian Lawyers Alliance, who represent victim-survivors of sexual abuse. In one case a schoolboy at a religious boarding school was physically and sexually abused by several of his teachers who were priests in the religious order that ran the school. In another, it was a youth volunteer at a railway organisation who was sexually abused by a train driver who was supposed to be overseeing his volunteering. There is an attendee at a church Sunday school who was sexually abused by a senior member of the church on one of their excursions. And there is a youth member of the guides association who was sexually abused by her guide leader at an event run by the organisation. Through no fault of their own, these victim-survivors have been denied equal and proper access to justice, simply because their perpetrator was technically not an employee.

When I put a question without notice to your predecessor on this issue late last year, I was encouraged by their response. They recognised the need for reform and advised that they had been tasked with bringing material back to the Standing Council of Attorneys-General in February this year. In the meantime I introduced the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025. While this bill is yet to be second read, I am currently consulting with stakeholders to ensure it will allow victim-survivors to access justice. Thank you to all of those who have reached out to offer their invaluable support. I ask: will the Attorney-General commit to reforming vicarious liability laws as a matter of urgency and consider supporting my bill when it is debated?

**Blackburn planning**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1479) The action I seek is from the Minister for Planning. The plan for activity centres threatens to destroy the character of one of Melbourne's greenest suburbs, replacing a thriving local shopping strip with high-rise towers – an excessive development that will permanently alter the area. The Blackburn community has made it abundantly clear they do not support this top-down rezoning. Yet under Labor's planning agenda local voices are being ignored and councils are being stripped of their ability to stand up for their residents. The Blackburn shopping strip is a vital hub for small businesses, families and long-term residents who rely on its unique village-like feel, and for decades this area has been a place where locals gather, shop and connect. It now risks being turned into another soulless, high-density precinct, with no regard for community wishes. Beyond the attack on local businesses, this plan ignores the very reason people choose to live in Blackburn: its natural beauty and open spaces. Blackburn is one of Melbourne's leafiest suburbs, home to a rich canopy of trees, established gardens and the cherished Blackburn Lake Sanctuary. The natural assets are irreplaceable. Labor's reckless push for blanket, high-density zoning will see our green streets replaced with concrete towers, stripping the suburb of its beauty and identity, and putting enormous pressure on already stretched infrastructure.

There has been no meaningful consultation on this proposal. Once again, this government has announced sweeping changes without listening to the people who will be most affected. The community deserves the right to shape the future of its own suburb, not to have planning decisions dictated from Spring Street. Furthermore, this plan does nothing to address the real barriers to housing supply. Developers are not struggling to get projects approved, they are struggling to make them financially viable under Victoria's crushing tax burden. If the government were serious about fixing

the housing crisis, it would address excessive land taxes, stamp duty and red tape, instead of bulldozing communities into accepting unwanted high-rise developments. The action I seek from the minister is simple: join me this Saturday at the Blackburn market to hear directly from business owners and local residents about how they feel about this proposed activity centre. Come and listen to the people who will be most affected by imposing a one-size-fits-all planning agenda on a community that simply does not want it.

**Retail worker penalty rates**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:36): (1480) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister Symes, and the action that I seek is that she provide an update on the government's submission into the Fair Work Commission regarding the award review in terms of the general retail industry award. We have seen a quite frankly outrageous attack by the Australian Retailers Association that has been backed in by several major retailers – an attack on working people's penalty rates. It is simply not the time during a cost-of-living crisis for these multinational retailers, these major retailers who have been experiencing strong profits, to be now coming after the pay packets of working Victorian families and young people.

In my previous career before coming to this place, I had the great privilege of representing retail workers in and across different parts of Melbourne. I know from conversations firsthand the sheer number of people for whom penalty rates are not just a nice add-on but a vital part of their weekly earnings and a vital part of their pay which means that they can make that mortgage payment, make that rental payment, make the electricity bill or take the kids out for the occasional treat as well. They are an essential part of our modern industrial relations landscape, and it is outrageous to see this attack come now, especially at a time when families in Victoria and right across the country are doing it tough.

