



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 3 December 2025**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

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

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

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

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

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

**Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Wednesday 3 December 2025**

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

**The SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the former member for Shepparton Suzanna Sheed in the gallery this morning.

***Bills*****Electoral Amendment Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electoral Act 2002 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:33): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:33): The purpose of this bill is to amend the Electoral Act 2002 (a) to improve the operation of electoral processes, (b) in respect of supplementary elections and re-elections, (c) in relation to authorisation requirements through advertisements and other electoral material, (d) to enhance requirements for political party registration, (e) in relation to electoral funding and donations and nominated entities and (f) for other purposes.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025***Introduction*

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to provide for a new offence in relation to coercive control and for other purposes.

Never has the need to introduce this bill been greater than at this time. We are in the middle of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence for a reason. The crime statistics around women and family violence continue to go in the wrong direction.

In the last 12 months serious assault in family violence has gone up 23.35 per cent. That is enormous, that jump. Breach of family violence orders has gone up nearly 17 per cent. Threatening behaviour has gone up 9 per cent. These are the rolling 12 months to 30 June, but the previous arc to 31 March showed the same story. Every time the crime statistics are out, we know that this is a problem, and we need to act now. The bill that I am introducing is both a preventative tool and has that criminal element, because in other jurisdictions where this type of legislation has been introduced, they have noted a societal shift. In the UK it has been operational for 10 years, and they have seen a societal shift in understanding what coercive control means. In other states that has been the same.

The Premier also knows that we need to do more and act on family violence. I will quote from question time recently, on 11 September. The Premier said:

... the number one law and order issue in our state, which is of course violence against women in the home.

The Premier knows we need to do more in this space, and I urge the Premier to get on board at this time. On 30 October, only a couple of months ago she said:

Whether it is the work to break the cycle of family violence or keeping kids connected to school, that is exactly the work that we will do.

Well, what I am putting forward today is part of the work that needs to be done.

Coercive control is at the heart of just about every female homicide, and there is evidence linking to that. It is not just me saying it. There have been reports to say that well over 90 per cent of women who have been killed by an intimate partner or former intimate partner have been subject to coercive control. We have seen the horrendous case of Hannah Clarke and her family in Queensland, which led to changes in that jurisdiction.

Chris Minns introduced this and it became legislation in the middle of last year. Within one month they had made the first arrest in New South Wales. It started to hit the ground very quickly after that. Chris Minns said:

This legislation is about recognising the true severity of intimate partner homicide and ensuring our justice system reflects that and holds perpetrators to account.

He went on to say:

We know laws alone won't end domestic and family violence, but they do send a powerful signal about what we stand for as a community.

This is such an important issue, and the Labor government continue to talk about the importance, but they do not even want to listen now, and they are showing the utmost disrespect by the –

*Members interjecting.*

**Cindy McLEISH:** I can hear the joking from the other side – jokes made by the Minister for Police about the library being outside. We are trying to bring in an important piece of legislation here, criminalising coercive control. In the main, coercive control is about women – not always, but it is about women. In Queensland they moved very quickly following the Hannah Clarke incident to also make it a crime. We are lagging behind. It was bad enough that 12 months ago when we introduced the domestic violence disclosure scheme that the government voted against that, Clare's law. The government voted Clare's law down, a law which has had tens of thousands of women in the United Kingdom come forward and find out that they did have something to be worried about. In South Australia there is an absolute surge in women coming forward under their domestic violence disclosure scheme. We are not doing enough in this place, and I urge the government to get behind this bill and help us criminalise coercive control, because it is insidious – living on eggshells all the time, being fearful, intimidated, controlled by an intimate or former partner, being monitored and surveilled all the time. We need to do better.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (09:40): Coercive control is absolutely an insidious, abusive and manipulative act. We stand side by side with victim-survivors of family and domestic violence, and we always will. No other state has done more in this country to prevent family violence than the state of Victoria, to protect victims and to make sure that we have the systems in place to share information and to support the services that are needed to wrap around women and children who experience family violence. We have a bill before the Parliament right now that will work to strengthen our system, protecting victim-survivors for longer and holding perpetrators to account. But of course in this space the work is never done. Technology is changing every day, and it is a challenge. We know that there is always more to do but what is most important is that we have the voice of victim-survivors at the centre of the development of our policy and legislation.

We will not make coercive control a political issue. This is something that needs consultation and time. While those opposite have been quoting New South Wales, let me give you a bit of fact about New South Wales – they introduced this as a concept in 2020; it took them until 2024, four years, to actually enact it. What we have done is put coercive control in the definition of ‘family violence’ here in Victoria already. We will continue to try and do what we can to improve the laws in the future, but what we will not do is be rushed. We do not want unintended consequences. Misidentification is a real thing that we hear from stakeholders in the sector about. We want to ensure that future laws do not embed that misidentification.

We do not support the Liberal Party’s bill, because it is undercooked, it is underdone and it is unfit for purpose. I do not know who they have spoken to in the sector, because no-one has had the conversation. Certainly victims have not been consulted. We have a victims advisory council. They are pushing this issue very hard. We know that there needs to be an education setting that happens alongside legislation, and I look forward to continuing this work. Let us not forget that those opposite failed to get behind the Royal Commission into Family Violence findings, 227 findings that supported the family violence multi-agency risk assessment and management framework information system, MARAM, that we have in place today, that shares information that is extremely important in informing our services, informing our police officers, informing our hospitals, getting information from our schools to ensure that we are sharing the information that we know is needed to protect women and children’s lives from perpetrators.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:43): When we talk about politicising family violence – and I have been saying this since the moment I walked in here and before I got in here – this issue is the very start of where things need to change. It needs its own bill. Please do not patronise me and my colleagues by saying that we are the ones that politicise family violence. The level of disrespect and hypocrisy I saw in the last 10 minutes is baffling to me. Everyone sits there and says that they support victim-survivors, yet the Minister for Health does not have the respect to listen to the shadow minister who has put this bill up. Other members do not have the respect –

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM**: It happened just then, so please do not tell me it is not true. I really held out a lot of hope today. I even put make-up on because I thought I was not going to cry for the third time in three weeks. I actually thought I might be able to get a message across. But what has been illustrated in this chamber in the last 10 minutes has upset me. When we have a minister saying that it is a political stunt, that makes me want to throw up. That is disgusting behaviour. And I, along with other survivors, will feel absolutely disgusted at the behaviour of members of the Labor government. It is absolutely disgusting.

We have proven this year in this Parliament – in this house – that there are some things that are actually bigger than politics. There are certain issues that transcend politics and are an important element of humanity. This is one of those things. I honestly thought this week with this bill that those who talk about supporting victim-survivors might actually just want to do the right thing and do something about it: cross the floor and support us. Let us at least debate it. Even if you do not support criminalising coercive control, which I think speaks volumes in and of itself, at least let it be debated. Let this transcend politics. Do not tell us that we are politicising it and staging some sort of political stunt. This has been a passion project of mine before coming into this place, and I sincerely thank the member for Eildon for all of the work she has done on this – she has done an incredible amount of work.

Coercive control more often than not is where it starts, and it is more often than not how women are perpetrated against by men – this is where it begins. Give it its own bill, criminalise it, at least let us debate it. Stop the talking and take some action, I am begging you. This is bigger than me, it is bigger than other victims and it is bigger than those that have lost their lives to domestic and family violence. Come with us; just let us debate it. What have you got to lose? Some sort of standing within the factions or the parties? Do the right thing.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jade BENHAM:** Then prove it. Prove it and cross the floor. I also want to correct the minister at the table. Saying that the coalition did not support the royal commission is absolutely false and misleading to the house. It actually had bipartisan support. It is the 16 days of activism. During this time of the year, for this important bill to be put up and to become Liberal and Nationals policy heading into the next election, is a line in the sand. Take action, cross the floor and do the right thing instead of being so disrespectful to me.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** There you go. That speaks volumes. You are disgusting.

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:49):** I think everyone in this place knows that family violence is the single greatest law and order issue in our state. It impacts so many families. I remember as a candidate when I was knocking on people's doors, not knowing who I was going to be speaking to, people would ask me, 'Well, what do you do for work?' I would say, 'Well, I work in family violence. I work in the court system. I work on the reforms that came out of the royal commission implementing specialist family violence courts to make the court experience safer and more supportive for women and children.' For me that was a big reason why I wanted to run for Parliament in the first place. So many women who I said that to said, 'I have been a victim of family violence.' The power of disclosing that to me has stayed with me throughout my three years in this place.

I speak to women all the time in my community who have experienced family violence, as I know everyone in this place has. This is something that we are all passionate about. I know that for the member for Mildura this is something she feels incredibly passionate about and wants to create positive change in the space, as I know the member for Eildon does, and I commend them for that. That is remarkable to get up in this place and stand up and say, 'I've had this experience and I want to change things for other women.' I commend the member for Mildura for the bravery and courage she has shown time and time again in this place. We know that family violence is the single biggest issue in this state. And why do we know that? Because on this side of the house there are so many of us who are women, so many of us who have our own stories of family violence or of experiencing coercive control, or friends or family members who have experienced that.

In thinking about what I was going to say in my contribution today I was thinking about coercive control, and it is rather new language for us in Victoria. I thought back to my 20s and all the terrible boyfriends that you have who might pick up your phone and go through it or say, 'Oh, I really don't think you should be doing that.' At the time you think, 'Oh, well, they're a bit of a loser' – maybe. I am not sure if that is parliamentary language, Speaker. But now we have a different word for it, and that word is 'coercive control'. And that is what we absolutely must stamp out in our state. We must stamp it out, because it is insidious, as the minister said, it is abusive, it is manipulative, and it has no place in Victoria. It has no place in our state. It has no place in our families and in our communities, and we will always stand side by side with victim-survivors of domestic violence and family violence. I know that everyone in this chamber will stand side by side with victim-survivors, and there is no other state than Victoria that has done more to support people experiencing family violence and doing our very best to address it and to stamp out the root causes.

I commend the minister for the incredible work she has done over many, many, many years. There is no-one in this place that has done more than the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence when it comes to addressing family violence in Victoria. There is no other state in this country that has done more, and we will continue to do that important work.

We have already accepted, implemented and funded 227 recommendations that came from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. That is a decade of hard work from the minister at the table and all of her team and, quite frankly, everyone in this place, because it was a huge amount of effort. I know so many people have played a role in that.

We have a bill before the Parliament right now, because we know that when it comes to family violence, when it comes to coercive control, there is always more we can do in this state, and that is exactly what we are doing. I spoke on it recently. I know many of my colleagues did too. We spoke about what we are doing to strengthen our family violence systems in Victoria to reduce misidentification of the predominant aggressor, a huge issue in our family violence system, about how we can protect victim-survivors better and about how we can hold perpetrators to account.

Once again, I would like to remind the house of why we are all so passionate about family violence. It is because of the women. It is because of the women in this place. The majority of women on the government benches, the majority of women who have experienced family violence, who have friends and family members who have experienced family violence. We take this seriously. We back recommendations from royal commissions. We do our due diligence. We consult with people, and we will always do more for family violence in Victoria.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:54): I rise in support of the member for Eildon's attempt this morning to introduce a bill into this place which will criminalise coercive control. I feel incredibly humbled to follow my colleagues, the member for Eildon, who spoke so incredibly eloquently, and the member for Mildura, who has spoken not only today so bravely but so many times so bravely.

Today is an opportunity for this chamber to rise above politics and do the right thing – to do the right thing for Victoria, to do the right thing for Victorians – and to say that an attempt to do something should not wait. It must not wait, and this Parliament has the opportunity now to allow this bill into the chamber and onto the notice paper for further consideration. The chamber needs to understand this. What we will vote on shortly is not the substance of the bill but if the bill is to be allowed into this chamber for future debate, for future consideration, and acceptance that this bill deserves to be considered by this Parliament. We are not asking this chamber, we are not asking the government, to immediately make a decision on this bill; we are saying this issue is a priority. It must be considered by this place. Please allow us the opportunity to put this bill on the notice paper for future consideration, because, respectfully, saying other jurisdictions took four years to do something is just not good enough. We have an opportunity today to do something, to allow this bill into the chamber. Of course we will work with the government. I put out the offer, if the government allows this onto the notice paper, to work with the government, as I am sure the member for Eildon will, in the most collaborative way, acknowledging the government bench and working with the government on timing that may suit them and amendments that they may wish to consider.

Of course we will work with the government. We will take any opportunity the government offers to work on a bill that criminalises coercive control, because in almost every single case of an intimate partner murder coercive control preceded that violent murder. The question is not whether or not this Parliament should do something; this Parliament will do something. It must do something, and it is a matter of how long until it does. Today is an opportunity for this Parliament to do something: to allow this issue onto the notice paper, to accept the opposition's offer to work with it and understand that this Parliament should not be about politics, it should be about doing the right thing by Victorians. Accept the goodwill of the member for Eildon in bringing this bill forward.

I do not need to read into the chamber record the sharp and alarming rise in terms of crime statistics, because I feel very, very confident that the minister at the table and many members on the other side of the chamber not only know the statistics but I am sure they keep them up at night. I have absolute faith in the goodwill of many people in this chamber on these issues. Therefore I ask: why not now? Why not accept this bill that has been introduced into the chamber and allow it to be put onto the notice paper for future consideration? Why not now? How can anybody in good conscience not allow it to occur now? We heard earlier that it is important not to rush, and I understand that. That is why putting this bill on the notice paper is the only good thing to do. Accepting our offer to work together, once the bill is there, on any amendments that may be required to ensure that this is done as soon as possible is the only good thing for this bill at this time. I would say to the government: please consider this matter very seriously; please consider your good conscience and support the member for Eildon today.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (09:59): I rise to make some brief remarks around this debate and the bill that is being sought to be introduced by the opposition regarding coercive control. At the outset I also want to acknowledge the seriousness of the debate on coercive control and its devastating impacts on our communities right now and on our victim-survivors, who are mainly women and children. Many of them, as the member for Lara has indicated, are silent victims of family violence. I do acknowledge that this is an issue that this Parliament – and this chamber – has a responsibility to treat with the seriousness and the gravity that it deserves, just as we did, and I did, last sitting week when we spoke on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025 amendments.

I spoke in this place around coercive control, stalking behaviour and the horrific statistics that we are seeing now, where teenage boys are the most likely perpetrators of child sexual abuse in this country – absolutely devastating. I spoke about the research and the work that Jesuit Social Services had done around the Adolescent Man Box survey, where they interviewed teenagers, 14- to 18-year-olds, to talk about coercive control behaviours and eventually around stalking behaviours, and about our society, where we send messages to boys that they need to be strong, this version of what a man should be. When men and boys have these narrow versions of men having to be strong and in control, what that leads to can be coercive control and stalking behaviours. In this place, just last sitting week, we had reforms around this to strengthen and improve our response to the ongoing changes that we see in our society, including the social media space.

We know that we have more to do, and the minister has said this, and we have said this in this place a lot of the time around introducing reforms as our society changes. But we also do not want to have laws that have unintended consequences, and we need to make sure we do this thoroughly. We have in this place done an incredible amount of work in this space since the royal commission, and we have done that with due diligence, making sure that we were consulting the right stakeholders and, importantly, victim-survivors. I want to just acknowledge and take a moment to talk about those people who have spoken up about their lived experience. I had the privilege – it might have been two years ago now – to meet Hannah Clarke's parents Sue and Lloyd Clarke, who devastatingly lost their grandchildren and their child, their daughter, in horrific circumstances. I heard them speak, and I heard them advocate for change, and they have been tireless in supporting victims of family violence but also victims who see the red flags at the very start before the violence occurs, and that is the coercive control. I really want to thank them for their advocacy. After they spoke, I went up to them and thanked them for their courage to speak, but I also asked them if there was something that they wished would change, and they said 'standalone coercive control laws'. It is something that this government is working on, and we have said that we will introduce those standalone laws. What must be central is those victim-survivors' voices, but we also have the responsibility to get the legalities right. We must do that to ensure that it works with the system that we have here in Victoria already. We have a world-leading family violence response system, including our multi-agency risk assessment and management framework, our family violence information-sharing scheme and the reforms that we have put around coercive control, but we must acknowledge and we have acknowledged that we will do more in this space. So while I understand and thank sincerely the intent behind this bill, the government will not be supporting it, because we need to do that due diligence around this issue. We will not be supporting this bill.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (31):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (50):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated**

***Business of the house***

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

**Notices given.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:15):** General business, orders of the day 9 and 10, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

***Documents***

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

Auditor-General:

Managing the Transition to Renewable Energy – Ordered to be published

Service Delivery Performance 2025 – Ordered to be published

Ombudsman – Investigation report ‘We just want to finish our home’: Management of domestic building insurance claims by VMIA – Ordered to be published

Respect Victoria – Maintain the momentum: Three-yearly Report to Parliament on the progress of prevention 2022–24

Statutory Rules 126, 127 and 128 under the *Supreme Court Act 1986*

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:*

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 123, 126, 127, 128

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – 2026* Greenhouse Gas Reduction Rates.

***Bills***

**Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025**

**Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025**

***Council's agreement***

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:16):** The Speaker has received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

**Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (10:16): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.**

*Members statements***Cyclone Ditwah**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (10:17): I rise to make some comments around the devastating floods and mudslides that are taking place in Sri Lanka at present, where the death toll has exceeded 300 people and the country is grappling with one of its worst weather disasters in years. There are still hundreds of people missing, 20,000 homes have been destroyed and over 100,000 people have been sent to state-run temporary shelters. Officials say that around a third of the country is without electricity and running water, and a state of emergency has been announced following Cyclone Ditwah. President Anura Dissanayake has said that it is one of the country's most challenging natural disasters, if not ever, and that it was so severe that estimates for the reconstruction are staggering. Victoria's Sri Lankan community is a very strong and powerful one, and I want to send my best wishes to them at a very, very difficult time for many people in that community who have family who are suffering from the effects of what is occurring back home in Sri Lanka where their families currently are.

**Doncaster Road–Council Street, Doncaster**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (10:18): I do not have an adjournment this week, so I would like to just raise an issue, if I can, in a members statement in relation to the signal audio at the VicRoads Doncaster Road and Council Street intersection. Currently it is failing, and VicRoads has been contacted by a number of residents to fix it. There is the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister – through you, Deputy Speaker – this intersection is very busy. It is seven lanes of road over Doncaster Road and it is four lanes over Council Street. The intersection is not working properly. There are many kids at Doncaster Primary who use the crossing. It is not working, and I just hope VicRoads will fix it.

**Yan Yean electorate projects**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (10:18): 24 November was a massive day for my community, proving that we do what we say we are going to do. On 24 November, Mernda Community Hospital opened to bring care closer to home for my community. On that same day, major works commenced on the Yan Yean Road stage 2 upgrade. So it was a great day for my community, and it shows that we are delivering what we say we are going to deliver and that we can be trusted that when we say we are going to do something we get it done. And those who also get it done are Dan, Pam and Gaweshi in my office, along with Pooja and Ruby. I want to thank them, along with Nella and Margaret, fantastic volunteers who mean that we can better serve the community by having all hands on deck. I know they show great care to constituents when they contact my office, and I definitely could not do it without them.

**Emergency services and essential workers**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (10:20): As we head into this Christmas period, I give all my very best wishes to all frontline workers in my community. CFA, SES – we are all preparing for a big season with fires, and I know that our community is well protected by CFA, SES and the police. I thank them and all retail workers over summer.

**Ovens Valley electorate road safety**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:20): Every Victorian who drives in the regions knows that the state of our roads in Victoria is absolutely appalling. In fact they are downright dangerous. If we



were to drive a car that was unroadworthy to the same extent as our roads, we would be fined and removed from the road, yet the Allan Labor government continues to take money out of the roads budget and pour it down rail tunnels at the expense of our road network. The Premier has absolutely no understanding of fairness, even though this is her buzzword this week. Let us look at the definition of 'fairness': 'impartial and just, or behaviour without favouritism or discrimination'. Well, Premier, you have failed the fairness test. Let us see what next week's buzzword might be. It will not be 'woke and broke', because the truth never gets a run under the Labor government here in Victoria.

I was speaking with a resident from Porepunkah last night. He told me there has been a name change in the Great Alpine Road; he said it is now called the not-so-great alpine road. A section near the berry farm near Porepunkah the size of an Olympic swimming pool has been repatched too many times to count. Be fair, Premier, and fix it properly. The Snow Road through Milawa is in similar disrepair, as is the Murray Valley Highway and the Benalla-Tocumwal Road south of Katamatite. Stop discriminating, Premier. Stop showing favouritism. Be fair, or your legacy will be the regional road toll rather than a railway station.

#### **Williamstown electorate events**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:21): Last weekend was action packed, starting with an on-country event hosted by the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria. Allies of the new message tree gathered to share stories of the history of the Yalukit Willam clan of the Bunurong nation, traditional custodians of the area that the Williamstown electorate is part of. I was so honoured to meet William Briggs. He is a direct descendant of Louisa Briggs, who shared with us his magical stories of Koort Boork Boork, the meeting place of the Bunurong people. Thank you to Rosa McKenna and Reconciliation Victoria and all involved in making the day so very meaningful.

From there it was off to a baseball match with the Japanese uni students, hosted by the mighty Newport Rams Baseball Club. Then I went on to the final night of the Substation art sale. Well done to Nuala and the board for hosting such a special event. I am truly blessed with two amazing lifesaving clubs in the electorate. Sunday saw Bronny and Veronica, organisers of the Williamstown Starfish Nippers, celebrating International Day of People with Disability. It was a wonderful event, making sure that people of all abilities have the chance to learn and experience the water. To round it off, it was Dog Day in Dog Town, organised by the Point Gellibrand Rotary Club. Despite the rain, the community came out in droves, dressing up their magnificent dogs to show them off to the community.

As the year draws to a close, I would like to wish everyone across the Williamstown electorate a safe and happy holiday season.

#### **Meningococcal B vaccination**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (10:23): On 24 September 2025 a young man by the name of Levi tragically lost his life in the Berwick electorate. Levi unfortunately got meningococcal B. That day he started to suffer symptoms at work – he was out working with his uncle – and the symptoms gradually got worse that evening. When at home that night unfortunately the symptoms took over very, very quickly, and at 1 am he was taken to hospital and tragically lost his life just 7 hours later. Obviously as you would understand, the family were absolutely devastated. The family are joining me today in Parliament – we will be going out and speaking to them shortly – because Levi had had the meningococcal vaccination for ACWY, but it does not include meningococcal B. Part of the issue with this is the cost – it is over \$100 per vaccination to get it separately – but it is the education about it as well, because many people who go and get the meningococcal vaccination for ACWY do not get informed about the B vaccination, which is becoming an issue.

I do note Dandenong council is starting to implement this now, and the Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmanian and South Australian governments. It is something I think that could make a big difference, particularly at the moment when you have got things like schoolies on and young men, who are most

susceptible to this, going to be out in the community and, let us be honest, having a good time. This is a time that meningococcal will be passed around, and I hope we can stand together and get meningococcal B onto the list here in Victoria.

### **Gavan O'Donnell**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (10:24): I want to pay tribute to an extraordinary education leader in our community Gavan O'Donnell, who has announced his retirement in our community. Gavan has served Catholic education for some 44 years, 35 years as a principal and, as many of my constituents know, as the principal of St Joseph's Primary School for 20 years. A generation has seen his education and leadership and the transformation of that school community, and anyone that has been anywhere near Chelsea or that parish, the St Joseph's parish area, admires his work and leadership.

I have had the opportunity to work with Gavan for a decade now and to see the transformation that has happened – the buildings, the upgrades to the halls, the Building the Education Revolution building upgrades. It is just some of that, but it is the personal stories of those students who have grown into the people who have lived and loved in our community over the years that really touch you. And then to hear a former student and then the school captain of St Bede's College Maurice Kerbage give his reflections on the day was amazing. The outpouring of affection for an education leader who has transformed the lives of so many is something that we owe him and it is so fitting. His dedication was recognised recently with the School Innovation Improvement Award from the Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals.

To Gavan O'Donnell, thank you for everything you have done on behalf of our community. You are a wonderful person, a caring soul. We will greatly miss you. You will not be too far away. Thank you for your leadership.

### **Community safety**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (10:26): I have raised a few times in this place and spoken about the Gordon family and the outcomes with Dr Ash Gordon. Yesterday the sentence was handed down for the murder of Dr Ash Gordon. As Glenn and Catherine Gordon said in the paper, in the media and also privately, their family gets a life sentence. Our hearts go out to them, and we stand beside them as they move forward. Nat Gordon, who has been the face and the voice behind everything that has happened with her beloved brother Dr Ash, said that there is more still to be done so no other family has to go through what they went through. Dr Ash, as we know, was stabbed six times on a street in Melbourne and lost his life. Nat does not want that to happen to any other person or any other family. We have more work to do here in the chamber as MPs to make sure that we protect people and keep them safe. My commitment to Nat and the family is that I will constantly be pushing to make sure these laws do come through and we are protecting all Victorians into the future.

### **Gallipoli Youth Cup**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (10:27): The Gallipoli cup was undertaken last week in Traralgon, so a big shout-out to Susie and Woofa Charlton. The Gallipoli cup has schools from all around Australia coming for a team event, and it was a very successful week. Well done to the club.

### **Kororoit community barbecue**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (10:27): It is that time of year again, folks. The annual Kororoit community barbecue will be held on Sunday 14 December at the wonderful Aintree SES. Anyone who lives, works or volunteers in the area is welcome. There will be face painting, balloon art, fairy floss, arts and crafts, an entire kids corner which is sure to thrill and a barbecue cooked by our wonderful SES volunteers and our local Caroline Springs Scouts. This year the Copperfield College band will be performing for us. The highlight of the day will likely be the announcement of the 2025 Kororoit local legend. I should say nominations are still open, so if you are yet to nominate

a local legend, make sure you get onto it as soon as possible. There will be displays from some of the local emergency services, such as the CFA and local police. This community barbecue is supported by a number of local businesses and organisations. There will be special appearances on the day and fun for young and old. Everything is free, and anyone who works, lives, plays or volunteers in Kororoit is encouraged to come – Sunday 14 December, Aintree SES, 1:30 to 3:30 pm. Hope to see you there.

#### **Hampton United Cricket Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:28): Hampton United Cricket Club recently celebrated their incredible 100-year birthday. Their success is shown through their club's motto 'Strength through loyalty'. The club, which began as the Hampton Methodist Cricket Club, met on 10 September 1926 to form a cricket team. Initially, the club was affiliated with the Brighton–Sandringham Cricket Association before moving to the City of Moorabbin Cricket Association, now known as the South East Cricket Association. The club has had a remarkable set of achievements over the century, having won 31 premierships. They are the first club in the association to have won three senior premierships in one season – and have done it three times across three seasons. Congratulations to president David Pearce and the club on the remarkable achievement. It is Hammer time.