We have seen a very strong response from both the ACTU and the union for retail workers, the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees Association, and I am wholeheartedly in favour of their responses and their submissions as well, as I am indeed proud that this government has also put its hand up and has openly declared that it will stand with working Victorian people and with Victorian retail workers, who too often do not have their voices heard in these discussions. I commend the minister for making that submission on behalf of the Allan Labor government, and the action that I seek is that she updates this house on that submission.

**Community safety**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:38): (1481) My adjournment is for the attention of the Minister for Police. The action I seek from the minister is the public release of all reported racially motivated crime incidents in the Northern Metro Region. It is with profound sorrow and outrage that I address the distressing, unprovoked and targeted attack on two Muslim women at the Epping shopping centre in my Northern Metro Region last fortnight. These women deserve to move around freely and occupy public spaces without the implication of abuse or intimidation. This brutal case of Islamophobia driven by racism and bigotry must be stamped out. Discrimination against Muslim women, sadly, is a phenomenon that has been around for far too long and does not seem to be dissipating. To address an issue, we must first recognise and define it. Without access to government data on these crimes, how can we fully grasp the scale of this problem? Public reporting increases transparency, improves safety and strengthens the effectiveness of our response. To create laws that reduce racism, we need a complete picture of the situation in Victoria. Racism is widely formally under-reported, and as a result, these crimes go undocumented and unnoticed by the majority, leaving individuals who experience racism without access to legal or emotional support.

The Victorian Greens have long championed a vision that places social justice, equity and human rights at its core. Our policies are built on the belief that a fair society must not only condemn hate crimes but also address the systemic issues that enable them and the structures that uphold them. We have advocated for investment in community-led anti-racism education, ensuring that schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods become safe havens for mutual understanding. It is so important now

more than ever that our laws protect women. This includes ensuring that law enforcement agencies are equipped to respond swiftly and effectively to incidents motivated by religious or racial bias. Providing resources and support to communities affected by such incidents is important, and this includes counselling services, community forums and platforms that amplify the voices of those who have experienced discrimination. The current social climate is creating challenges for many Victorians – the two women attacked in Epping will carry this traumatic event with them forever. The danger that we have is that women begin to program this as part of their reality. Minister, it is time for change, and we owe it to them and to all women and gender-diverse communities to take action.

### Planning policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:41): (1482) I want to raise an issue for the Minister for Planning. She has laid out 10 new pilot activity centres but also 50 nominated activity centre areas, some near stations and some not. These are incredibly dense proposals. They are huge proposals for increased numbers of dwellings in these areas. The activity centre proposals that I have seen, all of the ones that they have proposed, have massive numbers of new dwellings and consequently new people.

The services to support that need to be the proper education services, health services, dare I say sewerage and other key infrastructure requirements. One of those is open space. What I am terribly concerned about with these approaches is that the number of people pushed into these areas will see a significant diminution of the amount of open space per head. This is a well-measured point. Stonnington and Glen Eira have the lowest open-space-per-head ratios of any municipalities in Victoria, and now we are about to put much more into some of these areas. What I am seeking from the minister is an assurance that the ratio will not be altered. If you are going to put more people into an area, more density – the 50 activity centres, more people, more density – what are you going to do to make sure there is a commensurate, proportionate amount of open space? I want you to publish targets that lay out the amount of open space in each of these areas that you are going to produce. You are going to push the people in, you are going to strip away the community's planning rights, strip away the council's planning rights and put tens of thousands of new people into this area, but where is the equivalent of open space?

If you just put tens of thousands of new dwellings and people into an area and you expect them to recreate on the same open space – the parkland, the ovals, the tennis courts, all of those – you are going to see a difficulty with making sure that people have access to open space. This is about health, it is about quality of life and it is about livability. It is what we have come to expect in Victoria and in parts of Melbourne where the opportunity is there to go to an oval, to walk your dog in a parkland area or to go to a public recreation space, whether it be some other sporting facility – *(Time expired)*

### Windsor Community Children's Centre

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:44): (1483) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that she not rezone the land at 131–133 Union Street, Windsor, currently occupied by the Windsor Community Children's Centre. The land is owned by Swinburne University, which is seeking rezoning in order to be able to sell it. The Government Land Standing Advisory Committee held a hearing for the rezoning application last year, and it received more than 650 submissions, one of the largest responses in the state's history. Nearly all of those application submissions opposed the rezoning. The minister is considering a report that she received from that committee in October 2024 and has yet to make a determination on it. The Windsor Community Children's Centre has been the tenant at this site for the past 28 years. If it has security of tenure, the centre has the capacity to increase the number of childcare places currently available. I do note that the university initially sought unsuccessfully a public sector buyer for the land, but nevertheless it is important to put on the record that the reason that the university now owns the land is because it was gifted this Crown land – in other words, public land – which could well now be privatised if the university gets its way. There are solutions to this that the government could pursue. Stonnington council has written to the Minister for Children proposing a tripartite funding arrangement

between the council and the state and federal governments. Minister, please stop the rezoning of the land at 131–133 Union Street, Windsor. Do not allow more public land to be sold off under your watch.

**Religious discrimination**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:45): (1484) The mockery of Jesus Christ at Sydney's recent Mardi Gras highlighted the sickening double standard entrenched in today's culture. We saw an image of an Aboriginal stripper pretending to spear Jesus at a festival that receives millions of taxpayer funds and has the support and participation of the Prime Minister. This is deeply offensive not only for Christians but also for Indigenous people. But it is not the first time that Christianity has been vilified at a Mardi Gras. In fact it has become an annual sport. We routinely see men parading as sexualised nuns. Throughout the 1990s we saw the fake head of Christian MP Fred Nile paraded on a platter, reminiscent of the beheading of John the Baptist. LGBTIQA+ spokespeople routinely speak about the hurt and harm against their community, and I am asking you now to spare a thought for how men crossdressing as sexualised nuns to a sneering crowd would make those nuns feel – humiliated, denigrated, unsafe, vilified. How would public celebrating of the fantasised beheading of Fred Nile make him and his family feel? Would they feel safe? How on earth has this gone unchecked and unchallenged for over a decade?

Proponents of the Mardi Gras say that it is about celebration. If you have to routinely mock, ridicule and desecrate others to celebrate yourself, it is abuse. Groups that use language such as 'kindness', 'inclusion' and 'tolerance' should be held to the same standard that they are demanding. State and federal governments have laws against vilification and discrimination that are meant to protect people on the basis of race, religion and sexuality. Interestingly, during many of the recent speeches on the anti-vilification bill not once was offence towards Christianity mentioned, not because Christians are not facing hatred but because no-one knows about it. I know many Christians that have lost their job and their reputation and have been threatened or demonised through the media for holding basic Christian beliefs. I know this firsthand. I was vilified and lied about. Let us not forget that according to the media I was anti-gay, and as a result I was kicked out of my political party momentarily. I was punched in the head on the streets of Melbourne in the first week of sitting, and I was unable to live in my own home for months. The Mardi Gras claims to be about love, but what we saw last week was completely opposite to it. We cannot pretend that we are an equal and egalitarian society when groups are treated like this. In the interest of restoring respect and reassuring people of faith in this state, the action I seek is for the Premier to condemn the above actions of the Mardi Gras and ensure that Victorian taxpayer funds do not go towards groups or events promoting Christian vilification.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the problem with the action is that it is another jurisdiction. I understand that it was the Mardi Gras in Sydney, which the Premier has not got administration of. We will put it through. She will probably give the answer I have given you, but we will put it through and test it.

**Women's community sport**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:49): (1485) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action that I seek tonight is urgent. I call on the minister to order an independent audit of government women's sports grants to ensure that every dollar is actually funding women's sport. As part of this the minister must also report on how fair access policies meant to level the playing field for women's sport are being enforced in practice, not just in policy. This is not just a bureaucratic issue, it is a test of integrity and fairness for the future of women's sport in this state. In the town that I live in, the Kyneton women's football team have had no choice but to walk away from their club after enduring years of systemic sexism. Despite their success on the field, with two grand finals and a premiership, they have faced consistent disrespect. Their change rooms were disrespected, their training times were secondary to the men's team and they received abuse from club officials, Pride round signage was torn down, and the ultimate insult came when the club scheduled a fundraising event at the same time as their own grand final. The message to them was clear: they were invisible, they were not welcome and they did not matter.