#### **Hampton Children's Playhouse**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:29): Hampton Children's Playhouse is a not-for-profit community-run play space. It is a much-loved feature of our Hampton community. As every member and their family know, the playhouse is where childhood memories are made. We recently celebrated our playhouse's 40-year anniversary. Congratulations to president Jessica Gelsumini and the whole team on both the celebration and the wonderful work you do in supporting the Playhouse.

#### **Road maintenance**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:30): Our roads are a disgrace because this state Labor government has run out of money. As Tony recently said to me about the gaping potholes near the New Street and Dendy Street roundabout in Brighton, there are potentially serious risks that can affect the driving of our motor vehicles, nearby pedestrians, including young children, at the adjacent St Joan of Arc primary school and even the Sandringham train line. Labor, do your job and fix the roads.

#### **Parliamentary internship program**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:30): Congratulations to Charlie Williams and Thomas Heap for graduating from the Victorian parliamentary internship program, and thank you to the Parliament for running this program. Charlie and Thomas dedicated their efforts to providing high-quality reports into making our community a better place. Charlie's report, *Public Schools as Public Assets*, spoke to how we can better use schools for the public benefit. It highlighted programs like Our Place – congrats to that program; it is terrific that it exists – and showed the possibilities of what can be done. Charlie, I can let you know that this government has announced a trial across 41 schools in Melbourne's west and Geelong to make sure that we open them up to the community. Thank you for your report. Thomas's report, titled *Planning for Faith and Burial Infrastructure in Melbourne's West*, spoke to the comparisons of our community with others around the nation. As Thomas wrote in his report:

Inclusive planning not only accommodates diverse practices but also strengthens civic belonging.

Thank you both for your contributions to making Victoria better.

#### **Point Cook electorate office work experience students**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:31): Similarly, I had Aariyan and Rishit, two year 10 students, in my office for work experience. Over the week they got to learn the fun and the mundane parts of working in an electorate office. Thank you for assisting me in the Parliament to bring together two wonderful reports, one on one vote, one value in the Victorian electoral system – I will have more

to say on that – and one on cultural and language diversity in Point Cook. They both did projects that are valuable and provided valuable data that will assist me in the future. I wish them all the best for next year. And thank you to all the members of parliamentary services for everything they do.

***Rowville–Lysterfield Community News***

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (10:32): This statement congratulates the *Rowville–Lysterfield Community News* for another great year of keeping our local community well informed about their area. On Thursday 13 November I joined with local community members in attending the Rowville–Lysterfield Community News AGM and awards night held at the Anglican church in Rowville. The AGM and awards night is a popular event on the local community calendar. It celebrates the ongoing success of our community paper and particularly thanks the more than 200 volunteers who assist to keep the paper alive every month. The Rowville–Lysterfield community is blessed to have such a wonderful local community newspaper ensuring they are kept up to date with local news, informed of important upcoming local community events and generally made more aware of information that is relevant to their community.

My association with the community newspaper goes back many years, and it has been an excellent way in which to keep my local community informed of important news relating to key issues that are important to them, including local roads and other infrastructure projects, local schools and relevant state government services. My congratulations go to the president Rosemary Hermans and her wonderful team for their effort during 2025, ensuring the *Rowville–Lysterfield Community News* continues to thrive as an integral part of the Rowville–Lysterfield community. May its success continue long into the future.

***VicRoads, Maryborough***

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (10:33): I rise to give the firm commitment that VicRoads is staying in Maryborough with full services. The agreement negotiated between VicRoads and the Central Goldfields shire is for five years, with options for extension beyond this. It has come to my attention that the Liberals in the upper house have been misleading the Maryborough community about the future of our VicRoads agency in town. Joe McCracken stated on record that I told residents, when asked how long the VicRoads service agreement runs for, ‘How long is a piece of string?’ This is a blatant lie. I never said that, and Joe should be ashamed of himself for lying to my community in this way. This is coming from a guy who foreshadowed the coalition will cut government services if they win the next election.

Those opposite only find Maryborough on a map when an election is near or when they want to close our train line, cut funding to our hospital or close our schools. I am proud to represent Maryborough in this Parliament, and I have fought every single day for the last three years to deliver for Maryborough families. As the local MP I am proud to have delivered for our community, including a redeveloped Maryborough Hospital, more funding for our schools, major sports upgrades and more train services, and I will always fight to protect essential services for regional Victoria.

***Kirk Mercuri***

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:34): Kirk Mercuri is Mr Everywhere in Kinglake, and he is known by so many who see him around the traps on his daily bike ride, volunteering at the library or op shop, or helping at the football club or basketball court. That is why it was no surprise that Ellimatta in Kinglake was packed on Sunday for his book launch. The crowd, with swollen hearts and tears welling, delighted in the launch of Kirk’s book *Step by Step: Living with Autism*. Arriving in style and walking the red carpet, Kirk had a ball as he was greeted by family and friends, then interviewed by his editor the patient and talented Kinglake local Kath Stewart. I do not know how he did it, but he got Nathan Buckley to do the foreword for his book.

**Di Walker**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:35): After 25 years of school newsletters, administration coordinator Di Walker is retiring from Millwarra Primary School. Being part of the furniture, Di will be greatly missed by the school community. Wishing Di and husband Rob all the best on their retirement.

**Rotary interschool speech competition**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:35): Congratulations to Dixi from Woori Yallock Primary School. Dixi is the grand final winner of the Rotary interschool speech competition. Tackling the tough topic of gambling addiction and how it impacts family members, Dixi spoke confidently and clearly and showed real research and knowledge on the topic. Speaking for 3 minutes – without notes, may I add – is no easy feat, but Dixi mastered it.

**Buxton Primary School**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:36): Buxton Primary School recently celebrated 150 years. It is not an easy task keeping a small school going for that length of time, and there have been ups and downs, but the celebration of 150 years was a definite up. Congratulations to principal Sarah Irving and students.

**Cheddar Road–Macartney Street, Reservoir, construction site**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:36): I would like to raise an issue that is well known to anyone who drives up Cheddar Road in Reservoir, and that is the unfinished building on the corner of Macartney Street. The story there is that there were meant to be three townhouses built there back in 2010. Two of them were built and sold, but the third one was stopped midway through construction because of safety concerns around the frame. Unfortunately the builder was allowed to sell that half-finished frame at a great discount to another individual. Now, 15 years later, that unfinished frame remains there and no work has been done. One key item on our wish list for 2026 is that Darebin council, with their new local laws powers, will work with that owner to take down that frame. It is corroded and unsafe to use as a frame, and I am sure it will need to come down regardless of whatever legitimate plans that person may have for their site's future.

**Preston electorate infrastructure**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:37): If I can just touch briefly on some other wish list items for 2026, we are hoping to see lighting for courts 5 and 6 installed at Lakeview Tennis Club ahead of their 2026 season. We are hoping to see remediation works begin at Clements Reserve, given it has now been five years since lead and asbestos were discovered near the playground there. We are hoping to see more medium-density homes built and more trees planted in central Preston as part of our activity centre plans. We are hoping to see some progress made on extending the Merri Creek Trail to Edwardes Lake. Finally, we are hoping to see some speed limit changes at Tyler Street and Plenty Road. We hope everyone has a wonderful break.

**Government performance**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (10:37): In one year Victorians face a profound choice about the future of our state and the direction it is going. After 11 years of Labor, the cost of living is getting harder, pride in Victoria has been lost and too many people feel we are heading in the wrong direction. Debt keeps climbing, interest costs keep going up and, because Labor cannot get a handle on the books, they keep slugging Victorians with more and more taxes to try and pay it off, with 63 new or increased taxes since they came to government – with more to be introduced. This means less money for services that matter. At the same time crime is rising, hospital waiting lists are too long and the dream of a home is slipping away for our next generations. I am proud to take on the role of Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability, because housing is the foundation of security and opportunity, and it is the great Australian dream. We believe in that great Australian dream for young Victorians, for new migrants and for all Victorians here in our state. Our Liberal and Nationals team

has clear priorities for Victoria's future: strengthen the economy, ease cost-of-living pressures, end the crime crisis and keep families safe, deliver a world-class health system and give every Victorian the best opportunity to own their own home. On housing we are getting practical. We are going to cut red tape – we have got more to announce – and we have got the million dollars that we are lifting for first home buyers.

### **Community Care Centre Ballarat**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (10:39): Last week in Eureka I had the great honour of representing Minister Spence at the first anniversary celebration of the Community Care Centre Ballarat, and what a remarkable milestone that was. This project is the very best of Ballarat: people seeing a need in their community and coming together to meet it with compassion, creativity and hard work. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary vision and drive of Gary Morgan, whose leadership brought this project to life, and of course Shona, the warehouse manager, who keeps the whole operation running day in, day out with dedication and great heart. All six Ballarat Rotary clubs have thrown their full support behind this project, showing once again the profound impact that Rotary has had in our region for over a hundred years. They worked alongside the City of Ballarat, the Ballarat Foundation and Community Bank Buninyong, and all of those people's support was absolutely essential. But of course none of this happens without volunteers, with more than 2600 hours of service in the first year. Their generosity has helped more than 65 families.

### **E-cigarettes**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (10:41): My contribution today has been written by Gloria Baraka, an incredible young student who recently completed work experience in my office. Gloria wanted me to talk about the Barwon South West vaping prevention coalition. This project is part of the Vape-Free Victoria initiative and has been successfully youth led. The initiative received a \$200,000 VicHealth vaping prevention grant, which is being used to bring together young people, schools, libraries and community groups to help reduce the harms of vaping. In 2025 CatholicCare Victoria, along with VicHealth, have devoted their time and resources to running after-school programs with both Northern Bay College and North Geelong Secondary College students. The after-school programs were action groups composed of young leaders and students aiming to cultivate their existing skills and expand their insights on current issues, such as the health risks associated with vaping. Through these projects students were able to plan effective vape prevention ideas and implement them in their school's curriculum – for example, learning about vape prevention in health and human development while also aiming to impact the wider community. Programs like this empower our youth, ensuring they have a vital role in bettering our future. Advocacy is one crucial aspect of change, and these groups of young people have not only dedicated their time to this project but also poured their hearts into its development. With the help of school nurses and CatholicCare staff, students were able to create two animated videos, now available to view online at the City of Greater Geelong website. Let us continue to support the students that brighten our future one project at a time. And thank you to Gloria.

### **Laverton electorate achievements**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:42): As 2025 comes to a close let us look back at the year that has been. We started this year opening Muyan early learning centre at Sunshine Primary School, and we have got two more coming to Ardeer South and Glengala primary schools next year. Bemini Secondary also secured \$37 million in the budget for stage 2, which I cannot wait to see start in the coming months.

On health, the new Footscray Hospital is nearly complete and will open in a couple of months; works continue on Werribee Mercy Hospital's expanded ED, set to open next year; and major construction has begun on Melton hospital.

On community sport, there is a new scoreboard up at Sunshine Heights Cricket Club, with another one coming for Western Suburbs Soccer Club nearby.

On transport, there is even more good news: Sunshine superhub's funding has been secured, and it will start construction next year, with Albion station close behind. This Sunday, folks in Trug and Laverton will also be able to enjoy their brand new bus route, the 154, to take them between Tarneit and Laverton stations. And of course how could I forget the Metro Tunnel? At last it is finished and it is open, and folks across Victoria can now benefit from the five brand new stations and frequent services to the city, including my community in Sunshine on the Sunbury line. It will soon be followed by the opening of the West Gate Tunnel in just a couple of weeks, giving folks in Melbourne's west a second crossing over the Yarra to drive around and on at long last.

It is important to reflect on these things because they do not just happen, they happen because governments like ours fund the things that matter. I would like to wish everyone a very merry Christmas.

### **Father Denis O'Bryan**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:44): I would like to say how honoured I was to participate in and be at a special mass to recognise the contribution of Father Denis O'Bryan, our beloved parish priest at St Thomas the Apostle Parish in Clyde North. Across the Sale diocese Father Denis has been serving the community, most recently in Cranbourne and then forming the new parish at Cranbourne East and Clyde North. Father Denis has provided something additional in the context of people who have travelled from all over the world to make Cranbourne East and Clyde North home. In so many ways that role of pastoral carer, and also a theological role for many, has been more important because people have travelled from overseas, from interstate and from other suburbs. So I would like to wish Father Denis all the best on his next placement. He will be greatly missed. It was such a wonderful celebration, and we had Bishop Greg from the Sale diocese and Father Jithin there also as part of the celebrations. All the best to Father Denis O'Bryan on what comes next.

### **Cyclone Ditwah**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:45): I do want to acknowledge the devastating effect of Cyclone Ditwah on the Sri Lankan community and people in Sri Lanka. People know that this is a strong community, but we are all devastated by the terrible toll that this cyclone is wreaking on the community.

### **Bellarine electorate achievements**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:45): As we come close to the end of the year I would like to take a moment to thank the people of the Bellarine. Their willingness to engage with me on issues that matter the most, from local infrastructure to community safety, education, transport and health, is what drives my work every day. I think the Bellarine know that I am someone who likes to get things done, and I am solution focused and work hard behind the scenes, listening, advocating and delivering on those services and infrastructure that our community deserves, and this year we have made some incredible progress. We have delivered upgrades to local schools, improved roads on the Bellarine Highway, pedestrian safety in Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads roundabouts, and we have backed our health service, including one of the biggest investments we have seen in our Geelong region with the women's and children's hospital now under construction. We continue to invest in projects to strengthen our local towns. We have started the North Bellarine indoor aquatic centre, and we are boosting our tourism, our small businesses and protecting our unique environment. These are not headline moments; they are meaningful improvements that make everyday life on the Bellarine better for all our communities.

I want to thank local organisations and volunteers, first responders, teachers, nurses, small businesses, clubs and individuals who give so much of themselves to making the Bellarine such a strong and caring place to live. I also want to take a quick moment to thank my electorate office staff, who do an incredible job of assisting constituents with such care and compassion. They are very much valued, and I could not do the job without them. I want to wish everyone a merry Christmas and safe summer on the Bellarine.

**Gordon TAFE**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:47): The Gordon TAFE in Geelong is doing some incredible work that has been supported by the Allan Labor government, with things like the new disability school of excellence and, amazingly, an Indigenous culinary school for all of those students out there that want to focus on Indigenous methods of cooking, seasonal calendars, all of that work –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before we move on, as members will know I am hesitant to break into members statements with matters of order. However, the member for Ripon made an imputation on a member of the Council, and I wish to reiterate to –

**Lauren Kathage** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Yan Yean is not in her place and should not be heard. I remind the house of Speaker Maddigan's ruling from 6 September 2005 that:

An accusation that a member has lied, or is lying, is an imputation of improper motive, and a contravention of the standing orders.

I counsel all members to not impugn other members of this house or the other place.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to the comment which you have just made, may I suggest that an action be considered to counsel that member, perhaps a referral to the Speaker, who can then meet with that member and have that conversation directly with her. I understand that she is not in the chamber at the minute, and it may assist the member that you have just remarked upon for that to be conveyed directly to them as a point of fairness to them also.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, there was no point of order. The member for Sandringham should know that, if he has a matter that he wishes to raise with the Speaker, he should do so outside the chamber. So I ask that you rule his point of order out of order, and you perhaps might consider counselling him on the appropriate way to raise matters with the Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the point of order, I do agree with the Leader of the House: it is not a point of order. You are well within your rights, member for Sandringham, to see the Speaker in her office about the matter, and I encourage you to do so if that is what you wish.

***Statements on parliamentary committee reports*****Public Accounts and Estimates Committee*****Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates***

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:49): I could not wait to stand here in this place, because I am going to talk about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, which I had the privilege of tabling in Parliament not too long ago. I know this is everyone's favourite report, that they read page by page, of the recommendations and the findings and love talking about here in this place. But it is a pleasure to talk about it from the point of view of chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and, as I always like to do and will do at the end of the speech, I will give a range of thankys, because a tremendous amount of work goes into preparing this committee report before it gets tabled here in Parliament.

This is the fourth estimates report that I have tabled in Parliament, and the third that I have presided over as chair. As we all know, May is our favourite month because the government gets to hand down the state budget. In May this year the 2025–26 state budget was handed down, which made good on our government's plan to return to surplus by reaching stage 3 of the plan, which was to deliver an operating surplus. So that was really good to see. It did so whilst also delivering the funding and the support that Victorians really do rightly deserve and expect. I know that my electorate in Laverton will greatly benefit from many of the budget initiatives this year, including the \$37 million upgrade for Bemin Secondary College. Every time I read that, I think 'Oh, my God, that is so much money –



\$37 million.’ That is Truganina’s first high school and Truganina’s only high school. Bemini Secondary College was a huge achievement for this government, and landing \$37 million for the stage 2 upgrade is just extraordinary. I also had a couple of smaller projects, like the \$70,000 that was delivered for the Western Suburbs Soccer Club in Sunshine West. Such a great suburb that one. I also cannot forget the \$2 billion we are putting towards the Sunshine superhub. I absolutely love that project, and that is all part of these major achievements as part of the Labor government.

But the estimates hearings provide a really important role and opportunity in government scrutiny. It is a chance for ministers and their departments to sit down with the committee and answer questions relating to their portfolios, government finance and performance that are reflected in the budget papers. I do want to thank all of the ministers and department staff who participated in these hearings, respectfully and informatively. I think it goes without saying – a tremendous amount of work goes in to preparing for the hearing of ministers and department staff that appear before the committee, and I thank them for that work. It is this kind of work that forms the basis of any estimates report, and this year was no different.

The report makes a total of 79 findings and 42 recommendations, with a real focus on strengthening the transparency of government reporting, ensuring reforms and investments are properly evaluated, enhancing the quality and accessibility of data and developing stronger performance measures to further assess the level at which government programs are achieving their intended outcomes. I do want to acknowledge my fellow committee members, including the members for Point Cook, Yan Yean, Clarinda and Mildura here in this place, as well as Messrs Galea, Puglielli and Welch in the other place. Everyone did a tremendous job, and it was a big effort by the whole of the committee to get through those hearings. I would be entirely remiss if I did not acknowledge my outgoing deputy chair Mr McGowan. To say that name here in this place takes me back to those, I think, three years of our budget estimates that I presided over with Mr McGowan from the other place. If those of us on the committee do not miss Mr McGowan’s presence in PAEC hearings, I know, Mr McGowan, that my staff back in my office will certainly miss you.

Of course I do want to acknowledge the committee secretariat, especially Igor Dosen, who stepped up this year as the executive officer for the committee. He has done a great job, as has the whole of the secretariat team. I do want to say a big thankyou to them for the effort that they put into preparing this report. Hours and hours and hours of writing and reflection and looking at transcripts and synthesising themes in what make up a really great report, a professional report that is then tabled before this house, is done by that team and I do have to thank them on behalf of the committee. I do want to wish the committee secretariat, as well as my fellow committee members, a very merry Christmas and a very safe and happy new year. I look forward to again chairing budget estimates next year.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates*

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (10:54): I rise to address the 2025–26 budget estimates Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report of October 2025. In a similar vein to the government member who was just on her feet, I also acknowledge the contribution to the formulation of this report of a number of members, including the former deputy chair Mr McGowan and Mr Welch from the other place as well, and the member for Mildura Ms Benham. There were outstanding contributions from those three members in particular, and not a bad job from the member for Laverton in her capacity as chair as well. I am sure it would have been smooth sailing trying to navigate the path of ministers who are better prepared than others to respond to government members when those dixerers are presented to them.

I do rise specifically to address a section of this report, and that is section 7.3, the 'Carers and volunteers portfolio: key issue' output, specifically finding 52 and recommendations 22 and 23. Finding 52 states:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing does not have performance measures related to its food relief activities in the 2025–26 Budget.

It therefore made a recommendation, recommendation 22, being:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing include performance measures related to its food relief activities in the next budget.

Recommendation 23 suggests that:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing report through an appropriate mechanism on the changing demand for food relief in Victoria over time and by how much its activities meet this demand.

I agree with those recommendations of the committee, and I have no reason to disbelieve the finding that the committee has made. I will say this, though: times are getting tougher. Times are getting tougher for Victorians, and I think that we should also perhaps use this opportunity to acknowledge the work of many community members across the state who do so much to provide the basics that Victorians rely upon, especially this close to Christmas. In my own community the local Vinnies conference at the Stella Maris and St Joseph's Catholic parishes, and the Nazareth parish in Beaumaris and Black Rock, have undertaken for many decades a drive for food and essential goods, and I want to pay tribute to them. My office for the last three years has been a collection point, and I invite members of my community to drop off those essential items for that Vinnies drive to my office by Thursday 11 December so they can be included within that drive to provide those essential food items and personal items to people who need them. I do acknowledge the importance that the government has placed on this particular matter, as noted in this report, but I also want to acknowledge that it is not just the government's responsibility to contribute to these circumstances. It is also an opportunity for us to acknowledge the contribution of many, many locals within our community who do the same.

In that same vein there is another local charity which I would like to draw attention to. TeamSports4All is a magnificent local charity. They do not just provide the opportunity for young people in our community from a disadvantaged background, often with a family violence history, to participate in local community sport by paying for their uniform, paying for their boots and paying for their membership but they also provide an important mentor to step not only the child through the process but the parent as well – to walk with them, to journey with them. That is how they and this organisation are so different to other organisations which just simply put a sports uniform on the back of a kid in need. That is why on 31 December this year, when I move from Melbourne to Tanzania in an attempt to summit Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest freestanding mountain in the world, it is my aim to make a charitable contribution to this incredible local organisation in my community, and I would encourage anyone who can to make a contribution to that cause.

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance*

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:59): I rise to speak on the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into workplace surveillance, which I had the honour of chairing. This report and the inquiry really go to the heart of the fairness of Victorian workplaces. Through this inquiry we certainly exposed the reality that for many workers – who already see it and know it in their own workplaces – the workplace surveillance that is conducted by employers has gone far beyond just CCTV cameras or maybe the time clock that you might have when you come in out of work hours. But this human impact of workplace surveillance is certainly being felt.

Throughout the inquiry we had excellent witnesses and submissions, but I would like to indicate and maybe share a couple of those stories, particularly from the Victorian Trades Hall Council, who gave

voice to actually what workers are experiencing and how the impact is being felt by them. They stated that workers said things like ‘I felt like a prisoner at work’ and ‘Constant monitoring’. A retail staffer who stopped to talk to a colleague felt guilty – felt like a naughty child at school. And someone said, ‘I’m on my feet all day, and even having a sip of water makes me feel guilty.’ These are absolutely lived experiences. It erodes trust and absolutely has an impact on workers’ mental wellbeing.

This inquiry also then talked about the future: what does the future look like in our workplaces? I am old enough to remember the show that was on television when I was a teenager or a young child called *Beyond 2000*, and they would have the next technology that was coming through. I am sure it was something like X-ray vision or, you know, electric cars and things that would fly, and you would think ‘Wow! The future is just going to look absolutely incredible. We won’t know it.’ I know that we now wear devices – watches that might tell us our heartbeat and some things like that. I am not really up with all the technology that the kids are into these days, but what we absolutely heard in the inquiry was that the technology was becoming so advanced that there are devices now that you can wear on your head, like a headset or in a cap and they will track your brain activity and your brain waves.

We had a witness Dr Allan McCay, who is an academic fellow at the Sydney law school, University of Sydney; co-director at Sydney Institute of Criminology; and president of the Centre for Neurotechnology and Law. He certainly brought attention to these electronic devices that can monitor your brain activity. That all sounds very much like *Beyond 2000* and what we might see, but this is real – it has a positive. Some of these technologies are being used to treat Parkinson’s, epilepsy and hearing loss. They certainly have very much a positive impact on those that might be going through those types of disorders.

But it also gave us food for thought about how workplaces are using this technology. It may be as simple as a truck driver with a mining company that would wear this technology. It may beep at them if the technology is picking up fatigue, for example. Now, we might say that is a really great safety initiative, and we certainly want our workplaces to be safe, but this witness Dr Allan McCay did say there are some warnings here in that what can be described as your mental privacy and the issue of the privacy of the data that is being collected. There were 18 recommendations. The government has responded to these: 15 of those 18 recommendations have been supported in principle, and I am really looking forward to the government now undertaking the work to see what other further reforms and legislation might be needed in workplace surveillance.

I do want to mention, with the little time I have, that the opposition members had a minority report and sort of cautioned against some of the reforms and recommendations that we had suggested. I want to address these respectfully, but the stakes are way too high to leave these claims unchallenged. They basically had a do-nothing policy. While that might be fine for them, there still is harm currently now in our workplaces. I really look forward to the government continuing the work to make sure that we have safe and great workplace surveillance laws.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*

#### *Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes*

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (11:04): I rise to speak on the 2023–24 budget estimates report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC). But firstly I would like to just pay tribute to the committee that I am part of, being the Economic and Infrastructure Committee; the member for Bellarine is the chair and the deputy chair is the member for Shepparton. Just earlier we had the member for Wendouree in here, who is the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, which I sat on with you, Acting Speaker De Martino. The committees that we are on are actually excellent in getting to know one another and working in a bipartisan way to uncover important things within our communities and to undertake these inquiries together. Whilst we might have differing views on

the outcomes and differing views on the findings, at the end of the day it is always good to be able to work in a bipartisan way.

Now to the budget estimates report from PAEC, specifically speaking to the new revenue initiatives in the 2023–24 budget in section 2.5.3. We see here that the Victorian government, the Allan Labor government, has shown time and time again that it will spend big, blow the budget and then invent a new tax to make Victorians pay for it. After years of waste and mismanagement Labor has introduced or increased more than 63 taxes, with more to come this week, making Victorians the highest taxed people in the nation. Now the Auditor-General has revealed the true cost, as revealed here in this report, of Labor's incompetence: a \$50.6 billion hole in the state's finances over just six years. For those for whom billions of dollars are an abstract concept, because it is so much money to understand, that is \$50,000 million of budget blowouts. That is the government spending like there is no tomorrow. The government spend like a nepo baby with an inheritance to burn, except that it is not their inheritance, it is Victorian taxpayers money that they are burning day in, day out, which they have taken from Victorian taxpayers to scramble to plug the gap with yet another tax.

Today we hear again of this big new housing tax from 2027 that the government will impose in 68 activity centres, charging developers over \$11,000 per new home, with industry warning that it will only make housing more expensive at the very time affordability is collapsing. This is something that I will continue to fight for as the new Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability, as the government continue to demonstrate that they have no interest in making housing affordable for Victorians. The government continue to show that they have no interest in unlocking housing supply for Victorians who dream of buying their own home. That is not to mention the congestion levy, where Labor is hiking the congestion levy by 73 per cent, ripping an extra \$100 million a year from people who drive into the city. Car parks will be taxed up to \$3030 per space, with costs passed on to workers of around \$1386 more each year. Business groups have warned against it – they have warned that it will cripple CBD traders and stall Melbourne's recovery – but Labor has already spent the money, so the tax must go on.

That is not to mention, again, the pet tax. The government is now even doubling taxes on family pets, hitting 1.4 million households to raise another \$10 million. Victorians already pay the highest taxes in the nation, and now Labor wants to tax your cat and put a levy on your dog. There is no end to the cash grabs and tax increases under this government. They waste your money with absolutely no accountability, and Victorians will always be paying less tax under a Liberal government. It is time to toss Labor out and give Victoria a fresh start.

Further, on the PAEC report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes, speaking to foster care in section 7.5.2, we know that foster carers have departed in droves. Foster carers are the least funded and have the least allowances in all of Australia here in Victoria, and the Foster Care Association of Victoria has been mounting this public campaign to raise it – (*Time expired*)

### **Electoral Matters Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee By-Elections*

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (11:09): I rise this morning to make a contribution on a committee report, which is the report of the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections tabled yesterday. One of those by-elections brought the great member for Werribee to this house, who sits next to me today. I am lucky enough to be the chair of the committee that undertook this inquiry and wrote this report. I would obviously like to acknowledge the secretariat, particularly Christopher Gribbin, who does a fantastic job for all of us on EMC in helping to facilitate our work and these reports. I am not going to go through the entire committee, but I will give a shout-out to the member for Mornington, who is my deputy chair on EMC – a real lateral thinker, the member for Mornington. You have heard the phrase 'You cannot fit a square peg into a round hole' – he will try anyway. He will try and find a way. He is a real lateral thinker, and he is a pleasure to work with, to be quite frank.

**Nathan Lambert:** What about the rest of the committee members?

**Dylan WIGHT:** They are no good. We remember at the beginning of this year the by-elections in Werribee and Prahran. Obviously, being the member for Tarneit, I spent a significant amount of time working on that by-election in Werribee. It is incredibly important that whenever there is an election that affects this place, that affects the Victorian Parliament, whether that be a general election or a by-election, there is a thorough review undertaken by the Electoral Matters Committee into what worked, into what did not work and into what could be improved. This was a really thorough inquiry and a thorough set of hearings where we heard from several stakeholders: the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) obviously but also candidates – the member for Werribee and I think the member for Prahran specifically came and gave evidence – and the political parties and some independents that took part in those by-elections as well.

After all those hearings we came up with a report that I think thoroughly covers the key issues in these elections. I will speak specifically to Werribee because that is where I was. There were, to be frank, some significant issues with these by-elections in a number of key areas. First and foremost, it is no surprise to anybody that the independence of the electoral commission and everybody working for that commission in these elections is paramount. A fundamental pillar in our democracy is an independent electoral commission. We had some instances, one in particular in Werribee, where we had a VEC employee handing out ballot papers in the ballot room, telling prospective voters to vote for a certain party – a pretty significant issue that goes to not just the recruitment of staff but also training by the VEC. There are clear recommendations in here that the VEC must look at and overhaul its training of recruits and election workers to be able to identify these issues and make sure that they do not occur again.

There are obviously the timelines as well – between nominations and ballots being printed et cetera. Findings 3 and 4 go to those timelines. They take issue with the lack of flexibility for the Speaker in setting election timelines. There is also participation. We saw in these by-elections unfortunately really poor voter turnout. I think voter turnout in Prahran was somewhere in the vicinity of 60 per cent and in Werribee only a little bit above that, at about 70 per cent. Going to that, it is important, particularly in places with a pretty transient community and with a lot of renters, that the VEC has the most up-to-date roll that it possibly can, so there are recommendations within this report that would allow the VEC to take information from further agencies than it already does. Obviously the VEC takes information from VicRoads, for instance. When you change your licence to a new address, the VEC gets updated, so there are recommendations about expanding that as well.

### **Electoral Matters Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Victoria's Upper House Electoral System*

#### *Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee By-Elections*

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (11:14): I rise today to speak on a number of reports, on the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections and Victoria's upper house –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** Member for Mornington, you may only speak on one report, just for your information, so choose wisely.

**Chris CREWETHER:** I rise to speak on committee reports, and I particularly want to focus today on Victoria's upper house electoral system report. I would also like to note the words of the member for Tarneit before, as the chair of the Electoral Matters Committee. It has been a privilege to serve with him as the deputy chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, along with the member for Lowan and my colleague in the upper house Evan Mulholland, as well as other members. I would also like to note today I have Taj here in the chamber, who has just completed year 12 and who has assisted me with putting this speech together today.

We have considered a number of reports through our Electoral Matters Committee over this last year. I would like to, as I mentioned, focus on the upper house electoral report. In that report the committee recommends replacing group voting tickets, which as we have seen have been dodgy over a number of years and have been misutilised, with a system akin to that used by the federal Senate, which allows voters to mark multiple preferences above the line, with savings provisions to ensure votes remain valid even if fewer preferences are marked. We also recommend adopting the weighted inclusive Gregory method for surplus vote transfers to uphold the principle of one vote and one value. These changes will give voters real control over their preferences and end the backroom deals that distort outcomes, distort the trust of the Victorian public and lead to situations where someone with a very, very minimal vote ends up being a member of Parliament. The report also considers broader structural reform, including whether the Council should move from regional representation to a model whereby all members are elected from the state as a whole. This is a complex question that requires further consultation and, in our view, a referendum. The committee proposes a two-step process: first, abolish group voting tickets and introduce Senate-style voting before the next election; and, second, establish an independent process after the 2026 election to review the structure of the Council, with any major changes put to the people at a referendum later on, such as in 2028 or 2030.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** Member for Mornington, I have further advice, which does allow you to speak on multiple reports. Apologies for that.

**Chris CREWETHER:** I also want to acknowledge the minority report from the Liberal and National members of the committee. As stated in the report, we strongly support the abolition of anti-democratic group voting tickets and believe this to be long overdue, while this state Labor government has resisted reform for years, having now been dragged effectively kicking and screaming to this position. Across multiple terms and for the last three years the Labor government has been aware of this issue and has failed to act, particularly noting the 2003 decision to entrench the regional structure of the Legislative Council in the state constitution, which has created an inflexibility to sensible reform.

Going to this other report, on Prahran and Werribee, I particularly want to note the evidence given by the member for Prahran, who had direct experience in that regard. Prahran recorded the lowest turnout of any recent by-election, at just over 68 per cent. While this was influenced by the timing during the late summer holiday period, demographic factors and the absence of a major party candidate, the committee recommends stronger communication strategies, including postal mail-outs and improvements to the accuracy of the electoral roll to improve future turnout. We also call for amendments to the Electoral Act 2002 to allow greater flexibility in timeframes and timelines so that key periods for future by-elections do not fall during Christmas and new year. Persistent problems with the training of election staff were also identified, particularly around impartiality, vote counting and handling scrutineers. These issues must be urgently addressed, the issues raised by the member for Prahran and others must be addressed and we will continue to advocate for improvements to the process for by-elections and more.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** Once again I apologise to the member for Mornington for the confusion. He handled that beautifully.

### ***Bills***

#### **Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (11:21): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025:

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 Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

#### Overview of the Bill

The purpose of this Bill is to establish a new legislative scheme for supported medical treatment decision-making for persons who have an innate variation in sex characteristics.

The primary features of the legislative scheme provided for in this Bill are:

- The introduction of informed consent safeguards, including:
  - a framework for assessing a person's capacity to give informed consent before performing a medical treatment that modifies the sex characteristics of that person;
  - the requirement for a registered medical practitioner to seek and obtain informed consent for a treatment, including by providing adequate information and a reasonable opportunity to make a decision;
- The establishment of an independent specialist oversight panel, called the 'Restricted Medical Treatment Oversight Panel' (**Panel**), whose function is to hear and decide applications for approval of treatment plans which authorise a medical treatment that will modify the sex characteristics of a person who does not have capacity to give informed consent;
- The introduction of a prohibition against knowingly or recklessly providing unapproved medical treatment in certain circumstances;
- The provision of new oversight functions and enforcement powers to the Secretary; and
- The introduction of a requirement for health service providers to report the performance of certain medical treatments.

The provisions of the Bill are to be interpreted having regard to the principles of bodily integrity, children's agency, precaution and medical necessity, so that decisions about restricted medical treatment are deferred, where possible, until a child is able to make their own decision, and finally, independent oversight, given the risks associated with providing this treatment (clause 6).

#### The importance of the Bill

The Bill serves an overall protective purpose intended to promote human rights in the Charter. The new legislative scheme established by this Bill is designed ensure the rights of persons with innate variation in sex characteristics are protected and that such persons are supported to make decisions about their own bodies, and avoid preventable harm arising as a result of unnecessary treatments.

Persons (particularly infants and children) with an innate variation in sex characteristics can be subjected to deferrable or medically unnecessary treatments that vary their sex characteristics. These treatments have typically been justified on the basis of cultural norms, such as to allow a child to develop in a more 'typical' male or female way, or psychosocial rationales, such as to avoid bullying or discrimination. These treatments can lead to negative impacts, including permanent infertility, scarring, pain, decreased genital sensation, sexual dysfunction, mental health impacts and life-threatening infection.

While many people born with variations and their families receive appropriate healthcare support to meet their needs, it is known that medically unnecessary interventions on people's sex characteristics still occur, particularly on infants and young children. There is a body of research, including reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which record the negative impact of unnecessary intervention and advocate for reform to better protect rights of this group. Multiple United Nations bodies, along with local human rights organisations, have recommended the adoption of legislative provisions prohibiting unnecessary medical intervention on people born with variations in sex characteristics without their free and informed consent.

In response to these concerns, the proposed legislation is intended to address a gap in healthcare for this cohort by establishing legislative safeguards to better support their rights. This Bill is also a key part of implementing commitments by the Victorian Government made in *(i) Am Equal: Future Directions for Victoria's Intersex Community and Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022–23* to establish a scheme to improve the treatment and care of people with innate variation in sex characteristics, particularly infants and children.

### Human rights issues

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

- Right to protection from discrimination (section 8)
- Right to life (section 9)
- Right to protection from medical treatment without consent (section 10(c))
- Right to privacy (section 13)
- Right to protection of families and children (section 17)
- Right to property (section 20)
- Right to fair hearing (section 24)
- Right to presumption of innocence (section 25(1))

### *Decision-making in relation to treatment where a person does not have capacity to provide informed consent*

The legislative scheme provided for by this Bill broadly applies to a person who has an innate variation in sex characteristics (definition of ‘applicable person’ in clause 3). Clause 10 requires the assessment of a person’s capacity to give informed consent to restricted medical treatment, being treatment which changes an applicable person’s sex characteristics. Where a person is assessed as not having this capacity (defined as a ‘protected person’ in clause 4), the Bill allows for a medical treatment decision maker to make decisions in relation to restricted medical treatment on their behalf (clauses 11, 30(4), 38(2)(c) and (6), 46(2) and 52) and provides for independent oversight by the Panel who must provide approval for restricted medical treatments (clause 16(1)(a) and Part 6).

### *Right to protection from medical treatment without consent (section 10(c)) and right to privacy (section 13(a)).*

Section 10(c) of the Charter provides, relevantly, that a person has the right not to be subjected to medical treatment without their full, free and informed consent. In addition, section 13(a) of the Charter protects a person’s right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. The right to privacy is broad in scope and extends to privacy in the sense of bodily integrity, which involves the right not to have our physical selves interfered with by others without our consent. The purpose of these rights together is to protect the individual’s personal autonomy and integrity. They recognise the freedom of individuals to choose whether or not they receive medical treatment. Additionally, section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child. This includes an obligation to take measures to protect a child’s enjoyment of their Charter rights, particularly in light of their vulnerability.

These rights may be engaged by provisions which allow for a medical treatment decision maker and the Panel to make decisions about restricted medical treatment on behalf of a protected person. Section 10(c) may be limited as treatment can occur in situations where a person is not able to give their full, free and informed consent, while a person’s bodily integrity pursuant to section 13(a) may also be limited by the performance of such treatments. However, as I will discuss below, I consider that the limit on s 10(c) is justified pursuant to s 7(2) of the Charter and that the interference with s 13(a) will be lawful and non-arbitrary, such that these provisions are compatible with human rights.

As outlined above, there is a body of research documenting the harm that can result from unnecessary medical intervention and highlighting the need for greater protection of the rights of people with innate variation in sex characteristics and oversight of treatment decisions. This Bill is designed to pursue the legitimate purpose of providing greater protection for these rights.

The Bill is confined in its terms and provides a series of safeguards to ensure that treatment can only be provided to protected persons where it is medically necessary and where it is not possible to defer until the person is able to make their own decisions about their body. These safeguards include:

- Part 3 of the Bill provides for a robust and detailed process for assessing and obtaining a person’s informed consent. This Part promotes the rights under sections 10(c), 13(a) and 17(2) (where the person is a child) by ensuring applicable people are supported to make an informed decision in relation to treatment where they have capacity to do so. These provisions also provide clear guidance to practitioners on how to assess whether a person is able to provide informed consent, ensuring decisions are only allowed to be made on behalf of a person by a medical treatment decision maker and the Panel where necessary;



- Restricted medical treatment, apart from urgent treatment necessary to preserve life or prevent serious harm, is not able to be provided to a protected person without the consent of at least one of the person's medical treatment decision makers (clause 11(1)(a)). The offence in clause 7 reinforces this prohibition and provides further protection against treatment being undertaken without the consent of the applicable person or a person authorised to make decisions on behalf of a protected person;
- The Bill requires that the views of a protected person are still taken into account, despite not being able to provide informed consent, and that they are supported to obtain information and provide these views (clauses 11(2)(a)(i), (2)(a)(iii), (3), (5) and 37(1)(b));
- Clause 35 provides that treatment plans can only be approved by the Panel where there is sufficient evidence that the person would suffer significant physical or psychological harm if the treatment proposed in the plan were not provided and that there is no alternative treatment option available which is both as effective as the treatment proposed in preventing significant physical or psychological harm and less restrictive of the person's or persons' ability to make a decision about their sex characteristics in the future. Clause 35 also provides that evidence that a treatment must be provided to reduce a risk of discrimination or stigmatisation is not a relevant consideration to the approval of a treatment plan. This clause works to ensure treatments are medically necessary and are unable to be deferred until the person is able to make their own decisions about their body and not informed by improper considerations, such as to allow a child to develop in a more 'typically' male or female manner, that have historically been used to justify restricted medical treatments;
- Approval decisions in relation to individual or general treatment plans are subject to internal review (Part 8) and external review by VCAT (clause 52) providing for additional oversight of treatment decisions; and
- Clause 6, as outlined above, requires the Bill is to be interpreted having regard to the principles of bodily integrity, children's agency, precaution, medical necessity and independent oversight.

There are also a series of safeguards which apply to and guide the decision making of a medical treatment decision maker.

A medical treatment decision maker is defined to have the same meaning as in the *Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016* (**MTPD Act**). Pursuant to section 55 of the MTPD Act, an adult's medical treatment decision maker is a person reasonably available and willing to make a medical treatment decision and, in order of priority, is: their decision maker appointed under the Act (if any), their guardian under the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019* (if any), provided that the guardian has power to make medical treatment decisions, or a person in a close and continuing relationship with them, being their spouse or domestic partner, primary carer, adult child, parent or adult sibling. The medical treatment decision maker of a child is the child's parent or guardian or other person with parental responsibility for the child who is reasonably available and willing and able to make the medical treatment decision.

These provisions allow for a person to exercise some control over their future treatment by appointing someone they trust to make decisions on their behalf should they lose capacity to provide informed consent. Alternatively, a protected person will have decisions made on their behalf by a person with whom they are in a close and continuing relationship, who can reasonably be expected to act in their best interests and to understand, and therefore make decisions based on, the person's preferences and values.

The MTPD Act also contains further safeguards that apply to all medical treatment decision makers (for example under section 61, the medical treatment decision maker must make the decision that they reasonably believe the person would have made if the person had decision making capacity) and are subject to oversight by the public advocate and VCAT (e.g. see sections 62 and 67).

On the basis of the above, I am satisfied that the limit imposed on the right in section 10(c) by allowing treatment to still occur where a person is unable to provide consent is proportionate and reasonably justified having regard to the importance of the identified purpose and the safeguards in place to ensure any treatment is medically necessary to prevent significant harm and is unable to be deferred until the protected person can make a decision for themselves. For these same reasons, I am also satisfied there will be no limitation of the section 13(a) right as treatment will be authorised under an appropriately circumscribed law, which is subject to sufficient protections to protect against a decision being made arbitrarily or unreasonably.

Accordingly, I am satisfied these provisions are compatible with the rights under sections 10(c) and 13(a) of the Charter.

#### *Right to protection from discrimination (section 8)*

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter relevantly provides that every person is entitled to equal protection

of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

‘Discrimination’ under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* on the basis of an attribute in section 6 of that Act, which relevantly includes sex characteristics. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable.

Section 8(4) of the Charter provides that measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination. Section 8 as a whole is concerned with substantive equality. This means that any measure taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing a group disadvantaged because of discrimination, such as people with innate variation in sex characteristics, will not constitute discrimination where it satisfies the test for establishing a special measure. This includes demonstrating that the disadvantage to be targeted by the measure is caused by discrimination, that the measure is reasonably likely to advance or benefit the disadvantaged group, and that it addresses a need and goes no further than is necessary to address that need.

The application of this scheme to people with innate variations in sex characteristics, including by requiring this group to obtain additional approval from the Panel to undergo certain medical treatments, may be seen to be disadvantaging or treating this group unfavourably. I am of the view, however, the legislative scheme established by the Bill, particularly the informed consent safeguards and the oversight provided by the Panel, does not amount to discrimination as it constitutes a special measure under section 8(4) of the Charter. This is because their purpose is to support substantive equality in the enjoyment of the human rights of people with innate variations in sex characteristics who, as outlined above, continue to face the risk of the performance of medically unnecessary treatments in the absence of their informed consent. They constitute a proportionate and justified measure having regard to the various safeguards in the Bill as outlined above which promote rights or minimise any limitation of the rights of an applicable person.

For these reasons, I am satisfied that the creation of these measures specifically for people born with innate variation in sex characteristics is not discriminatory and therefore does not limit the right to equality under the Charter.

#### ***Emergency medical treatment***

Clause 8 provides that restricted medical treatment can be provided without consent, or otherwise obtaining authorisation from the Panel, where a medical practitioner believes on reasonable grounds that the treatment is necessary, as a matter of urgency, to save the person’s life, to prevent serious damage to the person’s health, or to prevent the person from suffering or continuing to suffer significant pain or distress. Pain or distress is defined to not include actual or a perceived risk of discrimination or stigmatisation, or emotional pain arising from such discrimination or stigmatisation.

#### ***Right to protection from medical treatment without consent (section 10(c)) and right to privacy (section 13(a)).***

As outlined above, section 10(c) and s 13(a) both protect an individual’s personal autonomy and recognise the freedom of individuals to choose whether or not they receive medical treatment. Both these rights are engaged as this provision allows for medical treatment without first obtaining a person’s consent. However, I consider that the limit on section 10(c) is justified pursuant to section 7(2) of the Charter and the interference with section 13(a) will be lawful and non-arbitrary such that this provision is compatible with human rights.

Clause 8 promotes the right to life under section 9 of the Charter, which includes the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. Its purpose is to enable the expedient provision of emergency treatment that is necessary to save someone’s life or prevent serious harm and operates to ensure the provision of treatment to a person who is unable to provide informed consent is not delayed by the process of applying to the Panel for the approval of the treatment or compliance with the informed consent processes under Part 3.

Clause 8 is proportionate to its legitimate purpose and strikes an appropriate balance between the right to life and the right not to be subjected to medical treatment without consent or the protection against unlawful or arbitrary interference with privacy. As outlined above, clause 8 only allows emergency treatment in specified and exceptional circumstances, establishing a high threshold for treatment without obtaining consent. Importantly, by excluding the risk of discrimination or stigmatisation from being sufficient to authorise emergency treatment, clause 8 ensures such reasons are not used to circumvent the operation of the scheme and proper oversight from the Panel.

For these reasons, I consider that emergency medical treatment allowed for by clause 8 is compatible with the rights under sections 10(c) and 13(a) of the Charter.

***Powers of the Secretary and assessment committees to obtain and share information***

The Bill grants the Secretary with additional functions and powers to monitor and enforce compliance with the requirements under the Bill (clause 12). As part of this oversight function, clause 13 provides that the Secretary may request that a person (other than an applicable person, parent, guardian or carer of an applicable person) provide information or

a document that is necessary to determine whether there has been a breach of a provision of the Bill. This provision authorises a person to provide the requested information and expressly provides that any disclosure does not alone amount to a breach of professional ethics or amount to unprofessional conduct (clause 13(2)–(3)). The Secretary is also empowered to disclose information to certain bodies, including Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency or the Director of Public Prosecutions, for the purpose of assisting that body to perform functions or exercise powers under any Act (clause 14).

Clause 38 relevantly allows an assessment committee to inform itself in any way that is appropriate, including by speaking to a protected person with the consent of their medical treatment decision maker or seeking advice from an expert relevant person or body. The provision further provides that in consulting with or obtaining advice from an expert relevant person or body, the committee must ensure that information that might identify the protected person is not disclosed to the expert unless required. If such disclosure is required, or the expert is required to assess the protected person, the consent of their medical treatment decision maker must be obtained. Clause 40 allows an assessment committee, in assessing an application or proposal, to request further information about or relating to the relevant treatment plan.

***Right to privacy (section 13(a))***

As outlined above, this right protects against unlawful or arbitrary interference with a person's privacy. The information gathering and sharing powers discussed above which allow sensitive personal and health information to be shared with the Secretary, the assessment committee and other bodies may constitute an interference with privacy rights under the Charter.

However, I consider that any such interference is lawful and not arbitrary. These provisions further the legitimate purpose of allowing for the effective administration of the Bill including the investigation of possible non-compliance with the Bill and proper consideration of applications or proposals for approval of a treatment plan, ultimately serving to protect persons with variation in sex characteristics against unnecessary medical intervention. The provision of, or sharing of, information under these provisions would be pursuant to legislation which is appropriately confined to achieve this purpose. As outlined above, a request from the Secretary or assessment committee for further information is non-compulsive and can only be made for particular purposes, being compliance or in assessing an application. Information can only be shared by the Secretary with other bodies to assist with the performance of statutory functions or powers. The assessment panel can only speak with the protected person, disclose identifying information or arrange assessment of a protected person with the consent of their medical treatment decision maker. Further, the personal information of applicable or other persons will continue to be subject to the protections afforded under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the *Health Records Act 2001*. Accordingly, I consider that any interference with privacy is neither unlawful nor arbitrary.

***Reporting requirements***

Pursuant to clause 54, applicable providers are required to provide a report to the Panel on certain information in relation to the provision of restricted medical treatments to applicable persons annually. Under clause 55(1)–(2), the Panel is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary including certain information about the volume and nature of restricted medical treatments performed in Victoria.

***Right to privacy (section 13(a))***

I do not consider these provisions will impose any limitation of the right to privacy, as there will be no disclosure of personal or health information which would allow for the identification of an individual, or that such disclosure will be lawful and not arbitrary.

Clause 55(3) expressly provides this protection, requiring that any annual report of the Panel must not include any identifying information of an applicable person, their medical practitioner or their medical decision maker. It is not intended that clause 54 operate in a way which requires a health service provider to report identifying information to the Panel.

However, in the event that the information required at clause 54(1) could be used to identify a person, I consider that the disclosure of this information will be pursuant to legislation which is sufficiently circumscribed to meet a legitimate purpose. I consider the reporting of this information is necessary to allow the Panel to monitor and analyse data for various purposes, including to inform and improve the exercise of its functions, such as informing any recommendations to the Secretary about the improvement of care, support and outcomes for applicable persons (clause 16(b)). The collection of this data over time will also assist in the

review of the Bill required under clause 56. This information will be held and used by the Panel and Secretary for these particular purposes and will not be publicly disclosed, noting the protection in clause 55(3).

For these reasons, I consider that the degree to which an individual may be identified in the disclosure of this information, such disclosure will be according to law and non-arbitrary and so will not limit the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter.

### ***Criminal prohibition***

Clause 7 creates an offence for a person to provide restricted medical treatment to an applicable person who does not have capacity to give informed consent where the provider knows or is reckless as to whether the treatment is ‘restricted medical treatment’ and knows the applicable person does not have capacity to give informed consent or is reckless as to whether they have this capacity.

Clauses 8 and 9 provide for exceptions to this offence, namely where the treatment is urgently necessary, or where the treatment provided in accordance with an approved treatment plan.

### ***Presumption of innocence (section 25(1))***

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

As these offences are summary offences, section 72 of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* will apply to require an accused who wishes to rely on any exception in clause 8 or 9 to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that, if they existed, would establish the exception. In other words, the provision imposes an evidential onus on an accused when seeking to rely on the defence. Case law has held that an evidential onus imposed on establishing an excuse or exception does not limit the Charter’s right to a presumption of innocence, as such an evidential onus falls short of imposing any burden of persuasion on an accused. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the elements of the offence.

Accordingly, I do not consider that the offence provision and exceptions in clauses 7–9 do not limit the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter.

### ***Statutory immunities***

Clause 27 provides that a Panel or committee member is not personally liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in the exercise of a power or discharge of a duty under the Act as a Panel member, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in exercise of such a power or discharge of a duty. Clause 27(2) provides that any liability which, but for subsection (1), would attach to a Panel or committee member, instead attaches to the State.

### ***Property rights and right to fair hearing (sections 20 and 24(1))***

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or the common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, are formulated precisely and do not operate arbitrarily.

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The right may be relevantly limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court.

The fair hearing right is relevant where statutory immunities are provided to certain persons as this right has been held to encompass a person’s right of access to the courts to have their civil claim submitted to a judge for determination. Similarly, insofar as a cause of action may be considered ‘property’ within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, clause 27 may also engage this right.

The exclusion from personal liability does not deprive a person of their property rights nor interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because parties seeking redress are instead able to bring a claim against the State (clause 27(2)). The provision also serves a necessary purpose by ensuring that a Panel or committee member is able to exercise their functions effectively without the threat of personal repercussions and overall interference that responding to court claims has. Additionally, the Panel or committee member will still remain personally liable for any conduct not performed in good faith or outside their statutory functions. Accordingly, this provision does not limit property rights or the right to a fair hearing under the Charter.

**Conclusion**

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP**  
**Minister for Health**

*Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (11:21): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

Today I introduce the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025, a Bill that affirms our government's commitment to the health and wellbeing of people born with variations in sex characteristics, especially infants and young children.

Being born with a variation in sex characteristics, sometimes referred to as 'intersex', means your body does not fit typical definitions or understandings of male or female bodies. This can include physical traits, like reproductive organs; chromosomes; or hormones. This should not be confused or conflated with being trans or gender diverse.

This legislation is the culmination of years of advocacy, consultation, and reflection.

It responds to the lived and living experiences of people born with variations in sex characteristics who have courageously shared their stories of medicalisation, trauma, and resilience. It is also informed by the growing international consensus that unnecessary medical interventions on infants and young children with variations must end.