This is systemic sexism in sport. When men's clubs control funding and facilities for women's teams, it is not just unfair, it is a failure of governance. This is not just about what is happening in Kyneton. Women's sports grants are being misused to prop up men's teams, with football clubs applying for grants intended for women's sport and funnelling that funding back into men's programs. This is fraud dressed up as equality, and this should be a moment of reckoning. What is happening with the Kyneton women's football team is not just about football, it is about what happens when women demand a fair go, no matter where they are. We tell women to speak up, and then we punish them when they do it. We tell them to stand their ground, and then we rip it out from underneath them. We tell them to break barriers, but we keep moving the finish line. This is a story that is as old as time.

I ask the minister to assure this chamber that every dollar of government funding for women's sport is going where it is supposed to and to guarantee that fair-access policies are being enforced so that women have the same access to local grounds as their male counterparts. This is not just about Kyneton, it is about every woman and every girl who steps onto a sporting field expecting fairness but receiving less. The fight for women's sport is not just about funding or about fairness, it is about basic respect, and I ask the minister to show us if she will stand for it.

### Energy policy

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:52): (1486) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek from the minister is to set down her ideologically driven opposition to Victoria's onshore conventional gas industry and assist in the relieving of the spiralling energy costs that so many Victorian families and elderly people are struggling to cope with. Once again we see power bills are going up, much to the dismay of individuals, families and the elderly. This government promised to reduce power bills – we have heard it multiple times – yet we are set to see an increase of 120 to 140 per cent by 2030, proof that their energy policies are continuing to fail Victorians. Infrastructure Victoria has made a prediction in its draft 30-year infrastructure strategy with Aurora, and this news will again rip the hearts and the minds out of people who are struggling to pay their bills.

Infrastructure Victoria's report is based on predictions on the closure of the Latrobe Valley's coal-fired power stations in my Eastern Victoria electorate. That region has powered this state for a century, and we are very proud that we have been part of that. It is terrible news for mums and dads and the elderly, who are struggling to make ends meet and who are struggling to decide whether they will be able to put two new tyres on the car or will be able to pay a power bill. It is also terrible for our state's business and industry sectors, who are fighting to remain viable. There is no fat to trim off in these business and industry sectors. Families are desperate for cost-of-living relief, but rather than the minister's 'down, down, down' we have proof that bills are going up, up, up. The average annual household bill in Victoria is set to top out at \$2600, all because this government has botched the energy transition. We are not against transition and we are not against renewables, but this government has been doing stunt after stunt, and we have seen it in the SEC – what a stunt. We have seen our power bills soar and we have seen reliability dive. Labor has no new plans for cost-of-living relief. Common sense informs us that gas can play that firming role. In peak demand time gas can play a hugely vital role. We do not want to see this state go off an energy cliff. Minister, I call on you to set down your opposition to gas, support conventional onshore gas and provide that reliability and stability to our system.

### Local government integrity

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:55): (1487) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. I call on the minister to review the use of Local Government Act 1989 section 224 powers and ensure the *Local Laws Manual* is updated to reflect limitations on these powers. Longstanding abuse of property rights by government officers has recently reached boiling point in Victoria. The Local Government Act 1989 contains provisions under section 224 which give authorised officers the power to enter any land or building in the municipal district at any reasonable time to carry out and enforce this or any other act or regulation or local law.

The *Local Law Manual* provides guidelines for authorised officers in employing these powers. This manual was published in 2014 and is now over a decade old. On the use of section 224 powers the manual describes them as extensive and admits these powers exceed the powers of many other enforcement agencies. The only words of guidance around limitations of use are:

Powers must be exercised with caution and within authority.

It describes that authority as being explicitly not an at-large appointment.

Section 72 of the Local Government Act requires local laws must not be inconsistent with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, including protections against unlawful seizure of property and protection against arbitrary interference with family homes. Despite these guidelines, my office is receiving reports from all over Victoria describing instances where authorised officers are abusing these powers. Private property rights are being trampled on by officers entering property and confiscating cars without any notice or warrant. Chicken enclosures are being torn apart and animals seized. Abuse and intimidation by authorised officers of constituents is also commonplace. Some residents have been on the receiving end of such vile statements that I could not repeat them in here without using unparliamentary language.

These powers have been on the books since the assent of the 1989 act and are long overdue for a review. They lack any specifics around their use or limitations, both in statute and other materials. This does not align with the principles of legality and has been discouraged by the High Court of Australia in the case of *Coco v. the Queen*, where Their Honours said on the matter of state trespass:

Statutory authority to engage in what otherwise would be tortious conduct must be clearly expressed in unmistakable and unambiguous language.