It empowers parents and guardians to make decisions that are truly in their child's best interests – not just in the moment, but for life. And finally, it supports clinicians who work tirelessly to provide the best possible care to all Victorians by enshrining a best practice, contemporary approach to the care and treatment of people born with variations in sex characteristics.

Importantly, there will be no change regarding urgent treatment required to save a person's life or prevent serious, significant damage to their health. Urgent treatments will be able to proceed without additional oversight or delay. We will rely on the expert advice of dedicated clinicians to determine urgency and proceed appropriately.

This Bill is not about ideology. It is about healthcare. It is about ensuring that our health system does no harm. It is about recognising that diversity in sex characteristics is a natural part of human variation, and that every person deserves the right to make decisions about their own body.

***The problem we are addressing***

For decades, around the world, infants and young children born with variations in sex characteristics have undergone medical procedures so that their body can appear more typically male or female. These interventions, including surgical or hormonal treatments, were often not medically necessary, irreversible, and performed well before the person was able to consent.

While the intention has often been benign, the consequences can be devastating and lifelong. They can include sterilisation, pain, sexual dysfunction, psychological trauma, and a deep sense of violation.

These practices have been condemned by people with lived and living experience, as well as human rights bodies and medical ethicists around the world.

Victoria wants to do better. And with this Bill, we will.

***What the Bill does***

The Bill establishes a clear legal framework to protect people with variations in sex characteristics, particularly infants and young children, from harm. It does so through 4 key mechanisms.

The first mechanism is **informed consent safeguards**. These safeguards ensure that all people born with variations in sex characteristics, and the families of infants and young children, get the information and support they need to make healthcare decisions.

This will include providing a person with tailored information about their variation, treatment options, and what would happen if they did not receive treatment. It can also include being able to talk to a peer worker or counsellor about healthcare needs and options.

If the person has capacity, they will be able to consent to approved treatment. If the person does not have capacity to consent to approved treatment, they will be supported to contribute to decision making as appropriate for their age and developmental stage, with additional oversight.

In the case of infants and young children, an oversight panel will need to approve the treatment first. Then the parents or guardians will be able to consent to the treatment going ahead. This Bill will not replace parent and guardian decision making. Parents and guardians must still give consent for treatment to proceed on their child, in line with an approved treatment plan. Families will be supported with accurate, clearly understandable information and a reasonable period of time to consider any decision.

The second mechanism is a new independent, legislated **oversight panel** that will approve general and individual treatment plans. The panel will also develop guidance and report on treatment data.

The panel's role is not to obstruct care but to ensure that irreversible decisions are made with the utmost care and accountability. The panel will ensure that children and their parents and guardians are better supported in their decision making, while also reducing risks of decision making for clinicians and health services.

The third mechanism is **treatment plans**, which provide approval for treatments that vary sex characteristics. This can include pre-approved general treatment plans, which apply to more than one person for common treatments where there is an established evidence base, and individual treatment plans, which apply to one person for less common treatments. Treatment plans will often be developed and proposed by the treating clinician for approval.

General treatment plans in particular are a flexible and responsive way of managing oversight and reducing regulatory burden and duplication.

The fourth mechanism is a **prohibition with consequences for non-compliance**. The criminal prohibition addresses intentional or reckless provision of restricted medical treatment to a protected person – that is, a person born with variations in sex characteristics who does not have capacity to consent to a proposed medical treatment.

Consequences for non-compliance with the Bill will largely be supported through existing regulatory mechanisms. For example, if a clinician does not meet their informed consent obligations, they can be referred to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency for unprofessional conduct. However, there is one proposed summary offence for breaches of the prohibition.

The maximum penalty for the most serious, intentional, and/or repeated breaches is to be 2 years' imprisonment or 240 penalty units. This is an important deterrent to non-compliance, given how devastating and lifelong the consequences can be for people born with variations in sex characteristics.

### ***Cultural change***

This legislation is important. However, legislation alone is not enough. Cultural change is needed – within medicine, within families, and within society. This Bill is a foundation, not a finish line.

Because legislation alone is not enough, the proposed reforms will be supported by complementary system enhancements, including improvements to the model of care; data collection to provide better visibility of variations and procedures; and resources, guidance, and education to support understanding of roles and responsibilities under the scheme.

And we will not rush implementation. We will continue to work with clinicians and people with lived and living experience to ensure that people are at the centre of new processes, including people born with variations in sex characteristics and those who care for them.

### ***Conclusion***

This Bill reflects our government's commitment to evidence-based policy, human rights, and inclusive healthcare.

It is the result of deep consultation with people with lived and living experience, clinicians, and legal experts.

I want to thank the brave people who were born with variations in sex characteristics for their leadership, their courage, and their generosity in sharing their stories.

I also want to recognise the clinicians who are already practising in line with the principles of the Bill, who helped shape the proposed reforms and who will be leaders in this next healthcare chapter.

This Bill is not just about healthcare. It is about justice. We cannot undo the harms of the past, but we can ensure that moving forward, every Victorian, regardless of their sex characteristics, has the right to make decisions about their own body, to access compassionate and informed care, and to live free from harm.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:22): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 17 December.**

**National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (11:23): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill).

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

**Overview**

This Bill amends the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008* to support the improvement and expansion of Victoria's declared gas transmission system in the interests of ongoing security and reliability of Victorian energy supply.

The Bill introduces a new head of power for the Minister responsible for the administration of the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008* to make Orders under proposed new section 58B, which require a declared transmission system service provider or prospective declared transmission system service provider to plan, carry out or operate specified improvements to Victoria's declared gas transmission system, or to facilitate others' doing so.

The Orders will be able to modify the application of, or disapply provisions of the National Gas Law and the National Gas Rules with respect to improving Victoria's declared gas transmission system, and related services.

The Bill provides that Orders, made under new section 58B, are not to be considered a decision in relation to works for the purposes of section 8C of the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. This amendment in the Bill is limited to dealing with the procedure for making such a decision, rather than the substantive effects of such a decision and therefore does not engage relevant human rights.

The Bill provides for amendments to improve the civil penalty arrangements for a breach of a declared system provision prescribed to be a civil penalty provision under the *National Gas (Victoria Act) 2008*. The amendments alter the compliance and enforcement arrangements to ensure that the Australian Energy Regulator may enforce civil penalties in Victoria for such breaches under the Act.

The Bill in new section 58H enables the Supreme Court of Victoria to restrain persons with obligations under these Orders from undertaking conduct contravening them, or require them to take actions to prevent contraventions, in relation to enforceable provisions under Ministerial Orders. The Court orders are likely to be directed at the entities who are directed to carry out improvements to the Victorian declared gas transmission system, as provided under Ministerial Orders.

**Human Rights Issues**

Section 6(1) of the Charter provides that only persons have human rights. A person is defined as a human being. A note to section 6(1) clarifies that corporations do not have human rights.

The entities that will be subject to requirements under a Ministerial Order made under the new provisions set out in this Bill are declared transmission network service providers, prospective declared transmission

network service providers, the Australian Energy Market Operator, and the Australian Energy Regulator. All are large and sophisticated commercial entities, and not natural persons.

*Civil penalties including Court order in relation to contraventions of enforceable provisions*

The imposition of civil penalties will generally not engage the right under sections 24 (fair hearing) or 25 (presumption of innocence) or 26 (Right not to be tried or punished more than once) the Charter, unless the penalty is in the nature of a punishment. Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which he or she has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This rule only applies in respect of criminal punishment. Breach of a civil penalty provision is not an offence.

To the very limited extent that these civil penalties provisions in the Bill apply to a natural person, the penalties (including new section 58G), which are civil penalty provisions for the purposes of the National Gas (Victoria) Law, and the powers of the Court to make orders set out in section 58H, serve the purpose of ensuring that a person upholds their duties in an order under section 58B. These provisions are largely protective in nature with the aim of ensuring compliance with the regulatory scheme in a reasonable and proportionate way and are not punitive in nature. The amendment provides that the Supreme Court may issue orders against any person who has contravened or proposes to contravene an Order, or any person who engages in certain accessorial civil breaching conduct to that contravention or proposed contravention of the Order. That is, conduct whereby a person has been in any way, directly or indirectly, knowingly concerned in, or party to, a contravention or proposed contravention; or aided, abetted, counselled or procured such a contravention; or induced, whether by threats or promises or otherwise, such a contravention; or directly or indirectly, knowingly concerned in, or party to such a contravention; or conspired with others to effect such a contravention. In these instances, a natural person will likely be employed by or acting on behalf of the legal person, such as a corporate entity, directed to undertake improvement work under a Ministerial Order. Regardless, as the order will be decided by the Supreme Court, any impact on an individual person will be a matter for consideration by the Court in determining the application made by the Minister. Applications for orders are subject to the independent determination of the Supreme Court based on rules of evidence in a civil proceeding. The Court decision is subject to any appeal or judicial review. The Court may rescind or vary, an order or interim order. These matters afford further procedural fairness.

As such, I conclude that the rights in sections 24(1), 25 and 26 of the Charter are not limited by the provisions referred to above.

**Consideration of reasonable limitations**

I am satisfied that the Bill does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter. If to the extent that that any limitation is imposed on the rights in sections 24(1), 25 and 26 of the Charter, any such limitation is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, as the civil orders are protective in nature and afford procedural fairness to serve the purpose of ensuring that a person upholds their duties in an order under proposed new section 58B under the *National Gas (Victoria Act) 2008*, for the reasons above.

**Conclusion**

I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP**  
**Minister for Energy and Resources**

*Second reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (11:23): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

Victoria is moving ahead with its transition to net-zero and expanding our power networks to connect Victorian homes, power our industry and support our economy.

Gas will continue to play a role in the economy as we meet our legislated renewable electricity and emission reduction targets. Critical uses for gas include providing firming capacity through gas-powered-generation of electricity and as an input in our manufacturing sector.



By 2029, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) has projected the East Coast and Victoria will experience annual gas supply shortages. There is also a risk of seasonal and peak-day shortages happening ahead of this time. We are seeing sharper demand spikes as coal-fired generators close and renewable energy requires gas-powered firming, particularly in winter.

The current backbone of the gas transmission pipeline network in Victoria, also called the Victorian Declared Transmission System or DTS, plays a key role in ensuring enough gas supply can get to where it is needed. But the DTS was built for an earlier time when Victoria sourced most of its gas from the east of the state and Longford. It now needs timely and effective upgrades to allow available and projected supply to come in from other parts of the network to support ongoing secure and reliable energy supply. Having appropriate transmission infrastructure in place is a key piece in firming the electricity network through gas-powered-generation of electricity. Any network expansions or upgrades must also be properly targeted so only necessary upgrades are made that benefit all consumers and to reduce the risk of asset stranding.

The Government has already supported key pipeline investments to strengthen the DTS, including rigorous oversight of delivery of the Western Outer Ring Main, which was completed in 2023, and supporting compression upgrades to increase the capacity of the South West Pipeline. These upgrades have contributed to an increase in system capacity so it can better serve Victoria's peak demand. They have proved invaluable over the past three winters. But more work will be needed to ensure the DTS can support Victoria's energy security and reliability needs, including supporting the electricity system.

That is why the Government is introducing powers to shore up supply and ensure our DTS has the transportation flexibility and capacity to meet demand.

#### **Overview of the Bill**

##### *Ministerial Orders*

The Bill will introduce the power for the Minister to make Orders to direct the regulated transmission pipeline owner to make specific augmentations to the DTS under a new Division 6 in Part 6 of the *National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008*.

A Ministerial Order will be able to modify, or disapply, provisions of the National Gas Law and National Gas Rules to deliver the DTS upgrades to or direct services relating to the declared transmission pipeline network where these changes are needed for the reliability and security of gas supply.

For example, an Order may direct a declared network asset owner to undertake upgrades to its transmission pipeline network to increase capacity or to support improved resilience and operability of the network to ensure ongoing security of gas supply.

An Order may also ask AEMO to provide its expertise to help identify which changes to the DTS would best help avert shortfall risks and in a way that best supports the effective operation of the market. The Bill also confers powers on the Australian Energy Regulator to monitor and enforce compliance with any potential Orders and provides for civil penalties as an enforcement tool.

Before making an Order, the Minister will be required to consult with the Premier, the Treasurer, AEMO and the DTS owner. In this way, the Orders will be based on carefully considered advice to ensure that changes are made only when and where they are needed, that projects will be at an efficient cost and that they will deliver value for Victorians. The responsible Minister will also be required to publish the Order, together with the reasons for making the Order, in the Government Gazette and the Department's internet site.

These Orders will be an important measure of last resort. They will only be used where the market fails to find a solution.

These reforms are prudent and proportionate and will support the effective delivery of the energy transition to the benefit of all Victorians.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:23):** I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 17 December.**

## Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:25): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025:

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 Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025 (the Bill).

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

### **Overview**

The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYF Act) to create a supporting stable and strong families scheme (SSSF scheme) to provide for collective responsibility and a whole-of-government approach to supporting child wellbeing and safety.

The SSSF scheme places obligations on Ministers, the Chief Commissioner of Police and heads of government departments (supporting stable and strong families partners (SSSF partners)) to take action to support the needs of vulnerable children and families within the supporting stable and strong families group (SSSF group) in delivering actions identified in a supporting stable and strong families plan (SSSF plan), with progress reported against that plan.

The Bill also consequentially amends the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (CWS Act) to expand the functions of the Children's Services Co-ordination Board in relation to the SSSF scheme.

The SSSF scheme provides for a more proactive and holistic whole-of-government approach to taking tangible action to promote child wellbeing and safety in Victoria. It enhances accountability by setting out planning and reporting responsibilities and requires various public bodies to work together in a more coordinated manner.

### **Relevant Human rights**

The following rights under the Charter Act are engaged by the Bill:

- right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8); and
- right to privacy (section 13); and
- right to protection of families and children (section 17); and
- right to protection of cultural rights including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19)

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter. All measures in the Bill are intended to promote the protection of families and children and so, to the extent that any rights may be limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

### **Analysis of relevant clauses**

#### **Right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)**

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

Clause 3 of the Bill amends the CYF Act to insert the definition of *SSSF group*, which has the meaning given by new section 20F.

New section 20F explains that *SSSF group* for the purposes of new Chapter 2A means the following persons:

- *vulnerable children* and *care leavers*;
- parents of, and other family members who reside in a household with, *vulnerable children* subject to a family preservation order;
- in relation to *vulnerable children* subject to a family reunification order:
  - i) the parents of the vulnerable children with whom the vulnerable children will be reunified; and

- ii) other family members who will reside in a household with the vulnerable children after reunification in accordance with the order

The definition of *care leavers* is found in new section 20G, which provides that in Chapter 2A, it refers to persons under the age of 25 years who have left the care of the Secretary and i) live independently; or ii) are of an age to live independently; or iii) intend to live independently.

New section 20G also provides that in Chapter 2A a reference to *vulnerable children* includes: i) a child who is or has been subject to a report under section 28, 33(2), 183, 184 or 185 of the CYF Act, ii) a child who receives or has received services from a community service; iii) a child who requires but has not received services from a community service; iv) a child whose primary family carer receives or has received a service from a community service; and v) a child whose *primary family carer* requires but has not received services from a community service.

In new section 20G, the term primary family carer, means the child's parent or guardian, or another person, who has daily care and control of the child, whether or not that care involves custody of the child. This definition is found in section 3 of the Commission for *Children and Young People Act 2012*.

Clause 4 amends the CYF Act to insert new Chapter 2A. Part 2A.2 of this Chapter deals with the SSSF functions and responsibilities of Ministers, the Chief Commissioner of Police, heads of government departments and any other person prescribed to share these functions and responsibilities. New section 20H sets out the functions of these SSSF partners, allocating different functions to SSSF partners who are Ministers to those SSSF partners who are not Ministers.

SSSF partners who are Ministers are required to prepare a SSSF plan and take the actions specified in the SSSF plan; prepare SSSF progress reports against that plan and consider their SSSF responsibilities as set out in new section 20H in preparing a SSSF plan. SSSF partners other than Ministers (principally heads of government departments) are required to consider their section 20H responsibilities in taking actions specified in the SSSF plan.

SSSF partners are not to consider their responsibilities in the performance or exercise of their primary functions, duties or powers or where there is a conflict or incompatibility with those functions, duties or powers.

New section 20I provides that for the performance of SSSF partners' functions under new section 20H, a SSSF partner has several responsibilities directed to the *SSSF group*. These responsibilities include: i) delivering or facilitating the delivery of services; ii) promoting the physical, psychological, emotional, cultural and developmental wellbeing; iii) promoting equality of opportunity; and iv) having regard to and applying the recognition principles and recognising and supporting the cultural identity of Aboriginal persons.

In summary, SSSF partners are required by Part 2A.2 to consider the SSSF responsibilities when preparing their SSSF plans and SSSF progress reports against those plans (for SSSF partners who are Ministers) and consider the SSSF responsibilities when taking actions specified in the SSSF plans prepared by Ministers (SSSF partners who are not Ministers).

#### *Discrimination as a requirement of sections 8(2) and 8(3)*

'Discrimination' under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (EO Act) on the basis of an attribute in section 6 of that Act, which includes age, race and parental status amongst many others.

The Bill establishes a requirement to prepare and take action under SSSF plans taking into consideration SSSF responsibilities considering the needs of an exclusive cohort (above described) and creates a differential treatment to people arguably based on attributes such as age, parental status and/or race, both in terms of including and excluding people from the *SSSF group*.

Whilst this may, on its face, appear to treat persons with protected attributes differently and preferably, to those within the community who do not share those attributes, I am of the view that it does not constitute discrimination on the basis of those attributes as the scheme is essentially responding on the basis of need rather than those attributes. An examination of the definition of SSSF group highlights the connection of this group to the child protection or community services sector. If, however, this is insufficient to ensure compatibility, the SSSF scheme can be considered a special measure aimed at assisting those groups facing disadvantage.

#### *Special measure (Section 8(4))*

Section 8(4) of the Charter provides that measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination, and as such, these special measures would not engage sections 8(2) or 8(3) of the Charter. The introduction of the SSSF scheme in the CYF Act, including the requirement to produce a SSSF plan that considers the needs of the SSSF group,

can be considered to constitute a special measure as it meets the following criteria set in *Lifestyle Communities Ltd (No 3) (Anti-Discrimination)* [2009] VCAT 1869, 262–264.

- a. The SSSF scheme has the purpose of assisting or advancing the identified disadvantaged and discriminated against*

Vulnerable children, care leavers and their families, particularly those involved, or at risk of becoming involved, with child protection, face significant barriers to access adequate universal services that address their needs in a timely manner. This impacts their ability to equally access opportunities, placing them in disadvantage and impacting their ability to remain together as a family or to reunify in a timely manner following child protection intervention. This intention is clearly articulated in new section 20I(c) which includes the responsibility to promote equality of opportunity for children and care leavers in the SSSF group for whom there are welfare concerns.

Through the requirement for SSSF partners to plan and undertake actions in those plans, the Bill clearly identifies that vulnerable children and care leavers face systematic disadvantages and often do not have the same opportunities that their peers have.

- b. The SSSF scheme is reasonably likely to advance and benefit the SSSF group.*

New section 20C clearly sets out the objects of new Chapter 2A which focus on coordination and collective responsibility to promote the wellbeing and safety of vulnerable children and persons under the age of 25 through early intervention and providing timely and adequate services to support families caring for those vulnerable children and young people.

I am of the view that the introduction of a whole-of-government approach to taking action to support this group will produce better outcomes as the Bill also provides for more accountability through the requirement to prepare plans and have them laid before the Parliament in addition to the requirement to report on progress against those plans.

Better coordination in the planning and delivery of services to those who come within the SSSF group should enhance the capacity for family reunification and ultimately keep more vulnerable children and families out of the child protection system.

- c. the SSSF scheme must address a need, and go no further than necessary to address that need*

The scheme directly addresses a need for enhanced coordination of planning for, and delivery of, services for the most vulnerable within our community in the expectation that will produce better outcomes for those within the SSSF group. It goes no further than necessary to address that existing gap.

- d. discrimination must be the cause of the person or group's disadvantage*

Children are a group whose vulnerability to a significant extent arises from their age. It does not follow that such vulnerability is the result of discrimination based upon the attribute of age. The connection between the status of being a parent and the involvement of the child protection system is clear but is not based upon discrimination due to that attribute. The involvement of the child protection system within the life of a family is based upon concerns for the safety of the children within that family.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission highlighted ongoing systemic racism within Victoria's child protection system which is referred to within the recognition principles set out in section 7E of the CYF Act, in particular section 7E(5):

Historic and ongoing biases and structural and everyday racisms create barriers to the best interests of the Aboriginal child and are to be recognised and overcome.

The requirement in new section 20I for SSSF partners in undertaking their functions under section 20H to have regard to and apply the recognition principles and recognise and support the cultural identity of Aboriginal persons in the SSSF group aims to ensure that the specific and distinct cultural needs of Aboriginal adults and children are recognised, respected and protected, and act as a bulwark against discrimination in the context of child protection and community services. This aspect is discussed further below when considering the rights set out in section 19 of the Charter.

To the extent that discrimination is a root cause of Aboriginal parents and children forming part of the SSSF group, requiring this recognition and support in accordance with section 7E would support the application of section 8(4) to the SSSF scheme as it is clearly intended to contribute to overcoming the impact of that discrimination.

Accordingly, I am of the view that, if the measures in this Bill are considered discriminatory by focusing attention of some members of the community to the exclusion of others, they fulfil the requirements of a special measure aimed at assisting to overcome disadvantage to promote substantive equality.

*Reasonable and justified limits (section 7(2))*

Section 7(2) of the Charter provides that Charter rights may be subject under law only to such reasonable limits as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom, taking into account several factors.

Since targeting the *SSSF group* in the SSSF partners' responsibilities does not constitute discrimination, sections 8(2) or 8(3) of the Charter are not limited and therefore, no analysis under section 7(2) regarding limits on rights in sections 8(2) and (3) is necessary.

Right to privacy (section 13)

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

Whilst this right may appear to be engaged due to the focus of the Bill on ensuring adequate and timely service provision to those within the SSSF group, the proposed plans and actions required in those plans is targeted at a group level. As such, the SSSF scheme will not require the sharing of personal information of any individuals who may form part of the SSSF group. Accordingly, I am of the view that the right to privacy is not engaged by the provisions in the Bill.

Right to protection of families and children (section 17)

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State. Section 17(2) provides that every child has the right to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by reason of being a child.

As set out earlier, the Bill intends to provide for a whole-of-government approach and ensure collective responsibility when it comes to addressing the wellbeing and best interests of vulnerable children and their families. It is recognised that this cohort of vulnerable children and care leavers, along with their families, require additional supports through service delivery and early intervention to uplift and support their family units. However, the Bill also recognises that not every need will be the same and to promote the best interests of these children there needs to be a level of discretion as to what actions an SSSF partner takes and how best the SSSF partner considers they can address the needs of the SSSF group.

The Bill acknowledges this by setting out several SSSF responsibilities which SSSF partners are to consider when preparing their SSSF plans. These responsibilities include to:

- deliver or facilitate the delivery of services to the group including through providing access to health, education, welfare and other services appropriate to the needs of the SSSF group (as per new section 20I(a)(iii)) and
- promote the physical, psychological, emotional, cultural and developmental wellbeing of children and care leavers by promoting decisions and actions that prioritise the best interests (as per new section 20I(b))

SSSF partners are given flexibility in how they address and promote the best interests of the vulnerable children and their families when preparing their SSSF plans per new section 20L. This can be reflected in the detailed plan of actions which needs to set out how resources are to be allocated and specific actions that are to be taken by any or all SSSF partners who have SSSF responsibilities in relation to a Minister's primary functions, duties and powers and non-statutory commitments (see section 20L(1)(b)). There is also the ability for an SSSF plan to meet the requirements even where the vision statement and detailed plan of actions is in relation to one class of persons in the SSSF group (see section 20L(3)). I am of the view this promotes the best interests of children by ensuring SSSF partners, through their SSSF plans, tailor their actions and delivery of services in the manner they consider is most appropriate given their primary functions, duties and powers.

I accordingly consider the changes proposed by the Bill to be compatible with the right to protection of families and children under the Charter.

Right to protection of cultural rights including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19)

Section 19 of the Charter provides for the protection of cultural rights and outlines that people with particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic backgrounds are not to be denied the right to enjoy their cultural, to declare and practice their religion, and use their languages. Section 19(2) of the Charter provides that Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community to, amongst other things, enjoy their identity and culture and maintain their kinship ties.

New section 20I(d) of the Bill states that one of the responsibilities of a SSSF partner is to have regard to and apply the recognition principles and recognise and support the cultural identity of Aboriginal persons in the SSSF group. The recognition principles are set out in section 7E of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

In my view the Bill promotes and strengthens the Aboriginal cultural right by requiring SSSF partners to actively consider Aboriginal persons who fall within the SSSF group and to plan for them when preparing SSSF plans. Similarly, the requirements surrounding the content of SSSF plans (set out in new section 20L) and the SSSF progress report requirements (set out in new section 20O) ensure SSSF partners plan for measurable objectives that focus on the wellbeing and development of children and care leavers in the SSSF group, some of who are likely to identify as Aboriginal, and then at the end of the term of the SSSF plan assess and report back on those measurable objectives. Section 20L also requires that the detailed action plan within a SSSF plan takes into account outcome measures, some of which will be prescribed against the outcome area of 'Aboriginal self-determination'. SSSF partners will therefore set objectives related to Aboriginal persons in the SSSF group and in doing so, will then be required to assess the performance of actions.

This promotes accountability in relation to actions taken for supporting the cultural identity of Aboriginal persons and I am therefore of the view that the changes are compatible with this Charter right.

#### Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**The Hon. Ben Carroll MP**

**Deputy Premier of Victoria**

**Minister for Education**

**Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC**

#### *Second reading*

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:25):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

#### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Bill amends the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act) and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* to create a legislative framework to improve collaboration across Government and better support vulnerable children, young people and families. The Bill incorporates shared responsibilities across the Victorian Government to enhance service access and support earlier intervention for children, young people and families at risk of, or already involved with, Child Protection.

The Victorian Government has focused on progressing collaboration, identifying opportunities to leverage existing resources and initiatives to better support vulnerable children and families – particularly those involved with child protection or at risk of being so. Partnering across government has reinforced the collective responsibility that all departments and portfolios share for supporting the most vulnerable members of the Victorian community.

This effort has achieved some important advancements – notably, parents who are pursuing family reunification are now recognised as a priority cohort under the Victorian Housing Register. This recognises the important role that stable and appropriate housing plays in enabling parents to address protective concerns and safely resume caring responsibilities.

Despite these successes, the work to date has also highlighted the need for a more enduring approach that facilitates and directs our collective effort towards supporting vulnerable children and families. This Bill establishes that enduring approach by legislating the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme, formally recognising that, when the State takes responsibility for a child's care, every government department becomes a part of that child's support structure. The Bill gives practical effect to this duty by introducing responsibilities across government, mandating integrated planning and service delivery across government areas such as housing, health, education, and justice. This draws on a similar scheme, known as Corporate Parenting, that has operated successfully in Scotland.

The Bill seeks to enhance early intervention and minimise the number of children and families engaging with the statutory system, and the duration of their involvement. This complements the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025 reforms, which will extend the time available to parents to reunify with their children who are subject to a Family Reunification Order made by the Children's Court of Victoria.

To ensure this is more than just an aspiration, the Bill creates a robust framework to hold government to account. It mandates clear reporting on outcomes for children and their families, making Ministers and departments answerable for their role in this collective effort. This Bill makes clear that supporting vulnerable

children and young people is a whole-of-government responsibility, not just that of Child Protection and the Minister for Children.

The framework established by the Bill will be known as the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme. This title reflects the focus and objectives of the scheme to support those families in Victoria experiencing hardship and enable them to live strong, stable and fulfilling lives.

The ideas underpinning these reforms are not new and sit at the heart of what it means to be part of a supportive family and strong community. The title of the scheme draws on the consultation undertaken with key stakeholders and the language used to describe the intent of these reforms. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the other contributions from stakeholders, which were not able to be incorporated into the Bill itself, but speak to the importance and resonance of these reforms.

Several stakeholders spoke to the importance of reflecting the obligations we all have to each other – as members of communities, of broader society, and as human beings. Others spoke to the importance of partnership and working together to achieve positive change, both for individual families and the Victorian community more broadly.

In discussions with members of the Aboriginal Children's Forum, members spoke about parallels in Aboriginal culture – the importance and strength of community and the shared obligations to raise children and assist those doing it tough. As one member put it: *when Aboriginal people gather around the campfire, everyone is expected to bring something.*

I would also like to share some of the contributions made by members of the Ministerial Youth Advisory Group – an incredibly impressive group of young people with lived experience of the child protection and care system, who I have the privilege of meeting with and learning from. The language they used speaks to the potential of these reforms to make a significant and lasting difference to children and young people. Members spoke of 'lifting up lives', providing a 'launchpad' for the 'next chapter', and delivering both 'roots and wings' for those in need. As one member simply put it – 'together we thrive'.

The scheme creates responsibilities for Ministers, department heads and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police towards a Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group. Responsible individuals will have three main functions under the new model to:

- consider their Supporting Stable and Strong Families responsibilities towards the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group;
- prepare and implement a Supporting Stable and Strong Families plan setting out the exercise of those responsibilities as relevant to the portfolio, by setting out actions the responsible individual will take in line with the responsibilities; and
- report on performance against Supporting Stable and Strong Families plans.

This Bill focuses on how government works together, but its success will be seen clearly in the impacts on the lives of children and families. The scheme will provide the framework for government to work together, to identify gaps and challenges, and to deliver better services to children and families, and decision makers will be held to account for making this happen. If we get this right, we will see fewer families coming into contact with the Child Protection system. When children do enter the system, we will see more of them safely reunified with families sooner, and those who cannot be reunified with their families will have outcomes equivalent to their peers across education, health, housing, employment, justice system involvement, and connection to culture. The Victorian Government intends that Supporting Stable and Strong Families is a framework that will improve the lives for thousands of children and families in Victoria.

### **Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group**

The Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group will be comprised of:

- children under the age of 18 who are or have been Child Protection clients;
- children under the age of 18 who are receiving, have received, or require but are not receiving, services from a community service;
- children under the age of 18 whose primary family carer is receiving, has received, or requires but is not receiving, services from a community service;
- care leavers under the age of 25; and
- parents and household members of children subject to Family Preservation Orders and Family Reunification Orders.

The initial focus will be on children and families involved in Child Protection and recent care leavers. This will focus resources at those with the highest need and ensure children and families get the support they need.

Over time, the focus will broaden to the rest of Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group including children and young people (and their families) receiving or requiring family services support and those at risk of engagement with Child Protection. This will support the system to focus on early intervention to prevent more children and families from entering the Child Protection system in the first place.

### **Responsible individuals**

All Ministers, department heads and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police will be responsible ‘Partners’ under Supporting Stable and Strong Families. This captures the core Victorian public office holders with the resources, powers, responsibilities and other mechanisms at their disposal to affect positive change for vulnerable children. However, the Bill also provides the ability to prescribe additional office holders over time.

### **Responsibilities**

Responsible individuals, in so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions, will be required to consider the responsibilities to:

- a. Deliver or facilitate the delivery of services to Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group:
  - i. Assessing the needs of the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group;
  - ii. Identifying and assisting parents and caregivers of children and care leavers in the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group at the earliest opportunity to meet the needs of children and care leavers; and
  - iii. Providing access health, education, welfare and other services appropriate to the needs of the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group.
- b. Promote the physical, psychological, emotional, cultural and developmental wellbeing of children and care leavers in the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group by promoting decisions and actions that will prioritise the best interests of the children and care leavers.
- c. Promote equality of opportunity for children and care leavers in the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group for whom there are welfare concerns by delivering services that provide the same opportunities that the peers of the children and persons have.
- d. In relation to Aboriginal persons in the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group
  - a. have regard to and apply the recognition principles in the Act; and
  - b. recognise and support the cultural identity of those persons.
- e. Monitor the outcomes, and report on effectiveness, of services provided to the Supporting Stable and Strong Families Group.

### **Supporting Stable and Strong Families Plans and Reporting**

Supporting Stable and Strong Families responsibilities will be enacted through Supporting Stable and Strong Families plans, to be released every two years by Ministers for each of their portfolios. Plans will outline the actions to be taken by all responsible individuals within the portfolio. At the conclusion of each plan, Ministers will release a report outlining the progress against the actions in their plan. Plans and reports will be focused and meaningful documents that describe what each responsible individual is doing to improve outcomes for the priority cohort, ensuring public accountability for delivery of outcomes.

Supporting Stable and Strong Families plans will be tabled in Parliament and will outline a clear vision and actionable steps for supporting the well-being and development of children and young people, including:

- defining a clear vision and set specific, measurable objectives focused on the well-being and development of children and young people;
- developing detailed action plans outlining steps to achieve objectives, and ensure adequate resources (e.g. staffing allocation and material) are allocated;
- fostering collaboration with other responsible individuals, agencies, and communities; and
- establishing robust systems for monitoring implementation, evaluating outcomes, and making necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness.

Each Minister will be required to table a report in Parliament at the conclusion of each Supporting Stable and Strong Families plan, reporting on the progress against the actions within their portfolios. These reports are to provide an overview in respect to delivering on their stated goals in their Supporting Stable and Strong Families plans.



**Governance and monitoring**

To ensure there is adequate monitoring of progress between Supporting Stable and Strong Families plan periods, outcome measures across Government will be prescribed in Regulations, which responsible individuals will be required to have regard to in their Plans and tracked in their reports. Outcome measures will be across the outcome areas of:

- Health;
- Education;
- Justice;
- Housing;
- Aboriginal self-determination;
- Employment; and
- Other prescribed areas.

This provides a simple and enduring approach that allows for changes in ministerial responsibilities over time, to reflect the preferences of the Government of the day.

To support the Minister for Children with monitoring of system performance, coordination of the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme and setting of regulations, the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* is proposed to be amended to establish additional functions for the Children's Services Coordination Board to provide advice to the Minister for Children on:

- a. cross-government priorities for the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme; and
- b. outcome measures and whether new domains may be required, to support the responsible Minister's recommendations to the Governor in Council.

The Children's Services Coordination Board will advise on outcome measures and will track system wide performance, supporting the Minister for Children in monitoring trends in outcomes for the priority cohorts throughout the life of each Supporting Stable and Strong Families plan. The outcomes measures will identify key trends in harm to children and young people and service gaps for families across the State, broken down by locality, harm and service type, and specific community needs to identify priorities across government. The Board will also be required to seek the voice of children, young people, carers and those with lived experience to inform the scheme. This structure will help identify priorities and direct collective effort across government that is informed by those who benefit most.

In action, this Bill represents a fundamental shift in how we, as a government, care for our most vulnerable children and young people. It moves us from a model of reactive referral to one of proactive, collective responsibility. Supporting Stable and Strong Families promotes multi-agency collaboration by requiring various public bodies, including health, education, and social services, to work together in a more coordinated manner. This ensures a comprehensive support system that addresses the diverse needs of children in care and promotes earlier intervention to support families staying together – providing the help they need, when they need it.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:25): I move:

The debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 17 December.**

***Documents*****Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action*****Sustainability Fund Activities Report***

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (11:26): I move:

That the *Sustainability Fund Activities Report 2024–25* be tabled.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Parliamentary committees***Reference*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (11:26): I move:

That this house refers:

- (1) an inquiry into the accessibility of voting centres at Victorian state elections, with reference to:
  - (a) compliance with disability access standards, including physical access and wayfinding;
  - (b) signage, lighting and safety measures at polling places;
  - (c) the provision of information and assistance to voters with accessibility needs;
  - (d) examples of best practice from other jurisdictions; and
  - (e) recommendations to improve accessibility for voters at future Victorian state electionsto the Electoral Matters Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026;
- (2) an inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance through:
  - (a) greater accountability, transparency, and elevated community, staff and student voice at the highest governance level; and
  - (b) implementing the principles of the Expert Council on University Governance; and the agreed priorities of the Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for higher education; and
  - (c) when considering the distinctive objectives of each university, the committee will inquire into the ways by which universities are giving, and intend to give, effect, in a timely fashion, to the final report of the Expert Council on University Governance, with specific reference to how each university will:
    - (i) strengthen accountability for university performance and outcomes;
    - (ii) increase the transparency and representation of university council appointment processes, composition and decision-making;
    - (iii) support councils with greater higher education expertise and a range of staff, student and community perspectives and representation; and
    - (iv) ensure that university council decision-making is inclusive of and responsive to staff, students and other stakeholdersto the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 31 May 2026;
- (3) an inquiry into how best to expand access to renewable and affordable electricity for Victorians in apartments and other multiunit dwellings, including consideration of:
  - (a) recent developments in energy supply and technology options for these dwellings over the last four years;
  - (b) barriers and inequities experienced by Victorians in such dwellings, including renters and social housing tenants, when accessing renewable and affordable electricity compared with other households;
  - (c) options to increase access to renewable and affordable electricity for these dwellings, including shared rooftop solar, balcony or facade solar, community batteries and virtual power plants;
  - (d) the likely impacts of those options on different groups of Victorians, including by tenure type, income, housing type and location, on the type, affordability and reliability of energy they receive; and
  - (e) any legislative, regulatory, planning or market reforms that could support the implementation of options, consistent with Victoria's legislated emissions reduction and renewable energy targetsto the Environment and Planning Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Business of the house***Standing and sessional orders**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (11:26): I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended on Tuesday 9 December 2025 to allow:

- (1) The house to meet at 11 am.
- (2) Legislative Council members to be admitted onto the floor of the house from the ringing of the bells and to remain until the question for the endorsement of the apology to First Peoples is put.
- (3) The Premier to table a statement of apology to First Peoples.
- (4) The Premier to move a motion that the house endorses the apology, and the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, and the Leader of the Victorian Greens to speak on the motion.
- (5) At the conclusion of the motion the house to suspend until 12 noon.
- (6) The order of business on resumption to be:
  - Formal business
  - Statements by members
  - Government business
  - Question time (2 pm)
  - Constituency questions
  - Government business
  - General business subject to standing order 34
  - Adjournment debate or motion to continue sitting.
- (7) The Speaker to interrupt business under sessional order 2 at 5 pm.
- (8) Condolences under standing order 42 not to take precedence until the next sitting day.

Victoria will take the important step of addressing past injustices towards Aboriginal people and building a stronger, united future with an apology to First Peoples to be made to the Victorian Parliament on Tuesday 9 December at 11 am. The Premier will make a formal apology in the Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition, the Greens and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples will speak on the apology.

The apology is a key recommendation of Victoria's nation-leading Yoorrook Justice Commission and was committed to as part of the outcomes of the first treaty following the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 becoming law. The commission heard evidence that colonisation of Victoria was marked by dispossession, displacement and violence towards First Peoples. The final report of the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommended an acknowledgement of the responsibility of predecessors for law, policies and practices that contributed to injustices against First Peoples in Victoria.

The Victorian government has worked with the First People's Assembly to deliver this apology through the treaty process. This was a key commitment agreed to in the first Statewide Treaty. There have been other apologies in our state's and country's history, which have been the right thing to do. There has not been a comprehensive apology on all matters raised by the Yoorrook Justice Commission. This is not just another apology; it is quite unprecedented and needed. The apology, along with Victoria's treaty, is a chance for Victorians to move forward together. It is a pathway to acknowledge the past and make real, practical changes to achieve better outcomes for First Nations people and close the gap. The apology will be streamed on the Victorian Parliament's website, and support is available to affected community members through Lifeline, Yarning SafeNStrong and Beyond Blue.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:29): I will just make a few brief comments, although we will not be opposing the motion. This will be the fourth apology to Indigenous Australians, which we will

be hearing next week. The minister did note the apology next week will be unprecedented for those that may not have been here, and I think we do have a member of this place who will have been here at the time. Former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett, in this very place, moved an apology on behalf of this Parliament, so to suggest that the fourth apology next week is unprecedented is just wrong. This very chamber passed a motion of apology following the moving of that motion by then Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett.

I do note that confusion has extended to others, not just those now in the chamber. When the Premier apologised last year to Indigenous people she said ‘On behalf of successive Victorian governments, I apologised’ and that she was the first representative of the Victorian government to do so – the first representative of the Victorian government to do so. Again, that was wrong. For those that recall, and I do put on record for the house, almost 30 years ago former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett moved an apology in this very chamber by way of substantive motion, and that should be remembered. I am sure that this house should remember that. I feel very certain that the former Premier remembers it, and his record in this place stands strong. In fact the apology he moved was 10 years before the national apology, and that should be noted: 10 years before the national apology he moved one in this place. Although the coalition will not be opposing this motion, we note that it will be the fourth apology – the fourth.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** I hear from the government that you cannot apologise enough, and I am sure that it will become an annual thing. Next week’s apology will be the fourth of what I suspect from the government benches will become a repeated apology. The point that I would make and have made previously is that actions speak louder than words. And although we are not taking away from previous apologies, actions speak louder than words – actions. I feel very confident not only that at some stage this house will hear this apology but that one day we will hear a Premier apologising to Victorians for the crime crisis that we are in and the crimes and deaths that have occurred in this state because of the weakness of this government and that crime crisis.

**Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (11:32):** I am pleased to rise to contribute to the apology motion. This is one of the most significant apologies this government and Victorians can ever make. I make note of the recent contribution from the member for Brighton in relation to this being the fourth apology. This apology is significant because it comes on the back of the Yoorrook Justice Commission outcomes. We have been able to collate that information. The commission has collated that information through evidence given by First Peoples in this state that we have not actually necessarily heard before. It is their stories of their experience of colonisation in this state, and we have never apologised for that. My understanding of Jeff Kennett’s apology was around stolen generations, and I do not take anything away from him doing that apology, but then he followed on by stripping funding from different organisations and Northland Secondary College, which was an integral part of the Aboriginal community in the northern suburbs – stripped them of funding. He also opposed the native title case in Victoria. So what sort of commitment to that apology can you say Jeff Kennett made to First Peoples in this state?

This is a really important event following on from treaty and following on from the Yoorrook Justice Commission report, and I am immensely proud that the Premier of this state and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples will be making that apology alongside the opposition and the Greens, I understand. This is a really momentous occasion for First Peoples in Victoria, but not just for First Peoples, for all Victorians, because many of us have been waiting for this apology, we have been waiting for treaty and we are now taking on the Yoorrook commission’s report on what actually occurred, what the experience was for First Peoples during colonisation. Part of the recommendation from that was about a full apology to First Peoples. As I said, I am really proud that this government is committed to that full apology, and that will happen on Tuesday regardless of the comments from the other side of this chamber.

The commission did hear evidence that the colonisation of Victoria was marked by dispossession, displacement and violence towards First People – we know that. It is now documented and I think many of us already knew that. There were bits and pieces of information that had come out over the years, but to have that contained within that Yoorrook commission report is really, really important. That will go out to our schools for education, and people will learn about this. It is not about blaming and pointing fingers right now, it is about acknowledging the truth.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris COUZENS:** No, I am not. I am talking about the truth that was put in front of us through the Yoorrook Justice Commission. To deny that ever happened is just wrong, and to actually say that we have apologised to First Nations people for what has happened in this –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris COUZENS:** No, I will not take that from the opposition. We have not done a full apology as requested by the Yoorrook Justice Commission. We have apologised for a number of bits and pieces. This is a really significant apology. We are the only state in this country that has committed to treaty. We are leading the way on this and other states are looking to us, so it is shameful for those on the opposite side to start complaining about having to do an apology ‘that has been done four times’. No, you are completely wrong. They are not the facts.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris COUZENS:** No, it is not the fact. I think it is really important that we continue on the journey that we started 10 years ago. I know that the minister, who is in the chamber today, has spent the last 10 years working through this with First Peoples. We have given them the right to lead this process. We have had the deep listening, which is really important. We have had the Yoorrook Justice Commission do their work – extraordinary work – for all Victorians, and now we are at the point where we will deliver the apology next Tuesday, and we will also continue our journey on treaty, which is such a big thing for this state. I know everyone on this side of the chamber is immensely proud of the work that we have done, but more particularly the work that First Peoples have done. It has been a long journey for them.

As proud as I am of all that, I think we have to acknowledge that the apology will be traumatic for a lot of people. They will come into this place next Tuesday, they will be online, or they may read *Hansard*. I do want to acknowledge that this can be very traumatic for First Peoples. The cultural load that they carry in their lives every day is extraordinary, but they have continued on. They have fought to get to where we are today with treaty going through both chambers only a few weeks back. I do want to say that the apology will be live streamed from the Parliament, and there will be support to those that may need it through Lifeline, Yarning SafeNStrong and Beyond Blue. I am sure there will be many attending next Tuesday to hear that apology, because that can be part of their healing process. I know it is going to be traumatic for many people, but we are acknowledging that this is a difficult time and also celebrating that we have achieved treaty in Victoria. We will see that celebration on 12 December at Federation Square, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will come in from all corners of this state. There is huge excitement about it. There is huge excitement about the apology next week, but there is also that understanding of how traumatic that will be, particularly for many of the elders that will come into this place. I think we need to show due respect when they come into this place.

We need to respect the fact that many of them have shared their story at the Yoorrook Justice Commission and given evidence or written submissions. So I think we need to be very respectful of what is going to be happening next Tuesday. We know that there has been a lot of hard work over the last 10 years to make sure that treaty gets to where it is now by the people involved. We will have the First Peoples’ Assembly sitting here to hear that apology. We will have people online, particularly elders, as I said. I know people coming from my electorate on Wadawurrung country will be here. I

know that there are many members here in this place today that will have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming in to hear that apology from their countries.

This is a really significant apology that we are going to have next Tuesday. I want to thank the Premier and the minister for making sure we have kept this commitment to do the apology as part of the Yoorrook recommendations and as part of the treaty process. These are commitments that we have made. We have done the deep listening. We have supported the Aboriginal community, or First Peoples, in this state to develop that framework, to develop treaty in consultation with many others, including the government, including the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and the previous Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and the work that she has done. There is a huge amount of work that has been done to get to this point, and I am just so pleased that the Premier and the minister will address the chamber next Tuesday and deliver that apology to First Nations people in the state of Victoria. I commend this to the house.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (11:42): It is a great privilege to rise and support this motion, and I obviously thank the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples for moving the motion. The minister has done a great deal of work working with the First Peoples' Assembly, and of course I acknowledge the important work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Just to restate: the apology is intended to be made here in this house, which will be a significant moment next week, on Tuesday. The Premier will table a statement of apology to First Peoples. The Premier will move a motion that the house endorses the apology, and the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and the Leader of the Victorian Greens will speak on the motion.

It is refreshing, I believe, if I heard correctly, that the opposition will not be opposing the motion. That is good. However, I am just a little concerned about some of the commentary and the rhetoric. I think it is fair to say I am a pretty bipartisan chap, I like to think, on most occasions. But I call it as I see it, and I have got to say some of the commentary around this – the fourth apology – I think is a little cheeky and not overly constructive to the conversation. I think what we can do is understand that this is something that was called for through a significant process, something that has gone on for years – enough of us as a Parliament dictating to First Nations people. I think for a lot of it, it was really good work, really bipartisan across Parliament, and I want to see that continue. Despite some of what I frame as cheeky or not overly constructive comments, let us turn a page. We will try again, and we will keep trying, because it is the right thing to do.

Again, the opposition are not opposing, so I assume in many respects they are supporting, which is good, but let us keep making sure that we do not politicise this, that we keep listening to First Nations people and that we respect the mountain of work done by them and what they have asked us to do in this as part of treaty, as part of that important work – the first of its kind in Australia, of all the state jurisdictions. We need to continue to do that work, and this is part of that work. Let us not forget that for a moment.

This is not just another apology. This is a culmination of years of work. I would ask the member for Brighton to remember that. Member for Brighton – who I do not mind – I would ask you to remember that.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jackson TAYLOR:** I like to see the best in people. The member for Brighton then going on to say that we are going to make this a yearly thing again I do not think is kind. I do not think it is overly constructive, I think it is cheeky and I think it really lessens the significance of this moment. We can be better than that; we can. I know the member for Brighton is, and I appreciate he will be supporting the motion.

Victoria will take an important step towards addressing past injustices towards Aboriginal people and building a stronger, united future with the apology, as stated, to First Peoples to be made here next Tuesday at 11 am. As said, it is a key recommendation from the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The

commission heard evidence that the colonisation of Victoria was marked by dispossession and displacement of and violence towards First Peoples. The final report of the justice commission recommended an acknowledgement of the responsibility of predecessors for laws, policies and practices that contributed to injustices against First Peoples in Victoria. Of course we know the Victorian government has worked with the First Peoples' Assembly to deliver the apology through the treaty process. This, as has been stated here already, was a key commitment agreed to in the first Statewide Treaty.

One of the points raised as well, in fairness, was an apology made by a former Premier. The apology that we will make next week in this place will comprehensively acknowledge the impacts of colonisation, not singular policy decisions. This is important. As it has been described on numerous occasions, it is a line in the sand to continue towards a better and stronger future via treaty, by listening to our First Nations people and by working with the First Peoples' Assembly.

I reflect on some of the remarks I made in the contribution I put to this house when we were debating the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, and I just reflect on some of the words I used and some of the words of the chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly. I remember talking about how this was over 200 years in the making, the Statewide Treaty Bill, and this is one of the first outcomes of that treaty. The rest of this debate, the rest of the conversation and the rest of the coverage are important as well. What people say is really important, and I hope our friends in the media are kind and courteous about this apology. It is important how we speak about it, because that is a reflection on all of us and it is a reflection on society. It is indeed over 200 years in the making. I hope we see positive, thoughtful, considered contributions on what exactly this means. I want to leave the culture wars – I am not saying any of that has been present here today, which is good, and I do not expect it to be – and all of that at the door. Get rid of it. This is too important. We cannot keep playing politics. We cannot keep stuffing around with this stuff; we simply cannot. I believe, as Rueben put it:

Good intentions have too often outlived good outcomes ...

That was such a poignant thing that he said, and it is absolutely so true. He said:

To the Parliament: I remind you that treaty lives beyond the page; it must live beyond these walls.

I think that this apology is one of those moments, so let us not stuff it up. I said, when I was talking on treaty in terms of passing the Statewide Treaty Bill, that:

Today is one of those times that we will reflect on in life ... those moments that you remember where you were when that happened.

This again, as part of that, one of the first outcomes from the treaty bill, is one of those moments. Let us get it right. How do you put a value on that? It is subjective who is on the right side of history, who writes history. It is subjective to some extent, what is the right side of history. But I think we are going to look back at this. We saw that with the national apology that former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made, and we know that the former opposition leader Peter Dutton has regrets about his position. Let us all mark this moment and acknowledge it with the dignity, respect, time, courtesy and coverage it not only needs but absolutely deserves.

I am very hopeful. I know everyone comes to this place with the right intentions. We all have a different way of doing things as individuals but obviously of the parties we respectively represent and of course are preselected by. This is one of those things that is not a political issue. We need to continue on this matter to rise above politics. I spoke before about that priorities argument. There are a lot of priorities when you are in government. Obviously the opposition have a role to play in our democracy, as do the Greens and as do independents. They all have a role to play in a democracy and they all have their own priorities as well.

I remember during the Voice there was this pretend argument that got a little nasty, that pretended that government and parliaments cannot walk and chew gum. Now, we have had a lot of additional sitting weeks because we know that we are here to represent the Victorian people, we have to do their work.

We know that a number of issues, including crime as well as health and education, are of significant importance. For the reform that has been made and the continuing reform around childcare and the continuing reform around crime and law and order we had additional sitting days to address those matters. The government and all governments should be able to walk and chew gum, and if you cannot, you should not be in government. We can have lots of priorities. This is absolutely one of those priorities, and so it should be.

I want to thank everyone who will speak on this motion. I of course look forward to the apology. It will be a significant moment in this place, in the history of this state and in the history of this nation. I look forward to hearing the contributions from colleagues, and of course if any others in the opposition or our friends in the Greens or independents or otherwise would like to say a few words, I look forward to hearing their thoughtful words as well. I support this motion.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (11:52): I was listening and reflecting upon the impassioned contributions of my colleagues and something that the member for Bayswater just mentioned: that this will be a seminal moment where we will remember precisely where we were. On 13 February 2008, pregnant with my daughter, living in Wagga but travelling down to Albury for my husband to undergo his citizenship test prior to becoming an Australian, I sat in the car and I cried as I heard the apology to the stolen generations delivered by then Prime Minister Rudd. I still recall precisely where I was, and I know that the same will happen – there will be an echo not just in this place when we come back next Tuesday and not just across the state of Victoria but beyond and across the rest of the country, as they look to us and see what we are doing, having actually genuinely listened to the First Peoples of our state.

I would like to acknowledge the minister herself for all the work that has been done. She has been the minister for Indigenous affairs for 10 years, with the tenacity and the vision to see the fruition of Voice, truth, treaty and, to finish it off, this apology. My daughter, who I just mentioned, said to me, ‘Mum, why are you going back to Parliament next week? What’s that day for?’, and I said there could not be a better reason for it. We are going back to mark a historic moment in time. We are going to apologise wholeheartedly and fully, not just for aspects. And I do appreciate and acknowledge there have been other apologies – but not like this. This will be in totality, and this is driven by our First Peoples, and that is incredibly important. As the member for Bayswater said, we have listened. As the member for Geelong in her impassioned contribution said, this is coming from our First Peoples. This is precisely why we need to do it, and I cannot think of a better reason to return to Parliament next Tuesday than to be here and be present for it. I am incredibly proud that I am part of a government that has driven this, and I thank everyone who has been involved. That moment in this chamber when we heard our First People speak in here with clarity and conviction still resonates with me to this day. Watching us pass treaty has been one of the most profoundly moving experiences I have had in my life, let alone in my parliamentary life – in my life, full stop. I reflected in my contribution then when we were talking about treaty on how ashamed I felt of what I had been taught and of what I then taught only 20 years ago. We have come so far, but we still have a long way to go, and this apology marks the next important, crucial and critical step in the journey together.