It is time for the government to start respecting property rights and rein these laws.

**Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:58): (1488) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning. The action that I seek is for the minister to commit to distributing growth area infrastructure contribution (GAIC) funds for the purpose of urgently upgrading Donnybrook Road. The Minister for Planning announced in December that applications were open for a new round of grants that would distribute another \$150 million from the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund for transport projects. This fund collects money from property developers and designated growth areas and uses that money to build the transport infrastructure that growing areas need, like roads, train stations, bus services, walking paths et cetera. At least that is what it is supposed to do, but often the money is used for the Labor government's pet projects while rapidly growing areas like Donnybrook go for years without having major roads upgraded.

Donnybrook Road is a single-lane rural track that connects new booming suburbs to the Hume Freeway. Massive amounts of traffic funnel along the road every morning and evening, trying to get onto or off the freeway. The congestion is so bad that vehicles exiting the Hume Freeway to get onto Donnybrook Road often back up all the way onto the freeway, causing a major risk of collision. Donnybrook Road is a perfect example of failed Labor planning policy that puts in new houses without regard for infrastructure and tries to catch up later, after traffic has already become chaotic.

New housing estates were built around the train station so that commuters could catch the train to the city instead of driving, but there is no footpath along the road and no bicycle lane, so it is impossible for residents of the new estates to safely walk or bike to the train station. Until recently there was also no bus going from the housing estates to the train station. Now a new bus route has been announced, but there are no bus service bays on Donnybrook Road, so the bus will block the road every time it stops, making traffic congestion even worse. The road is a complete and utter planning failure by the state Labor government, which is happy to collect growth area contributions from developers and very

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happy to collect taxes from property buyers but will not invest that money on the infrastructure necessary to make this area livable for its long-suffering residents.

For the City of Whittlesea, developers have contributed \$111 million, but only \$75 million has been committed to projects. Funds for the Wyndham, Casey and Mitchell shires are undercommitted by 11 per cent, 13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively, but funds for the City of Whittlesea are undercommitted by 32 per cent. That developer contribution money is sitting in the state government's bank account, no doubt being held back to prop up Labor's ailing bottom line. In the meantime Donnybrook Road desperately needs to be upgraded, but the Allan Labor government seems to have no plan to fund this crucial project. With the recent announcement of a new round of grants from the GAIC fund, the Victorian government must finally fix this mess.

### Melbourne Airport rail link

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (19:01): (1489) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to work with her federal counterpart, the federal minister for infrastructure and transport, to prioritise the development of Melbourne Airport rail ahead of Melbourne Airport's now federally approved third runway and to provide a starting date for the construction of this vitally important project. The time has come for the state government to ramp up its efforts and prioritise the construction of Melbourne Airport rail so that it is ready to go when the Melbourne Airport third runway is fully operational in 2031. It is foreseen that once the third runway is operational there will be an increase in the number of passengers and airport staff utilising the airport, which will no doubt put considerable pressure on the road network leading to the airport. As anyone who drives along this highway regularly can attest, it is regularly heavily congested, which is incredibly frustrating for motorists. Victorians have been waiting patiently for the Allan government to inform them about when they can expect the Melbourne Airport rail to commence. Once the third runway becomes operational there will be a significant influx in the number of domestic and international passengers visiting our cities, and without the Melbourne Airport rail to alleviate the traffic flow visitors arriving in Melbourne will see serious congestion, gridlock and poor planning.

I join with Brimbank City Council in my electorate and applaud them for their community movement campaign Rail Before Runway. Their advocacy has been strong and unwavering. I urge the minister in the other place to work with Brimbank City Council and the community to ensure that Melbourne's west, which I represent, is no longer short-changed in transport infrastructure initiatives and to help them and the region keep up with the rapid population growth. Melbourne Airport rail makes sense. It is a project that will deliver a real cost-effective public transport alternative for Melbourne and the wider Victorian community. Every major city in the world has an airport rail, but not in Melbourne. Let us get on and build the airport rail. Time is ticking.

### Responses

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:04): There were 17 adjournment matters to 11 separate ministers, and written responses will be requested in accordance with the standing orders.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:04 pm.**