It is about bringing Victorians together. It is not about anything else. It was disappointing to hear some glib comments coming from the member for Brighton. I did think he would be better than that, I have to say. One of the comments shot out across the chamber was the interjection ‘Definitely leading on apologies’. Do you know what, I think it is wonderful that we are able to stand up and apologise. It is a mark of our government, a mark of respect and a mark of the moral fibre that we possess to be able to acknowledge the past harms, because without true apology there can be no healing. In order to move forward we must stop and sit in it and understand the damage that has been done and continues intergenerationally. What was wreaked upon our First Nations people by European settlers was horrendous, horrific and distressing, and it is time that we do what we are doing. Again I say I am so proud that we are doing it here in Victoria first. I genuinely hope that this continues and echoes around the country and the rest of the states and territories follow suit. I am beyond thrilled that this apology



will take place and that it has come out of the negotiations on treaty and it will be full hearted and full throated and with conviction.

I do also want to acknowledge that there will be many who feel trauma and who feel anguish as they listen to the apology, because this will resonate so deeply with them, so there is support available, as the minister outlined. It is wonderful that it will be streamed live so anyone anywhere around the nation, around the state and anywhere else in the world will be able to tune in and watch this historic moment. As I say, I still recall with acute clarity that moment that the apology to the Stolen Generations was made, and I know that this will leave an indelible mark on all of us.

Once again, I express my incredible pride that this is happening and my eternal gratitude and thanks to the First Peoples' Assembly and to every First Nations person who spoke their truth, no matter the pain that it may have caused them, that they would have felt so deeply when giving their contributions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission. It is not easy to speak of past traumas and hurts, and we know that in this place because many of us sometimes have to go into our emotional depths when we contribute on certain bills. Empathy is what I ask of everyone when we sit through this and listen and understand how much courage it takes for people to speak of a truth that has hurt them so much, so I am eternally, eternally grateful to everyone. All I can say is I am very pleased the opposition will not be opposing this. I look forward to Tuesday, and as I say, what a fabulous reason to come back for one last sitting day for this year.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (11:58): It is an absolute pleasure to speak on this motion this afternoon. I firstly just want to acknowledge some members of the First Peoples' Assembly in the gallery today, even though we should not do that. Victoria will on the 9th take a very, very important step towards addressing past injustices towards our Aboriginal people in Australia and building a stronger and united future here in Victoria.

I note that a lot of the members on this side have spoken about the importance of this apology and how it is unprecedented, and I believe it absolutely is unprecedented. We have never had a process before like the Yoorrook Justice Commission where we have listened to truth and people's sometimes horrifying, tragic, traumatic lived experience. This apology is entirely different from what has been cited, the apology from the Kennett era, which I think was on 17 September 1997. I just read that apology, actually, and I am stunned, to say the least, that we would be here today – even though there is bipartisan support for this motion – actually talking about how there was an apology 28 years ago about something totally different, because it was really about the Stolen Generations. I took the member for Brighton up and looked up that apology, and I will put into *Hansard* what it actually was so that people are clear on what Mr Kennett said:

That this house apologises to the Aboriginal people on behalf of all Victorians for the past policies under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families and expresses deep regret at the hurt and distress this has caused and reaffirms its support for reconciliation ...

It is entirely appropriate that we return on the 9th, after Yoorrook Commission, which uncovered and educated us, to make another apology specific to what we have found and what has been recommended. Funnily enough, when you type 'apology' and 'Jeff Kennett' into your Google search, you also find a couple of really disturbing things. I am sure the Jeff Kennett fan club will get up and be about –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** One of those things is that when you make an apology, you really need to take action or the apology is worth nothing.

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul EDBROOKE:** For the person that we are talking about, who was called on in 2022 to resign from the Hawthorn Football Club after those Rioli revelations –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It is actually, I believe, a substantive motion. I do not uphold the point of order.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Thank you for schooling the member for Brighton on basics with Parliament. It is a substantive motion and the supporters group from the Hawks in 2022 – this is on the news in Google – called for Kennett to resign from Hawthorn, with the Hawks releasing a statement apologising to Cyril Rioli and his wife for the racism they experienced at the club.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, how is sledging relevant?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member may have strayed from the motion, and I encourage him to come back.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I will come back. My line here is around the fact that when you apologise, if you are actually in any way committed to that apology, we would not be seeing headlines like that years later. It is entirely horrible when you type those two words ‘apology’ and ‘Kennett’ into Google and see things like Jeff Kennett calling a woman at a Young Liberals function a bitch.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your previous ruling.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member is allowed to rebut previous debate. I encourage the member to be on the motion.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** The line of argument from those opposite, as I sat here and heard, was that there have been four apologies, so we really do not need another apology. When you think about that, it means we do not need another apology because everything has changed. Everything in our world has changed because that apology happened. What I am displaying here is the fact that we might need to apologise every year, every day until things change, because there is a cultural issue. When you can have a leader in this house apologise and then be accused of those things, that is not what an apology is. An apology is – I am just going to change my tone, as we have got some kids coming in – when you are sympathetic, when you are compassionate to someone’s cause and when you have educated yourself about what has happened.

The key here is education. When I went to school, we learned a lot about Japanese history, Chinese history and Russian revolutions. Sadly, we did not learn anything about our own proud history at all. It was only years later, well out of university, that I was educated by friends and by reading about what actually happened in Australia, what actually happened in Victoria and what John Batman actually did, right on this space here and now. To be standing here today and to hear that we probably do not need to apologise, that it is somehow superfluous after what came out of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, is absolutely mind blowing, but I think I can connect that back to a lack of education. There is a direct correlation between naivety and people not reading the Yoorrook commission or not tuning in to see what was happening. As an Australian and as a Victorian, I was devastated by what I heard, and I learned a lot. Unfortunately, a lot of what we witnessed was not actually in the history books because a lot of it was oral history. To hear family members coming out and telling us what their family members went through, what has happened generation after generation; it is amazing that they could do that. But it also lends itself towards the fact that we need – and this government has been doing this – to educate people better. And I look across the chamber and I think that there is no better example of why we need that education and why we need the next generation to know what went on.

So when I am here on the 9th, proudly apologising, I hope I can have a discussion with my children – who are a little bit older than Mr Groth’s children over there, and not as cute these days either – and I hope they can ask: Why are we apologising? I even hope they say, ‘Why do we have an apology at an Australian level, at a national level? Why do we have an apology at a state level?’ so I can sit them down and we can have a really good chat about why we do this. After all, is it that big an ask, after what has happened in 200 years? Is it that big an ask to come into Parliament and make it a historic

day and fulfil one of the recommendations of the Yoorrook commission? I actually do not think it is, and again I think it comes down to education. If people want to come in here and say, 'We're bipartisan, but we really don't need to do this because Jeff Kennett did it a long time ago', 28 years ago, I think that is a very long bow to draw when it was an apology about something totally different, years before treaty even became something set as a serious policy.

For those opposite, I do understand that there is concern. I do understand that some of those fears will not be able to be allayed until people educate themselves, until people actually read some books. I would have expected that we would be standing here today and there would be wholehearted, united support for this, not just a 'Yes, we'll do it, but we don't think there is a reason we should do it again.' I would love to hear some of those opposite get up and say, 'This is what we should do, it's the right thing, and we should do it again,' because it is an apology that is totally different to anything we have heard before, and it is the right thing to do. I commend this motion to the house.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (12:09): Deputy Speaker, thank you for staying in the Chair so that I can contribute in support of the minister's motion. I would like to at the outset thank the minister for her work and that of her team in bringing this motion to this place and in laying the groundwork for the apology that will take place at 11 o'clock in this chamber on Tuesday. I am glad that the opposition are supporting the motion, and I look forward to there being contributions from across the chamber in the context of that apology.

There has been some debate about the need for a further apology to be undertaken by this Parliament, noting that there have been previous apologies. My understanding is that the apology that has been mentioned in the context of the Kennett government some 28 years ago was perhaps – and I do not diminish that in any way – a narrower apology in the sense that it was targeted or framed around the specific issue of the stolen generations, whereas the apology that will be delivered by the Premier is a broader based apology that seeks to engage with the complexities of Victorian history that I talked about in my contribution some weeks ago on the treaty bill as it was then, and I am glad to say, the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 and the treaty as it is now as a consequence of its passage through both houses.

In that contribution I discussed that we were seeking to give an apology in this chamber, in this Legislative Assembly, and the debate around the treaty took place in the context of a Westminster democratic institution that reflects a significant part of Victoria's history. But with that history of good, which has created democratic institutions to which we all belong and values that we can commonly share, there is a really problematic history, one of dispossession and suffering and trauma that is not just parked in the history books, although it is a prominent dimension of that history, but it echoes and manifests into the present day in the context of significant and inexcusable, I think, gulfs in outcomes between First Nations Victorians and broader populations that reflect that history. These are not abstract or arcane ideas; they are real and they are practical.

That is why I think it is appropriate that this Parliament, in giving an apology next Tuesday, led by the Premier, in some ways takes a form of corporate responsibility for the actions which were undertaken in the name of previous parliaments. They were actions and policies which in some respects I am sure those who were seeking to design them perhaps thought there was a positive intent behind them. But they have caused so much harm, real harm, to the Aboriginal Victorians who were subject to those laws and policies, but also to their descendants, who we represent in this place as modern-day, contemporary Victorian members of Parliament.

Apologies are often contested in some respects because they can be pejoratively termed as being predominantly about symbolism rather than about substance and form. I think the essence of that debate has been present even this morning and this afternoon. Symbolism, firstly, I think is important. Deputy Speaker, much of what happens in this place is inherently symbolic: the mace on the table, your role in overseeing debate, the colours in this place. All of that is loaded with meaning and substance, although fundamentally it is also symbolic.

But an apology is not just about that symbolism. Important though I think symbolism actually is, it does also reflect substance and form that have been manifest in the context of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which has been a comprehensive process whereby First Nations leaders have worked with government and interrogated government and the executive about policies and legislation, their effect and impact upon Victorians as a whole and in particular First Nations Victorians and the extent to which those policy settings contribute to closing the gap or indeed exacerbate that gap in the first instance. This apology stems from that process of the Yoorrook commission.

I am also conscious that while this will be the first apology that I have been party to or privy to as a member of this chamber in the context of First Nations Victorians, it is not the first apology that has been offered on behalf of this house by the Premier. It was a humbling experience and a privilege to have been here to see the Premier offer an apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. That apology was offered on the back of a really comprehensive process of consultation and dialogue between the government, and particularly the Premier in her personal capacity but also obviously as the head of government in Victoria, and those who had experienced harm, neglect and abuse in what should have been settings of care but were so far from that.

The apology, again, in that context was important. It was symbolic, but it also catalysed a process that was really substantive, I think. I had the great privilege in many respects of being able to represent the government and the Premier in working with the children, now adults, who had been in those institutional settings and their representatives, seeking to co-design a substantive redress scheme that sought to give effect to the intent of the apology and to provide practical manifestation of this government's and this Parliament's regret and genuine sorrow for the experiences that those people had as children and for the legacy that they had.

I conceive of this apology that is being proposed through this motion in similar terms, whereby the apology is an important step. It is loaded with symbolism, but it is also something of substance in that it is bound into the process of treaty, whereby we are seeking to empower Aboriginal Victorians to be at the heart of decision-making about things which impact them and their communities, so that together and collectively we can close the gap in education, in health care, in life chances and opportunities and in economic outcomes. That remains I think an enduring challenge, obviously, but a real scar on our society. I think all of us are drawn to this place because we believe in promoting and sustaining a better and stronger society, but it is very hard to say that we have achieved that or that we are doing so successfully while there is such an enduring gap in life chances and outcomes between those who are Aboriginal and those who are not. This apology I think is an important and indeed substantive part of the process towards closing that gap.

I am mindful of the apology that was offered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in February 2008, I think, as one of the first acts of that Labor government and of that Parliament after the 2007 federal election. It was one of those moments I think where people remember where they were and how they watched it. I remember being in Hobart at the time and watching it with family and being very moved by the words and by the presence of representatives of Aboriginal Australia and their communities to whom that apology was directed. Again, there were those who pejoratively suggested that that apology was solely about symbolism. I do not think it was. I think it catalysed a renewal of effort on the part of government to work proactively and substantively to close that gap with an entirely new framework, implemented by that government subsequent to the apology, noting that the apology was one of the first acts of the entire government and the Parliament in order to give effect to the sentiments that were captured within the apology.

I think and I hope something similar will take place as a consequence of the apology that is being proposed to be offered by the Premier on Tuesday, that it can more fully complete Victoria, that it can recognise that we have a history that has built institutions like this one and that has enabled us to have a vibrant, liberal democracy but that at the same time there is a complexity to our history that is

unresolved. It is unresolved because a gap endures. So we offer an apology for the harm that has been perpetrated on Aboriginal Victorians, and I hope that in doing so we can build a brighter future.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (12:19): I rise today very proudly to support the motion. Actually the motion is just to invite the Legislative Council members in here, to give the apology, and I think it is a really important thing to do. Often we invite them in here, and we all squeeze in, for those really historic moments, and we will have that happening again next Tuesday. It is also actually one of the only days we are sitting during school holidays for some of our kids who are in high school, and I am hoping to bring my children in here next week to witness this historic occasion. First Peoples have suffered so much under colonisation, and we heard so many stories through the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and this is an opportunity to apologise on behalf of those past governments, on behalf of those who colonised this country and treated those people, our First People, with such disrespect.

We know there was genocide. We know there was horrible abuse. We know there was denying of language. We know there was every attempt taken to take away their culture and their dignity. We have seen that throughout history with people, and unfortunately we have seen it so often through the British colonisers. They did it to my ancestors in Ireland. We have seen it all over the world. The First Peoples have asked for an apology through the treaty process, and it is a humble request. It is not asking much, but it will mean so much to so many. It will mean that their voices, their stories, are heard and acknowledged. We know as members of Parliament how important it is for people to be heard and to feel heard and to know that their stories mean something, that their part of history is not forgotten and that our children learn that and future generations learn that and new people to this country learn that. It is so important that those stories are recognised, and an apology is the least we can do. It is such a humble request.

I was so, so proud to be here when the treaty bill was passed in this house. I would have loved to have been here when it was passed in the other house too, but I am so pleased we are doing the celebrations on Friday night, which I hope to get to as well. I am honoured to be part of treaty. I am honoured to be part of the apology that will happen next Tuesday.

I really want to thank the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. What an incredible legacy she will leave behind, getting treaty through, being here for the apology that they have humbly requested. And the Premier delivering that is so very important, as the leader of our Parliament, as the leader of our government, as the leader of our fabulous party, who has driven this historic apology and historic treaty. I say 'driven', but I probably should say 'walked alongside with'. This whole process has been a partnership where we have allowed that self-determination, and it should not be 'allowed' – it should be a right to have your voices heard, to have the ability to self-determine the decisions that are made for your people. Governments should have the respect to do that.

I want to also thank the Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples. She has done a power of work, and it was beautiful to hear her speak so well every time with such heart. She truly understands our First Peoples and speaks for them every time, rationally and fairly and with true representation and partnership, walking side by side. I also want to acknowledge previous ministers who have worked really hard to get us to this space where we have treaty and we have an apology, as has been asked for.

Treaty was a very long road, and a lot of people have been involved. I want to acknowledge Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geraldine for their work as the first co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly. What an incredible thing to lead that work and ask for the truth-telling that resulted in the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which was chaired by Aunty Eleanor Bourke. I want to thank her for her incredible work and for hearing those stories. The parliamentary secretary talked about the trauma and the re-trauma and the cultural load. It is so heavy, and it is so hard for the people who carry that. They also carry so much discrimination, and it is getting worse. It breaks my heart.

There is so much disrespect, and trying to explain their position, trying to explain their stories and trying to be heard takes a huge toll. I thank them, because I know how important it is. Sharing stories is the only way we help each other understand. I know in my community, which is a very multicultural community, there is a lot of misunderstanding and there is a lot of prejudgement, and it is only when people come together and hear each other's stories and can understand where people are coming from that you have that true understanding that builds cohesion. So this will be part of that. The truth-telling was part of that.

I also want to thank our current co-chairs Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray for their power of work. They should be so very proud, and all of the First Peoples' Assembly. I have worked closely with Uncle Andrew Gardiner and Gnerick Gnerick Gary Murray. We have worked for many years on the Ballerit Mooroop project in Glenroy, and I was proud to provide another support letter for the grant application that they are putting in at the moment. I also of course want to thank Travis Lovett, deputy chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. It was another historic moment that I was so proud to be part of, meeting him on the stairs here at Parliament and being part of that when he handed over the message stick. To still have the oldest continuing culture on earth and be part of that is such a privilege. I am so grateful that we have had that opportunity. Of course I thank Aunty Jill Gallagher, the treaty commissioner, for her work over so many decades, and all of the people who have worked so hard. Of course there are too many to mention here.

As the parliamentary secretary said, the trauma will be raised next week, as it is whenever there is an apology. I remember the stolen generations apology, seeing the people in the gallery and the deep feelings and the trauma that you could see. That will happen again next week. I just want them to know that we are here for them. We want to be part of that healing. We hope that helps in a small way to lessen the burden and to support them for the pain that they have suffered. There will be support available, and I thank the government for supporting that and the First Peoples' Assembly for organising that. I think it is really important. And I of course, and all of us, will be very respectful of the day.

We have spoken about the stolen generations apology, and for me that was a very historic moment. Unfortunately at Peter Khalil's election auction I missed out on a signed copy of that, and I would love that in my office instead of the printed copy I have got, because it was historic. It was a terrible time in our history, and we should apologise for that. There are so many things that should be apologised for and we will be doing that on Tuesday, and I am very, very proud of that. I fully support the apology that acknowledges the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which they have called for, that acknowledges the responsibility of predecessors for laws, policies and practices that contributed to the injustices.

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (12:29): I too would like to rise in support of this motion put by the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and in doing so reflect upon the most significant thing that has happened in this place since I was given the great privilege of representing my electorate of Footscray, and that of course is the passage of treaty. It is a great honour to be part of a government that has worked so tirelessly with our First Peoples, and the minister has done such an enormous amount of work to get us to this point. That was a historic day, when we had passage of the treaty. Now it is only fitting that we conclude this parliamentary year with our first act in response to treaty, which is the commitment to an apology that has been negotiated.

I would also like to acknowledge the deputy chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission Travis Lovett and acknowledge how powerful it was in our community when he was getting to the final stages of his walk for justice across Victoria. There were hundreds of people from my community there to meet Travis and other members of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The main message of that was to walk alongside our First Peoples and to acknowledge the hurt and the trauma and the pain and the suffering that has been caused as a result of colonisation.

I know that next week will have a very significant impact on members of my community. I was really, really touched by some of the cards and the letters I received, which I have hanging on the wall in my

electorate office, urging the government to keep going with the treaty process. Not many people would necessarily associate Melbourne's inner west with the rich First Nations culture that it does have, because many people identify the inner west with our industrial legacy that was shaped post colonisation. But the Maribyrnong River valley was a meeting place for the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people. It was a significant place for trading. William Cooper called Footscray home, and it was from Footscray that he led perhaps the first calls for treaty in the 1940s and 1950s when he wrote to I believe it was King George calling for a treaty with our First Peoples. He established a group of activists who worked out of a little house in Footscray and did an enormous amount of advocacy on behalf of our First Peoples. I know that this will be a significant day for members of my community.

One of the most extraordinary things that I reflect upon is that if you look at comparable nations such as Canada – people like to think that we are very similar to our Canadian cousins – in Canada they have 29 treaties in place already across the country. In New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi has been in place for almost 200 years. But here in Australia Victoria is the first and only jurisdiction to have established a treaty with our First Peoples, and that has been more than a decade's work, including the establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly.

The final report of the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommended an acknowledgement of the responsibility of predecessors for laws, policies and practices that contributed to injustices against First Peoples in Victoria. Some people have reflected on the national apology for the Stolen Generations in 2008, but here in Victoria we have absolutely come a long way through the work of Yoorrook, through the work of the First Peoples' Assembly.

I remember the day that we were in here with Aunty Geraldine and Marcus Stewart as the inaugural chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly, and what a powerful moment that was. It is a significant event when we have members of the Legislative Council join us in here. We know that reflects an important moment. As you noted in your contribution, Acting Speaker Walters, of course symbolism is important as well as the actual steps forward that we take together. It is important that collectively as Victorians we acknowledge the past, the wrongs that occurred and the ongoing intergenerational trauma that is experienced by our First Nations community across Victoria. May this be the beginning of a healing process and a change – a cultural change, a cultural shift – in the way we deal with public policy and decision-making for what is the longest continuing culture in the world: our First Peoples. I very much look forward to next Tuesday at 11:00 when the Premier will make a formal apology. The Leader of the Opposition, the Greens and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples will also speak on the apology.

There is much to note in the apology, because the Yoorrook Justice Commission heard evidence about the colonisation of Victoria, which was marked by dispossession, displacement and violence towards First Peoples. It is very important that as part of that truth-telling process there is that formal apology. It will be streamed on the Parliament of Victoria website and I know people in my community, especially young people, will be watching. During the referendum some of the polling places in my electorate voted 90 per cent in favour of the national Voice to Parliament. It is something that I am often asked about when I visit schools, and I say with pride that Victoria is again a leader in this nation, and it is a leader in truth, justice and treaty. This is a pathway to acknowledge the past, make real and practical changes and better outcomes into the future, and of course to close the gap. That is something that has of course been foundational in why we have pursued these reforms.

I would like to acknowledge the minister at the table – and the former minister as well – for all of the work. The band is back together. As Victorians we are indebted to you and your staff, and also to the parliamentary secretary who spoke so beautifully before, as she always does, around these issues. Her understanding around the trauma and the injustice that is felt across Victoria within our First Nations communities is unprecedented. Thank you for your work. I commend the motion to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Invitation to Legislative Council members**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (12:39): I move:

That:

- (1) the Legislative Assembly invites members of the Legislative Council to attend a sitting of the Assembly in the Legislative Assembly chamber on Tuesday 9 December 2025 at 11 am for the consideration of the motion endorsing the statement of apology to First Peoples;
- (2) the lower public gallery on the opposition side of the house be deemed part of the Legislative Assembly chamber and the Assembly standing orders be applied for the time that Council members are invited onto the floor of the house;
- (3) a message be sent to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

**Motion agreed to.**

***Bills*****Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments***Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 16, page 13, lines 12 and 13, omit “the purpose of carrying out the police officer’s duties;” and insert –
  - “(i) the purpose of investigating or prosecuting an offence; or
  - (ii) the purpose of investigating an incident in relation to a commercial passenger vehicle service;

**Note**

See section 56 of the **Victoria Police Act 2013** in relation to the execution of process and warrants.”.
2. Clause 16, page 14, after line 11 insert –

“(1A) Before the regulator publishes a notice under subsection (1), the regulator must consult with the Information Commissioner appointed under section 6C of the **Freedom of Information Act 1982**.

(1B) The regulator must cause a review of the minimum standards published in a notice under subsection (1) to be undertaken every 3 years from the date of the first notice being published.”.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:40): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

These amendments speak to providing stronger protections around privacy and data collection. While the bill already contained provision for minimum standards determined by the regulator in relation to the collection, possession, transmission, disclosure and destruction of security camera and audio recording device data, the amendments made in the other place will require the regulator to consult with the Office of the Information Commissioner before publishing the standards and require the regulator to review the standards every three years to ensure they are keeping up with modern privacy concerns and changes in technology. Additionally, the amendments made in the other place will limit the purposes by which police officers can access security camera data. The purposes will be limited to the investigation of commercial passenger vehicle incidents and the investigation and prosecution of crimes. These are good amendments that strengthen this important legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (12:41): I do not intend to speak on the amendments for long. The opposition supports the amendments. We did so in the Legislative Council, and we do, obviously,



today, and we do not oppose the passage of the bill. The significant privacy, proportionality and governance concerns, which we raised during the debate in the Assembly, were formalised through our reasoned amendment. The government did put forward two substantive amendments directly reflecting the issues raised both in the Legislative Assembly and in the Council. As the minister stated, the agreed government amendments are around consultation with the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner when creating minimum standards, and the mandatory consultation with OVIC is a move forward, and the statutory review of the standards every three years to ensure ongoing accountability and compliance with contemporary privacy practice embeds independent privacy oversight into the regulatory framework, which is precisely the kind of safeguard which the previous shadow minister for transport, the member for Nepean, had been seeking when he moved his reasoned amendment and sought those amendments from the opposition then in the Legislative Council in the third reading. The second amendment is the narrowing of police access powers, and I understand the government will refine those police provisions in the bill to narrow those powers so that there is only access and use for commercial passenger vehicle audio and camera recordings in the course of an investigation and other matters can be obtained, and that does ensure the power is targeted, proportionate, not open to misuse or routine data access outside of the defined investigative purposes. As a consequence, we supported those amendments in the Legislative Council, and we will do so here in the Assembly today.

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (12:42): I just wanted to put on record very quickly my support for the amendments. I thank the Shadow Minister for Public Transport for addressing the amendments in their substance to what they go to. I just wanted to also, as the shadow minister who was carrying the bill at the time when it came through this place, thank my staff, who worked closely with the minister's office to strengthen these privacy provisions and make sure that this bill does not invade too far into the privacy of Victorians when it comes to recordings within those commercial passenger vehicles. These are amendments that the Council and the government brought forward in the Council, that we supported, that do make this a better bill, and I think that is what we should always be trying to do in this place. Any legislation that comes through, if there are ways to make improvements on either side of the chamber, we should always be looking to do so. I just want to put on record my thanks to my staff, who helped work with the government and the minister's office on the amendments that have come to us. As the Shadow Minister for Public Transport the member for Bulleen said, we will be supporting these amendments.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

**Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (12:44): I will just resume from yesterday's contribution. As I explained yesterday, this bill amends the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 to introduce a trailing liabilities scheme in relation to the rehabilitation of the land of the three declared mines, being ENGIE's Hazelwood mine, EnergyAustralia's Yallourn mine and of course AGL's Loy Yang mine. It will clarify the operation of rehabilitation plans and declared mine rehabilitation plans. It provides additional mechanisms for the variation of rehabilitation plans and declared mine rehabilitation plans, and it requires notice of any change in control of corporate declared mine licensees.

In addition, it will make technical changes to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023. As Victoria transitions away from dirty, coal-fired energy, it is important that

the mining industry remains responsible for the rehabilitation and the closure of the declared mines in the Latrobe Valley. I did make reference to the contribution from the member for Morwell yesterday in regard to what his constituents want to see in regard to the rehabilitation of the mines down in the Morwell area. In this bill we are making it clear what the mining industry is required to do as part of this rehabilitation process, and we are protecting Victorian taxpayers on the off-chance that a mine licensee fails to meet its rehabilitation obligations or is otherwise unable to meet these obligations. We are protecting Victorians so that it is not coming out of their pockets.

The rehabilitation process takes a lot of planning, and it is a dynamic process. It is a process that commences even before mining starts, and it continues over the operational life of the mine and through the final rehabilitation efforts after the closure of the mine. This process primarily involves making the site safe and stable, but it can also include thinking towards the future uses for the site, whether it can be used in some sort of recreational capacity or public capacity once it is rehabilitated.

We know that mines are inherently risky landscapes and that the Latrobe Valley coalmines are especially complex. They are unstable and they are fire prone. They are large voids close to the towns, close to Morwell. You can see them as you are driving down the freeway there. There are waterways involved within that infrastructure. These mines will require fairly extensive rehabilitation due to their exceptionally large and complex nature and the risk they pose to the surrounding landscape, to the community and to the community infrastructure. The example of that is the Hazelwood mine site, being 4000 hectares. It sits, as I said, right along the side of the freeway and very close to the township of Morwell. It is an interesting location, so close to such a township. Of course we all remember the terrible fires down in Hazelwood back in 2014 and how that affected the local communities, causing mass evacuations and road closures, including closing the freeway, or closing the highway, and covering the surrounding area in toxic smoke. It goes without saying that we cannot have an incident like that again, and again, that is what this rehabilitation process is all about.

Progressive rehabilitation involves restoring parts of the mine site during the operations instead of waiting for the mines to close, so rehabilitation can occur while the mine is still active. That approach reduces environmental disruption caused by the mine during its lifetime, and it lessens the load of rehabilitation at the end of the mine's life. You can progressively rehabilitate even though it can be still operational. That is an important part, I think, and reduces the risk and also the cost at the end and the time delay in rehabilitating. That can be an ongoing, active and progressive process.

Of course it would be pretty naive to talk about the huge process of rehabilitation without talking about money – the cost. People that have profited from operating these mines, the companies themselves, should be the ones to follow through on the rehabilitation efforts, and it should not be left to Victorian taxpayers to pick up the bill. We referred to that earlier in the contribution. Operators must lodge a rehabilitation bond with the government before work begins, and those bonds guarantee that funds will be available for rehabilitation even if the operator defaults. Rehabilitation bonds are returned only when Resources Victoria are satisfied that the rehabilitation meets legal and environmental standards. If the work is on private land, the landholder must be consulted about the completed works. It is sort of a surety that a bond is paid up-front to account for rehabilitation. Resources Victoria will assess whether the rehabilitation meets the standard before any bonds are returned. Local councils will also be consulted before any bonds are returned, because it is important within the local area that councils may be involved, so they will be consulted to make sure that they are satisfied with the rehabilitation process before that bond is returned.

The process and the consultation, the working with the organisation or the company that runs the mine, the consultation with the local council and with the community about the rehabilitation process is all quite important before any bonds are returned. The model that is introduced in this bill is modelled broadly on the Commonwealth offshore petroleum industry trailing liabilities regime, and that was introduced back in March 2022. The Commonwealth trailing liabilities scheme was introduced in response to a major rehabilitation failure in the offshore petroleum industry in 2015 where Northern Oil & Gas Australia acquired the Laminaria and Corallina oil fields in the Northern Endeavour floating

production, storage and offtake facility in offshore Commonwealth waters. NOGA was liquidated in 2020, and the Commonwealth government was left with the substantial cost of decommissioning those operations. As a result, the Commonwealth government introduced a trailing liabilities scheme on the basis of the polluter-pays principle. That is exactly what this bond scheme is in regard to the polluter paying or rehabilitating the site. This is a really important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:52): I am pleased to rise on the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025. This is an issue of considerable interest and concern in my electorate of Gippsland South but particularly to my neighbouring colleague in the seat of Morwell because it predominantly relates to the rehabilitation of the three Latrobe Valley coalmines. While there are potential other aspects to it, this is about the declared mines, and this has been an issue of discussion in the Latrobe Valley for decades, frankly.

I grew up in Traralgon. I had two sisters work at the SEC. I have got family still working in the power industry now, and from the time we were kids we were all talking about what would happen to the mines when they were finished. What is not commonly understood is the stability issue with respect to the mines. People say things like, 'We could use it for a car rally. We could turn it into a giant garden. We could fill it up with rubbish from Melbourne' – one of the ones that I personally detest. But none of those things are doable, because the mines have a unique geological situation where groundwater presses up from below the mines and from the sides of the mines on what are called the batters, and at the conclusion of mining, if there is not a counterweight put on top of the mine, then there is a very real risk of what they call floor heave in which the bottom would come up through the groundwater pressure, collapsing the sides, or indeed direct pressure from the sides on the batters that would collapse the side of the mine.

As the member for Melton just indicated, and others have spoken about before, these mines are very close. In the case of the Hazelwood mine – or the Morwell mine, as it should be more appropriately referred to – it is right next to the freeway passing through Morwell. As the member for Morwell said yesterday, you can literally throw a rock into the mine from the freeway. In fact if you are on the other side of the freeway, you can throw a rock into houses in Morwell – that is how close it is. As a result, it is important that we get this process right.

I must begin with an apology to the member for Bulleen. When he had the half-hour slot as a new shadow minister responsible in this place for this legislation, I thought, 'Oh, he will struggle to do enough on this particular technical issue.' But he proved his Latrobe Valley bona fides with his contribution last night, going into great detail. I knew his family had connections to Newborough in particular, but he did a very good job explaining some of the history.

The issues are important. There is a debate in the valley or in Gippsland more broadly that I do find tiresome sometimes. There are some groups, non-government organisations, that are constantly agitating against the companies that have purchased these mines and the associated power stations and now have the responsibility for rehabilitation of the mines. There is a whole lot of discussion, and I think most of it is driven by green NGOs who just want to attack fossil fuel companies. What they are attacking them on is the use of water and the environmental impacts, and they are all legitimate questions absolutely, but it is frustrating to hear some people criticising the use of pit lakes as a cheap solution by these horrible, nasty fossil fuel companies, when in fact the reality is that there is not much of an alternative. If you wanted to fill these mines with soil, you would be literally moving mountains, and that is not going to be feasible or environmentally feasible either.

But it is an issue that the mines are to be filled with water, because that water has got to come from somewhere, and it does have an impact, or can potentially have an impact, on Gippsland South, because the mines run within the Latrobe River system, with the Morwell River flowing next to Hazelwood and through the Yallourn mine and the Traralgon Creek flowing around the Loy Yang mine and eventually into the Latrobe, therefore having an impact on my area downstream, where I

have irrigators – farmers – who are very keen to further develop their properties with water and do not want to see too much water going into a mine.

Indeed an issue that I have been working on for a number of years is the bench 3–4 water. In the 1990s there was water put aside, about 25,000 megalitres, for a potential bench 3–4 as it was known, for an additional Loy Yang power station. Of course that station never went ahead, so that water has been sitting there for some time. I ran a campaign with local farmers to get that water allocated for productive use. The government finally agreed to do that a couple of years ago through the sustainable water strategy, but they decided to share 16 gigalitres of that water and set aside 9 for future industrial use, which I actually think is probably quite a smart decision, with the remaining 16 gigalitres to be shared between the environment, traditional owners and irrigators. The government, for whatever reason, instead of just saying ‘We’ll share it three ways: a third, a third and a third’ – we all would have been a bit cranky, but we all would have got on with it – the government took two years to make a decision on how to share that water, and finally it is now proceeding. But it was a case of the bureaucracy and the red tape that I think hampers this government in particular that meant that decision could not have been made quicker.

I do have a concern. Absolutely the owners of the mines need to be responsible for the rehabilitation. I find some aspects of this legislation troubling: the retrospective nature and the potential for the minister to decide that someone who owned the mine 20 years ago should be called in to make a contribution. That seems strange, particularly in the circumstance where the SEC or the Victorian government is expressly not able to be part of that process. That is, I think, a little silly in that the Victorian people and the Victorian government benefited from the SEC mining those coal pits for decades, literally around 80 years in some cases, and there is potentially, certainly by principle, an argument that the state should make some contribution. That is long gone. The decisions have been made that those who own the mines are responsible for their rehabilitation, and I absolutely agree with that because it needs to be done properly.

I have got a very short amount of time left. I have in fact travelled to Germany, the old East Germany, and looked at some of their lignite mines – lignite being brown coal as well – to see what can be done with rehabilitation. I went to one in particular where there was a beautiful lake, wineries on the banks, housing developments and a marina. I remember a few years ago we did see the Lake Como comparison on the front page of the *Herald Sun*. But I think it is true that we can do this properly, and I hope that it can be done properly for the people of Latrobe Valley and Gippsland.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable Jinson Charls, Minister for People, Sport and Culture, Minister for Disability, Minister for Arts, Minister for Youth, Seniors and Equality, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Veterans in the Northern Territory.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Victorian Managed Insurance Authority**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. The Ombudsman has today confirmed the VMIA spent \$22.8 million on top-tier law firms to run an adversarial campaign against the families affected by home builder collapses. How is it fair that this government used almost 23 million taxpayer dollars to legally bully Victorians into submission rather than completing their homes?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): In answering the Leader of the Liberal Party’s question, can I agree that what happened to the former clients of Porter Davis was absolutely not fair. They were put in such tremendous financial distress as a result of some quite inappropriate action from Porter Davis. What is also not fair is the characterisation by the Leader of the Liberal Party as to the

work that was undertaken. As the minister has already today acknowledged, as reported in the Ombudsman's report, where the behaviour of some staff was inappropriate, there has been an apology, and the minister has spoken to the VMIA. But let us also reflect, as I said, that what happened to those former clients of Porter Davis was unprecedented. It was an extremely stressful time. I would have thought that the Leader of the Liberal Party would not have wanted to add to the distress of home owners by misrepresenting the situation.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very specific question, and the Premier has been debating the matter rather than dealing with the question put to her.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Indeed as a result of the circumstances around Porter Davis there has been substantial reform work led by the minister that has resulted in the establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission, led by commissioner Anna Cronin, who is doing outstanding work. She is someone who is firmly on the side of consumers and has worked to both reform the regulator and also strengthen protections for consumers. Those protections for consumers come through the buyer protections bill, which we brought to the Parliament and was opposed by the Liberal Party, who clearly were not interested in fairness then for home owners.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier has not dealt with the \$23 million in legal bullying from this government.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask you to raise points of order in the correct manner. If your point of order was to do with relevance, the Premier was being relevant. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): The Ombudsman stated:

Many homeowners found VMIA's use of lawyers intimidating. Being contacted by a law firm about their claim gave people the impression that VMIA was essentially on a litigation footing from the outset.

Why did the government treat these Victorians, who had lost everything, with such contempt?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The Minister for Finance and the member for Nepean can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Minister for Finance and member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): The Leader of the Liberal Party has read from a section of the Ombudsman's report, and we have acknowledged that where there were behaviour and actions that were seen as inappropriate the minister has unreservedly apologised and has spoken to the VMIA. But I would also like to ensure that the Leader of the Liberal Party is accurate in acknowledging other parts of the Ombudsman's report that acknowledge that using law firms increased the VMIA's capacity to manage claims and processes more quickly, because of course what occurred with Porter Davis and their deeply inappropriate behaviour was unprecedented and stressful, and there was action taken to support home owners as quickly as possible.

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge a delegation from the County Assembly of Bomet in Kenya to our gallery: the Honourable Eric Kirui, the Honourable Peter Mutai, the Honourable Josphat Kipkirui, the Honourable Catherine Chepngetich and the Honourable Monica Manyei. My apologies for my mispronunciation. Welcome.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): I am proud to be Premier of a state where more and more people are choosing to live here, choosing to build or buy a home here, choosing to send their kids to school here and choosing to start a business here because they see a future here in Victoria.

When Victoria is growing, there is a simple choice before us: build the homes that young people and families need, or do we let a handful of loud, outdated voices stand in the way?

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Not you. Our government chooses to build. Further evidence of the bold reforms and actions we are taking is today another announcement by the hardworking Minister for Planning to cut through red tape and scrap 1970s rules around car parking, making sure that we can get more homes built next to great public transport locations by scrapping outdated car-parking provisions, which not only gets homes built more quickly and easily but means it is quicker for developers. It also means that it saves money – saves money for developers, which also saves money for home owners.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We understand on this side of the house that when you build homes, member for Frankston, you also need to invest in the communities around them, which is why we are taking the existing infrastructure contribution system and understanding, from listening to industry, where it needs to be strengthened – an existing program that is about building better communities. We think it is only fair that when you are building homes you have got to invest in communities so young people get the chance. The Liberal Party just keep wanting to block those young people getting into their home.

#### **Victorian Managed Insurance Authority**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. The Ombudsman's report exposed a damning workplace culture at the Labor government's insurer. Staff said of affected home owners 'I hate them all' and 'stupid effen query' and bragged about putting an 'expletive-C owner ... in her place'. Will the Premier now also apologise to Victorians for the use of this appalling language?

*Interjections from gallery.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The house will pause while the gallery is cleared.

**Public gallery cleared.**

**Sitting suspended 2:12 pm until 3:27 pm.**

**Bridget VALLENCE:** My question is to the Premier. The Ombudsman's report exposed a damning workplace culture at the Labor government's insurer. Staff said of affected home owners 'I hate them all', 'stupid effen query' –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Staff said of affected home owners 'I hate them all' and 'stupid effen query' and bragged about putting a 'C-expletive owner ... in her place'. Will the Premier now also apologise to Victorians for the use of this appalling language?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:28): As I said in my answer to the question earlier on this matter, this language is entirely inappropriate. I note that the VMIA has apologised. The Minister for Finance has also apologised, and indeed I do as well. No-one should be subject to that sort of language, particularly for those former Porter Davis clients who were experiencing extreme distress and pressure as a result of the highly inappropriate behaviour from Porter Davis.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:29): Given this culture of contempt for Victorians, are the staff behind these comments still employed at the Labor government's insurer?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:29): As I referred to earlier, that organisation has now been disbanded and the responsibilities for these matters sit with the Building and Plumbing Commission, which is being led by Anna Cronin. Having met with Anna, the commissioner, I know her commitment –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was very narrow about these particular staff who made these disgraceful comments. Are they still employed at the insurer?

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant and was not debating the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I think those of us who know and work with Anna Cronin know that she expects the highest of standards from those in the workplaces that she works with. As to the nature of the employment of those individuals, I would have to refer this to Commissioner Cronin for further advice, because this behaviour is not acceptable. Apologies have been issued, and I know Anna's commitment to driving a better culture in this workplace but also better service delivery for consumers who have been affected by these matters.

#### Ministers statements: housing

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (15:30): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's generational reforms to Victoria's planning system – reforms that will speed up approvals, cut delays and unlock more homes and more housing choice. At its heart our planning reform agenda is about one urgent, simple goal: more homes built faster in all the places people want to live. That goal stands in stark contrast to those opposite. When they had the chance to support meaningful change, they said, 'No, not in my backyard.' The only thing they have managed to overhaul is their frontbench, a revolving door of shadow planning ministers: three in just 12 months.

I wrote to the new Leader of the Opposition about our planning bill, and I outlined how our bill will help get more millennials into the housing market. I asked one simple question: will you support our bill? I am still waiting – no response, no ideas, no plan. The Leader of the Opposition loves to talk about housing choice, but her party blocks every measure that would actually deliver that choice. Let me spell it out.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, a ministers statement is not an opportunity for the minister to attack the opposition.

**Jacinta Allan** interjected.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, I reject the point of order, and the Premier has taken the words right out of my mouth. The minister on her feet is speaking entirely factually. Therefore there is no point of order. I ask that you rule it out of order.

**The SPEAKER:** The Minister for Planning to come back to her ministers statement.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** Let me spell it out for the blocker from Brighton. This government has rolled out a suite of reforms –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker: correct parliamentary titles.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, refer to members by their correct parliamentary titles, please, and come back to your ministers statement.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** Townhouse and low-rise apartment code, positioning Victoria as the townhouse capital; single home code, making it easier to build on small lots; our 10-year greenfield plan for more homes with backyards; our development facilitation program, accelerating good planning decisions and boosting affordable housing; our train and tram zone program, delivering more homes in well-connected areas with a commonsense approach to parking; making it easier to build a

second home, subdivide or build two homes on a lot; and of course overhauling our planning and environment laws.

### Housing

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (15:33): My question is to the Premier. How will an \$11,000 new tax on home ownership improve affordability?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Eureka! Member for Mordialloc, this is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:34): I am so pleased to have this opportunity provided to me by the Leader of the Opposition to talk about how we are not only building more homes in Victoria. We are making it fairer for young people and millennials to get their first home. We are also making sure we are investing in the local community infrastructure that makes these places great areas to live. You would only ask this question if you were not on the side of young people wanting to get their first home and did not want them to have great communities to live in. I take from the question from the Leader of the Opposition that what the Liberal Party is proposing is that you would not invest in local infrastructure and that you would not invest in the local roads and the schools and the playgrounds.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be direct, and this was about the Premier's great, big, huge new tax.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I am delighted by the intervention from the member for Brighton, because it also gives me the opportunity to remind the Leader of the Liberal Party that what we have announced today is not a new regime. It is in fact taking an existing approach to making sure that local communities get the investment in the infrastructure they need and making it fairer for people who want to move into a new home close to a great train station or tram zone. You must build both new homes and local infrastructure. We know the Leader of the Opposition does not even want to see new homes being built, which is why they are blocking and stopping the planning reforms in the Legislative Council.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I renew a point of order that I made during question time yesterday. Claims such as that must only be made by substantive motion, and I would ask you to counsel the Premier accordingly.

**The SPEAKER:** I am not sure what the point of order is, but the Premier will come back to answering the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The legislation that is before the Legislative Council is about stripping red tape. It is about streamlining approvals so more homes get built more quickly. When you build more homes more quickly, not only does that provide a benefit for young Victorians and millennials who want to get into their first home; it also benefits developers as well because it saves them time and money. It saves them time and money by cutting out red tape.

This is why the reforms we have put before the Parliament to slash red tape and to get more homes built more quickly right across Victoria – not locking out young people from the inner eastern suburbs like those opposite continue to do – are about giving fairness for all young Victorians to have access to a home, which is why investing in building more homes, streamlining planning approvals, cutting red tape and investing in local infrastructure is fair. That is why we are pushing on to get more homes built but are being blocked and stopped every step of the way by the Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (15:38): Both the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Property Council of Australia have said this new tax will reduce the supply of new homes. How will reducing the supply deliver more homes for Victorians?



**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:38): It is of no surprise that the member for Kew would want to see developers make profits, not build more homes, and what we are about is building more homes and better communities by streamlining the planning system and by making a fairer infrastructure contribution regime that has been done in development –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the relevance rule is becoming a farce. This was a very direct question, and the Premier is not responding.

**The SPEAKER**: I ask you to state your point of order succinctly, Manager of Opposition Business. The Premier is being relevant because when she answers a supplementary question she can refer to the substantive question as well in her answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: It is not fair to have homes being built without the local infrastructure around it. We understand that. The housing industry understands that. The Liberal Party clearly fail to understand that, because they also fail to understand that to get more homes built here in Victoria we have got to cut that red tape, we have got to streamline approvals and we have got to get this work done, not continue to block every step of the way every effort to get more homes built in Victoria.

#### Ministers statements: rental reform

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (15:40): As of last week landmark changes to support renters came into effect, but unfortunately these reforms did not receive bipartisan support. Rental bidding was banned – no more secret auctions where renters are pressured to outbid each other above the advertised price. The opposition voted no. Homes must meet minimum standards before they are advertised. The opposition voted no. And no longer can renters be evicted without cause. We know that the new Leader of the Opposition is now in the eviction seat, and judging from the past record on that side of the house she will never know when the ejection button is about to be pushed. But that cannot –

**Ellen Sandell**: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the minister is misleading the house. He said they did not receive bipartisan support. The dictionary would show that means two parties supported them. Two parties did support the legislation.

**Nick STAIKOS**: I kind of forgot about them. Now renters must receive 90 days notice for both rent increases and certain notices to vacate. And how do we think the opposition voted on this one? They voted no. And next year we will roll out a standard rental application form, a ban on junk fees for applications and rent payments and the new portable rental bond scheme. This is what a government with a plan for renters looks like: over 150 rental reforms and stronger enforcement – real action that cements Victoria as the best state in the nation for renters to find a home. However, those opposite offer something very different. They offer cuts, complaints and cluelessness. Their housing policy –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for the minister to attack the opposition.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister will come back to his ministers statement.

**Nick STAIKOS**: Make no mistake, the cuts commission proposed by those opposite would hollow out enforcement –

**The SPEAKER**: Minister, I have asked you to resume your ministers statement. I ask you to stop attacking the opposition.

**Nick STAIKOS**: Nearly a third of Victorians are renters, and they know which side of the house is on their side. It is the Allan Labor government. The choice is clear: an agenda that will strip away protections and put dodgy landlords in the drivers seat or the Allan Labor government, who will ensure that renters get a decent standard of living.

### Spensley Street Primary School

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (15:43): My question is for the Minister for Education. Spensley Street Primary School in Clifton Hill is in urgent need of major upgrades. In the upstairs and the downstairs toilets the flooring, the ventilation, the urinals and the cubicles are in such a state that some students actually refuse to use them. There is a hole in the roof, moss grows from underneath the tiles and the teachers use a plunger just to keep the toilets operational. Their learning spaces need significant structural and acoustic improvements, and they need renewed administration, first aid and collaboration areas to ensure that there is a safe, inclusive and fit-for-purpose environment for students and staff. Minister, will you fund these essential upgrades at Spensley Street Primary School?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (15:44): Can I thank the member for Richmond for her question on a day when the Education State was handed not only the best NAPLAN results in the nation but the best NAPLAN results in Victoria's history. In 18 of the 20 measures Victoria is on top, and that is what happens with long-term investment in people, in teachers and in infrastructure. In relation to Spensley Street Primary, I can assure the member that we fund all our schools right across the board. In fact we are going to be the first government that will fund 100 brand new schools. One in two schools built in Australia is built right here in Victoria, and we also know there are more than 2000 upgrades right across our state. I will continue to fund all schools and make sure, no matter the postcode, that every student gets to strive and make the best opportunity they can through a world-class education under the Allan Labor government.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (15:45): I appreciate the minister's response, but, to be honest, Spensley Street Primary has been neglected in the government's funding program for decades. The school has applied through all the grant channels available. Parents and teachers have had to fundraise for basic maintenance and urgent repairs themselves, including a leaking septic tank. This is no substitute for proper investment by the school building authority. Given the long-overdue upgrades, the school council has invited the minister to visit and see the conditions of the facilities firsthand, so my question is: Minister, will you accept the school council's invitation and visit Spensley Street Primary School yourself?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (15:45): I will accept the school council's invitation. It would be an honour to go and visit the school and see firsthand the Allan Labor government's reforms to teaching instruction, to the work we are doing in mandating systematic phonics, to also look at the inclusive playground we have funded at the school and to make sure too that those teachers there know that under a Labor government you will always get investment. I know that school and that community very well, and I look forward to going back out there again.

### Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (15:46): Labor governments build transport projects for the future. We know that investing in public transport is an investment in fairness. It means better access to opportunities, to jobs, to education and to recreation as well, and that is what the Metro Tunnel is all about. For well over a decade those opposite have talked this project down at every opportunity. They have called it a hoax, they have likened it to the Berlin Wall and just this week the Leader of the Opposition called it and the thousands of additional services it unlocks a waste. But it turns out that not everyone on the opposition benches thinks this project is a waste. Success has many parents, and so we have seen a few on the opposition benches scrambling to sun themselves in the warm glow of a newly opened Metro Tunnel. They have seen the light. The opposition leader says 'waste', but her colleagues are high-fiving the gunzels and saying, 'How good is this?' Mr McGowan in the other place has not only joined the Metro Tunnel flag-waving, he is claiming credit. But Victorians know the truth, and they will not be gaslit. The Brumby Labor government began planning the tunnel, Liberal infighting under Baillieu and Napthine killed the project and then the Andrews–Allan Labor governments recommitted

to it, funded it and delivered it in full. The Metro Tunnel and, most importantly, all the extra services it unlocks have been delivered by Labor and Labor alone. The real question, though, is: how long will it take the Leader of the Opposition to cut them?

### Fire services

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:48): My question is to the Minister for Environment. How many of the 290 forest fire management G-Wagon firefighting vehicles and 60 Unimogs are still offline due to a fault?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (15:48): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his question, and I appreciate his interest in this area. Can I just inform him and the house that the majority of the G-Wagons are back in service and the remainder will be very, very shortly, including the Unimogs. But the more important question for the community and for the house is that I continued to be assured by the chief fire officer again this week that we are fully prepared to fight fires in Victoria because of the investment this government has made and because of the extraordinary preparation of FFMVic throughout the year to get us ready for this fire season.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:49): When will all forest fire management vehicles be back online?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (15:49): I thank the member for his supplementary question. The Premier announced \$80 million in additional funding for FFMVic literally a few weeks ago to deploy the aerial fleet into Victoria, into the field, a month early, to employ another 133 firefighters in addition to last year's –

**Danny O'Brien**: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, you cannot just talk about firefighting and say it is relevant to the question. When will they all be back online?

**The SPEAKER**: Minister, come back to the question.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS**: I answered that in the substantive answer. I said shortly. Can I just say – a material point for the house to know – that when I am talking to FFMVic staff around regional Victoria do you know what they tell me? They tell me that they remember a time over about 12 years ago when their funding was 30 per cent less than what it is today.

**Danny O'Brien**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now both debating and not being relevant to the question, quite clearly.

**The SPEAKER**: I ask the minister to come back to the answer.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS**: I did answer the question in the substantive, but I think it is important for the house to understand that the funding of FFMVic under those opposite was far lower and is at huge risk. They will gut FFMVic – that is what I worry about – to fund their \$11 billion black hole. That is what they will do.

### Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (15:51): I am absolutely delighted to report on the strong program of building renewable energy projects in this state, thanks to this Allan Labor government. We are delivering, and there is no better example than my visit recently to the SEC's latest project, the SEC renewable energy park in Horsham, alongside the Horsham mayor Brian Klowss, who was very happy to see the benefits of the project in delivering real community support – for example, the supply chain benefits to Wimmera Bolts & Fasteners and so many other really terrific local businesses that are getting good jobs out of projects backed by the SEC.

This Horsham project is the first 100 per cent government-owned electricity generator since those opposite sold off our energy system, funnelling profits of \$20 billion offshore at the expense of Victorian families. Just one year into the construction, the SEC's project has created 200 jobs while installing almost a quarter of a million solar panels, accelerating the renewable energy build. When we accelerate the build through the SEC, we actually grow the energy supply, improving our reliability and putting downward pressure on every Victorian's household bills and business bills. Combined with the 100-megawatt battery, this will power more than 50,000 homes with cheap renewable energy every year. Not just that, but the battery will support the connection of a further 180 megawatts of renewables.

This is what you get when you have a plan, you have a strong pipeline of programs and projects coming through and you deliver. It is no wonder that Victoria continues to have continuously the lowest wholesale and retail electricity prices in this country. That is a fact. Those opposite might laugh, but what they oversaw when they were last in government was a 35 per cent hike in electricity bills and double the disconnection rates of Victorian families.

**The SPEAKER:** The time for questions has ended. The standing and sessional orders state that regular business is interrupted for question time and the matter of public importance to take precedence at different points of the day. Because of the suspension earlier today, constituency questions will not be finished by 4 pm, so the house will finish the business presently taking precedence, constituency questions, before moving on to the next business taking precedence, the MPI. I advise members that the bells will ring for the MPI immediately after constituency questions.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Minister for Consumer Affairs stated that the opposition did not support his consumer affairs legislation. I would invite him to review the records and make a statement of a personal explanation to the Parliament.

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot compel the minister to make a personal statement.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Nationals! Minister for Consumer Affairs, you may leave the chamber.

**Minister for Consumer Affairs withdrew from chamber.**

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:55): (1438) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. Will funding be provided in the next budget to upgrade the change rooms at Glen Huntly reserve? Caulfield Grammarians Football Club have been seeking a long overdue upgrade of these change rooms. These change rooms have not had a dollar in them for probably over 50 years. I recall playing as a junior and using those facilities. They are not fit for purpose. They are prison style in terms of the showers. In fact Dame Phyllis Frost has much better facilities than these change rooms at the moment. The club fields three senior women's teams involving over 100 female participants. They desperately need an upgrade to ensure that these facilities are fit for purpose. If there is anything this government should fund, it should be these types of community facilities. I urge the minister to look at this. The club is supporting it, and I suggest the government does too.

#### **Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (15:56): (1439) Given the strong community interest in the government's planning reform agenda, what specific mechanisms and support services are available to help facilitate the delivery of more homes in my electorate of Glen Waverley? Victoria's growing population continues to underpin our economic strength, and suburbs like Glen Waverley, Vermont South, Burwood East and Wheelers Hill are attracting new residents, many drawn by our excellent

local schools, transport connection and community amendments. The NAPLAN results today prove that Glen Waverley is the best place to come for education. We know that Victorians prefer to live in established, well-serviced areas, and increasing housing supply in these locations means more jobs, higher wages and greater opportunities. That is why the Allan Labor government is modernising our planning system to reduce delays and unlock the homes our communities need, particularly in well-connected suburbs close to public transport services and employment. As a middle-ring community set to benefit significantly from the Suburban Rail Loop, it is vital that these planning reforms and support mechanisms are implemented effectively to ensure that more homes can be delivered efficiently for the people of Glen Waverley. I look forward to the minister's response.

**The SPEAKER:** Was that for the Minister for Planning?

**John MULLAHY:** Yes.

### Ovens Valley electorate

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (15:57): (1440) My question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask it on behalf of Justin Elliott, who is one of the fantastic school teachers in the Ovens Valley electorate. The concern is with regard to the rise in private tutors. He wonders what qualifications, registrations or mandatory training are required in this field. When families employ tutors to assist their children in particular areas of study it is important to know that they actually have some sort of accreditation to ensure that measured education for our children seeking a little more assistance, which happens in many circumstances, because we know students learn at different speeds. I am seeking information from the minister on accreditation procedures.

### Sunbury electorate

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (15:57): (1441) My question is to the outstanding Minister for Transport Infrastructure; I notice she is at the table. Minister, how will residents in Sunbury electorate benefit from the transformative Metro Tunnel project? As the minister knows and as my community knows, this is a significant, transformative and incredible project for our city and our state – five new stations, two twin 9-kilometre tunnels, the ability to connect and move hundreds of thousands of people each and every day. It was outstanding to join the Premier, the minister and a number of outstanding caucus colleagues on Sunday for what was such a terrific day – not calling the project a hoax, not stopping and blocking, but getting on and delivering this project for our community, making sure we are making those investments to make our city and our state such a wonderful place. I acknowledge the minister's hard work, and I look forward to her timely response.

### Evelyn electorate

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:58): (1442) My question is to the Premier. Premier, why are you failing to keep my community safe? The Labor government's soft-on-crime approach, having weakened the laws to help perpetrators more than victims, has resulted in record crime rates in Victoria, an increase in crime in my community, the Yarra Ranges, and the scourge of violent youth offending. Just a week ago 80-year-old Jeff suffered a brazen attempted robbery and was slashed with a knife by a 16-year-old thug in the Lilydale train station car park, metres from busy Main Street. It is shocking to see brazen knife crime in the heart of Lilydale and at 2 pm on a Sunday afternoon. Thanks to the ambulance paramedics and Lilydale police for their swift response to support Jeff and arrest the violent offender. Jeff is recovering with 13 stitches to his arm. Thank goodness his injuries were not life threatening. The incident has terrified residents of all ages who no longer feel safe in their homes or on the streets. Jeff's wife has told me that many active older friends are now too frightened to go walking as they no longer feel safe. We must tackle the crime wave to keep our community safe.

### Wendouree electorate

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (15:59): (1443) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. What are the benefits to my community of pill testing at Spilt Milk? Spilt Milk is a massive event for

Ballarat that is held in the heart of Wendouree. On Saturday tens of thousands of festivalgoers will see a huge line-up of local and international artists including Kendrick Lamar, Doechii and Dominic Fike along with artists like Schoolboy Q, Nessa Barrett and Skin On Skin. For the first time Spilt Milk festivalgoers will have access to a life-saving drug-checking service. This service is confidential, completely free and staffed by experts providing health information to support safer, more informed decision-making. I am proud of our government's harm reduction approach, which is centred around open health-focused conversations and advice. This is a health initiative that is about reducing harm and saving lives. I hope everyone has a great time at Spilt Milk on the weekend.

#### **Ringwood electorate**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (16:00): (1444) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. The Premier has finally confirmed that 6400 dwellings have been completed across Victoria under the Big Housing Build. My question is: how many of these completed homes are located in my electorate? Ringwood continues to face very high rental stress, low vacancy rates and growing demand for local homelessness services. Residents want to know how much of this statewide program has translated into real completed homes in our community rather than projects that are only planned or under construction. Understanding the level of actual delivery in Ringwood is important for assessing whether local needs are being met. It is all very well having a very large scale housing building program, but if it is not delivering completed homes for people to live in, then the program itself is failing. My residents cannot live in a permit. They must be afforded homes to live in, and it is the responsibility of the government to deliver on their commitments.

#### **Greenvale electorate**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:01): (1445) My question is to the Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education. How is the Allan Labor government supporting the next generation of school leadership and investing in the formation and development of principals, educational experts and school leaders? In asking this question of the Deputy Premier I want to acknowledge all of the principals and school leaders and each educator in my schools across Greenvale, who work so hard every single day to support young people and to give them the best start in life. I want to take this opportunity in particular to thank principal Paul Sedunary from Good Samaritan primary school, who is retiring after 11 years of extraordinary service to that school, providing a home to refugee children and their families, having an amazing impact not just on the Good Samaritan community but on families across my electorate. I thank him most sincerely for his work as a leader, as a school principal, and for his impact on every single child at that school.

#### **Morwell electorate**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:02): (1446) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health, and the question is: why won't the government consider funding a palliative care facility in Gippsland? I have written to the minister twice this year with requests to meet, but those requests have been ignored. The state government contributed \$5 million towards a standalone hospice facility in Geelong, but so far the minister refuses to entertain the idea of a similar facility in Gippsland. Latrobe City Council have also asked this government to work with them to find a suitable location for a palliative care unit, to no avail. The former Latrobe health advocate, appointed by Labor specifically to advise the government on health issues facing the Latrobe Valley, called on the government to build a palliative care facility in the region. In the Latrobe Valley people are dying in pain, without adequate care and without dignity. There are just five palliative care beds at Latrobe Regional Hospital, which is entirely inadequate for a region with a population of 80,000 people.

#### **Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (16:03): (1447) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. How will the government's recent announcement of a new bus route connecting Lara train station and the Avalon Airport precinct benefit residents across the Lara electorate and the wider Geelong

community? I am so proud to be delivering accessible and affordable public transport in Lara. This bus service will strengthen our local community by providing reliable public transport options. It will cater for those needing to access the airport for travel and also for the thousands of people working in the precinct. The announcement of this service is a win for the Lara community, who have been asking for public transport services to and from the airport for years now. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who added their voice to this campaign and signed my petition calling for the introduction of a new bus service to Avalon Airport, and I look forward to the minister's response.

**Roma Britnell:** I have a point of order, Speaker, that I have outstanding questions: on the paramedic practitioner program, question 1366, asked of the Minister for Health in October; question 1334, on the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, asked of the Minister for Emergency Services in October also; question 1327 about farmers being forced to go and look for an off-farm job, which I asked the Premier on 15 October – well overdue, again, like the other three; and finally, a question on the South West Local Learning and Employment Network, question 1279, which I asked the Premier way back in August. Could the Premier and the other ministers please respect the members of South-West Coast and answer these questions?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! When members raise points of order about unanswered questions, it is a requirement that they state who the question is to and the number of the question, without added commentary.

**Annabelle Cleeland:** On a point of order, Speaker, I also have several overdue questions. They are 2896, 2895, 2783, 2904, 2902, 2898, 2846 and 2897. All are several months overdue, and they touch housing and building, health infrastructure –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Who are they to? The minister and the number.

**Annabelle Cleeland:** The Minister for Housing and Building, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the Minister for Police, again the Minister for Housing and Building, the Minister for Disability, the Minister for Emergency Services and really critical is the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, several months overdue.

**The SPEAKER:** I would ask you to give your list to the clerks, please.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Matters of public importance*

#### **Government performance**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (16:07):** The Speaker has accepted a statement from the member for Kew proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for their failure to:

- (a) ease cost of living for Victorians;
- (b) keep communities safe;
- (c) strengthen Victoria's healthcare system; and
- (d) enable more Victorians to own their own home.

**Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (16:08):** In just under 12 months time Victorians will be presented with a choice – a choice between a tired, out-of-touch, failed Labor government or a fresh start for Victoria and an opportunity to change the government but, more importantly, to change the direction of this state. We hear every single day that Victorians think Victoria is headed in the wrong direction. They think this government have lost their way and are no longer in touch with their priorities: cost of living, crime crisis, a healthcare system that is not delivering for them and their needs and a dream of home ownership that is no longer alive in this state. After 12 years of the Labor government, Victorians are worse off.

When it comes to the cost of living, we hear every single day that life is getting harder and harder. Whether it is the fact we have the highest taxes, the highest unemployment or the lowest credit rating in the country, instead of thriving, Victorians are just surviving under the Allan Labor government. The data bears this out. When it comes to per capita household disposable income, Victoria is now the second last in the country. We are 10 per cent below the national average, even behind Tasmania. As the acclaimed economist Saul Eslake points out, this is the most 'obvious measure of Victorians' individual material well-being'. But what is driving this decline in living standards? In one word: Labor.

Their economic mismanagement has been a wrecking ball through this state. The decline in living standards for everyday Victorians is felt every single day under their cost-of-living pressures, whether it is the fact that energy prices in this state continue to skyrocket under the mismanaged transition under this government or that since 2014 the Labor government has introduced 60 increased or new taxes, fees and charges – 60 new taxes under this Labor government. Today there was a new tax on aspiring home owners. This is a government that taxes Victorians at every single opportunity. And what does it mean? Higher living cost pressures; less money for businesses to grow, to employ and to expand their business operations in this state; and overall a weaker economy that is seeing investment flee this state.

Victoria's net debt is growing by \$2 million every single hour – \$2 million every single hour Victoria's debt is growing by – which means that it will reach \$194 billion by 2029. For each hour of that debt we see that 22 police officers, 19 nurses or 24 teachers could have been employed for a year. Now, \$194 billion seems almost incomprehensible to most Victorians. What does that really mean? But over that period in the coming years, Victorians will be paying more than \$1 million every single hour on the interest bill just to service that debt. What that means is that money cannot be going to better frontline services. It cannot be employed to fill the 2000 vacancies when it comes to Victoria Police. It is not going to the teachers we desperately need in our classrooms during a teacher shortage crisis. It is not going to the nurses and the paramedics that we need to ensure that Victorians can access quality health care. It is not going to help reduce the cost-of-living pressures on hardworking Victorian households through lower taxes. Instead that money is going to the bank.

On this side of the chamber we are focused on delivering real, immediate and lasting cost-of-living relief for Victorian families that will actually make a difference. Right now Victoria has the highest taxes in the country, and that just makes life more expensive every single day for Victorians. High taxes mean high cost-of-living pressures, and as every small business owner knows – and I know that we on this side of the house hear it every single day from the small and family businesses in our electorates and right across this state – government taxes mean it is harder to do their job and harder to open their doors, and they have to pass that cost through to their customers. We know that this Labor government is looking for every opportunity to tax Victorians. We have seen it again today: a brand new tax on housing at a time the government claims to be in the midst of a housing crisis. But what do they do? They put a new tax on aspiring home owners, passing a tax on to new home buyers in this state.

We on this side of the house will control government waste. We will highlight where this government is misprioritising its spending and the fact we are seeing waste and waste again. Yesterday \$200,000 was spent on pot plants for the Suburban Rail Loop. The SRL is a project that remains unfunded by this government – \$35 billion in new debt and new taxes at a time that Victorians can least afford it, but we can afford \$200,000 for pot plants. This is the priority of the Labor government. But we on this side of the chamber will always provide for Victorians a lower taxes guarantee. We will ensure that we are investing in the frontline services. We will prioritise spending to ensure that we are employing the police, we are employing the teachers and we are employing the paramedics that Victorians desperately need. We will stop taxes going up, because we will grow this economy by driving investment back into this state.



We know that under this government, investment is fleeing Victoria. Not only is it fleeing Victoria, not only is it going to South Australia, not only is it going to New South Wales, not only is it going to Queensland, with those premiers knocking on the door and saying, 'Why would you do business in Victoria?' Victoria is not even a consideration in the first place. We hear from the business sector and from the property sector the acronym ABM: anywhere but Melbourne. That is the attitude of the business community and of the investment community: 'Why would we come to a state that only wants to make it harder to do business?' Labor will always find a reason to tax more. They will always find an opportunity to make life harder for small businesses in this state and to make it harder to build a new home in this state, because for Labor, taxes are in their DNA. But we on this side of the chamber will guarantee lower taxes. Under a Liberal and Nationals government we will always have lower taxes, and we will prioritise funding for the essential services that Victorians desperately need.

Under the Labor government and under this Premier we have seen the government weaken laws, leading to a crime crisis in this state. Two and a half years ago this government, the members on that side of the chamber, voted legislation in that weakened bail laws. Despite the millions spent on advertising campaigns since, the bail laws today remain weaker than what they were 2½ years ago. And what has that led to? That has led to a crime crisis – night after night, repeat offenders, youth offenders out on our streets, terrorising families in their homes. I know that we on this side of the chamber – and, I have no doubt, members of the government – hear from their local communities every single day about the fact that people are afraid in their homes. They go to bed at night triple-checking they have locked every window, locked the doors and had a conversation with their family: 'Should we leave our keys on the front table, or should we hide them in the drawer?' That is the reality of the crime crisis here in this state. Victorians do not feel safe, and our police force are frustrated that they are continually arresting the same offenders night after night but they are back out on bail within hours. This is the reality when you mismanage the finances and you underfund our police.

Victoria's crime is at a 20-year high, and we know that a crime is committed every 50 seconds in Victoria. That means by the end of this contribution we will have had 12 crimes committed during this time. There is a theft from a retail store every 13 minutes, further undermining business confidence, and we have heard from the businesses surveyed in this state that more than 90 per cent of business owners say they are scared for their staff. These are the economic consequences of crime in this state. There are nine carjackings every single week. This is the reality when you have 2000 vacancies in Victoria Police and you have closed or reduced hours at 43 police stations. Labor have come to the table far too late with their changes to bail laws and far too late with their so-called adult time for adult crime. This is a government that does not believe in the very legislation it is bringing forward, and Victorians can see through it. They know that this is not a government that has their safety at heart. The first responsibility of any government should be to protect the safety of their citizens. What we have seen under this government is a disgrace. That is why we will bring forward 'break bail, face jail', we will legislate Jack's law to ensure that we give police and PSOs the powers to tackle knife crime in this state and, most importantly, we will address the root causes of crime through early intervention and actually ensuring we tackle this and do not see young offenders going down the path of the criminal justice system.

When it comes to our health system here in Victoria, every single day Victorians are losing out. I do not understand how it can be in this state that if you have to call an ambulance, you have a little bit of doubt in the back of your mind that it might not turn up. That is the reality of what the health system has come to under this Labor government. Victorians continue to face longer wait times for vital surgery and emergency treatment. We have seen the elective surgery waitlist surge to over 60,000, up 5 per cent just in the last quarter alone. It is failing to meet its ambulance response times, with only 65 per cent of code 1 incidents being responded to within 15 minutes, well below the 85 per cent target. That is the government's own target.

This is the reality of not investing in our health system. Why is this government not investing in our health system? Because they have mismanaged the finances and because they are paying an interest

bill that is increasing at a rate that is more than the revenue of this state, because of the \$50 billion worth of cost blowouts on major projects that this government laugh off. The government says things cost what they cost. That is not a way to manage the budget in this state, because economic mismanagement and financial mismanagement mean that you cannot invest in the vital services that Victorians rely on, like our health care. You just have to look to the Victorian Auditor-General and Infrastructure Victoria, who have highlighted the neglect when it comes to the funding of our health system and the need for urgent upgrades at three of Melbourne's busiest hospitals: the Alfred, the Austin and the Royal Melbourne. But this government has instead decided to prioritise wasteful spending – \$600 million to cancel the Commonwealth Games and \$13 million on machete bins that have done nothing to get knife crime off our streets. This is a government with its priorities all wrong.

After a decade of Labor in this state, young Victorians have given up hope when it comes to home ownership. Is it any wonder when the previous Premier said that young Victorians do not want to own their own homes? That was the belief of the previous Premier, and we can see it playing out in the policies of this government. Of the 60 new or increased taxes under the last 10 years of Labor, half of them have been property taxes. At the same time this government announced their so-called housing statement, they announced a raft of new taxes on the property industry. How does this government expect new houses to be built if they are taxing the very people who are meant to build them?

Today we have seen yet another example of how this government has its priorities all wrong: an \$11,000 tax on every new dwelling in our suburbs. That is a cost that is going to be passed directly on to aspirational first home buyers and renters. This is a government that does not believe in home ownership. It does not have a plan to drive down the affordability of homes. We on this side of the chamber believe in home ownership and we understand that we need to increase the supply of homes, but the only way that is going to happen is if we do something about the punishing taxes in this state. The only way this happens is if we do something to decrease the taxes on property in this state. In 12 months time Victorians will have a choice. They will have a choice between this tired, arrogant government and a fresh start that will put the priorities of Victorians first and foremost.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:23): I am so pleased to follow the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew. I invite those opposite to stay in for this one, because I am going to start with a story about something that happened a couple of weeks ago, just a couple of days after the member for Kew found herself in, what did we say, the ejector seat, or the Leader of the Opposition's seat. This is a true story. You know how I love to tell stories in this place, and this will make everyone feel very jolly considering we are well and truly moving into December now. I was standing in Strangers getting a coffee, and there was a tour group coming through and this woman kept looking at me. She diverted from the tour group and she came over, and I thought, 'Oh God, it is someone from my electorate.' So I stood up nice and straight. I had a big smile, as I do.

**Annabelle Cleeland** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY**: You will like this, member for Euroa; you will like this one. I stood up nice and straight and said, 'Why, hello there.' And she came up and she said, 'Oh, it's you. Oh my God, it's you. Are you the new Leader of the Opposition?' I did not know what was funnier, because I definitely do not think we Labor women look like those wonderful Liberal women on the other side of the chamber. I started laughing. I did not quite know how to respond to her, because there is always a bit of embarrassment when someone does that 'Oh my God, are you –' and she was genuinely really excited. I did not know if I felt happy that she had pinged me as another millennial – because yes, people, I am a millennial. I think the last year. My daughter says my year should not be included, 1981. I know the member for Kew is good with her number crunch and we know she is 35, so she can crunch to see how old I will be on 29 December this year, and it ain't 35, I can tell you that.

But I found it quite funny because there are stark differences that everyone here in this place needs to know, and I am telling this one for my community today. The difference between the member for Kew and the member for Laverton – even though some people might think all blondes look alike – is we

certainly do not think or look alike. One of the huge differences between the member for Kew and the performance she has just put on here in this place for the last 15 minutes and the member for Laverton is that although the member for Laverton was not born and bred in Victoria, in Melbourne, she loves her state. She is proud to call Melbourne home.

I moved here with my family, my children, knowing we would have a better life, a better education and better job opportunities, and that is exactly what we get here in this place. What was it that the member for Kew referenced? ABV, anywhere but Victoria. Well, I would say to the member for Kew that Sydney in New South Wales is about 8 hours north. You can start driving this afternoon and hightail it out of this state. You have only talked down this great state of Victoria, the state that hundreds of thousands of people come to each and every single year. We see them at our citizenship ceremonies. They are proud to come here. They are proud to raise their families here. They love their streets. They love their neighbourhoods. They love their communities. This is a wonderful state. This is an amazing city. Whether you are living in regional Victoria or you are living in the inner burbs, Victoria, Melbourne, is a great place to call home. That is one difference.

Another difference is around cost-of-living support. I noticed that in this matter of public importance, and I laughed so much because I just thought, 'Oh, my gosh.' I might have expected a little bit more from a young millennial, to come up with a better MPI, to stand here and try and make a speech, I am guessing, to the people sitting beside her, that she deserves to be here in 12 months time as leader of this state. She talks about the cost of living and, with a straight face, stands there and talks about how Labor needs to do more – that Labor is not doing anything for the cost of living. Well, I have two corflutes – and I have just done a reel on this, which I will release because I guarantee it will be funny – in my office right now, true story, that I take out to train stations, I take out to street stalls, anywhere I go. I have to say folks absolutely love this, and this is a true cost-of-living support, not just for folks in Melbourne's west but right across Victoria, and that is free public transport that starts – I was going to say on 1 January, but let us face it, folks, we are into December – in a couple of weeks. From 1 January there will be free public transport for kids under the age of 18.

Everyone here in this place who has kids that travel – whether it is by train, by bus or by tram to school, to hang out with their friends, to go to the shopping centre or go to the sporting clubs – knows the cost of public transport, particularly as parents and what we are topping up on kids' Myki cards. This free public transport for kids under the age of 18 started in my patch. Can you believe Westjustice started a program of free public transport for particularly vulnerable children in Melbourne's west? And, do you know what, it was a huge success, because these kids were not tapping on and tapping off. They did not have any money, and they were getting into trouble with the law. This was a great way in which to enable kids under the age of 18 to get somewhere and go somewhere and do something they wanted to do and not have to pay for public transport. It is something we thought was a great idea, and we have gone ahead and rolled it out for all kids under the age of 18.

For the member for Kew – because she is a number-cruncher, as she likes to talk about – that saves parents up to \$755 a year. Most parents would know that most of us end up having more than one child. Well, you can double that and do the maths – if not triple it. In my community – and this is what really irks me about the member for Kew – folks do not just have one kid or two or three. I have met women in my community who have 11 and 12 children. These women get together and their children make up entire soccer teams and soccer clubs that they cannot afford to pay for, which is why things like the Get Active Kids sporting grants make such a huge difference for getting kids active and able to get into the clubs that they need to get into, just to be like any normal kid. It should not matter how much you have in your bank account whether you deserve to play community sport. That is another excellent cost-of-living measure that we have implemented, because we know not everyone can afford for one child to play sport, let alone 11 and 12 children. There are people represented by members on this side of the house – I am sure they exist in the electorates of those opposite – that have huge families and struggle to get them involved in sport. They cannot afford to pay for public transport – \$755 a year. That is real cost-of-living relief.

I have two corflutes in my office. The one for seniors is about free public transport on weekends. I do not know what the member for Kew does, but I go and visit and talk to my seniors because I am also processing their \$100 power saving bonuses. I have been working hard and working it hard inside my retirement villages and at the multicultural senior groups, which run from Monday to Friday – we are a very big multicultural community – processing their \$100 power saving bonuses. And, you know what, they absolutely love it. They cannot believe that we are going to give them 100 bucks to help with their electricity bills. This is another thing that we announced and have rolled out to help folks with the cost of living. We know things are a bit tough, which is why it is so important for governments to get in there and help.

Another incredible program that we have rolled out I have not had much to do with. I was at a school, Ardeer South Primary School, a couple of weeks ago. They have a great principal there, Andrea Markham, and she wanted me there to hand over the glasses for the Glasses for Kids initiative that we have rolled out. In Ardeer South there are a lot of families at that school who are probably not like the families in Kew. A lot of them are doing it incredibly tough – incredibly vulnerable migrant and refugee families – and what the school has picked up is that a lot of the kids cannot see the blackboard. They are struggling to learn and struggling to read and write in those essential years that help kids get through primary school. They are struggling with reading, writing, numeracy and just being able to see the blackboard. These kids were absolutely amazed and stoked to get their glasses, and they were beautiful glasses – I know that as someone who has worn glasses since I was 12 years old. They are gorgeous. I have never seen kids so proud. It was a small moment, but it was a big moment for me to think about how proud I was to be part of a government that truly believes in helping families with the cost of living. No child should go without a pair of glasses, without having their teeth checked, without being able to enrol in sport or to afford public transport because their parents do not have the money in their back pocket. That is why Labor governments matter, and that is why Melbourne's west continue to support Labor, because we have the backs of those people. We have their backs.

What does the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition, think the opening of the Metro Tunnel was? Seventy thousand people rode those trains across Sunday – it was absolutely amazing. The Premier has talked about it here, and I think it is really important to highlight it. It is not just a generational, transformational project in the way in which I see it, enabling more services to be put on the rail networks, particularly in the western suburbs, and access parts of the city that were a bit tricky. If you are like me and you do not like to jump on a tram, now you just stay on your train and pop up and you are at five amazing stations with better access in and around our city. That project is about fairness and equality when it comes to transport here in this state. It is not just for the here and now, it is for the generations to come – generations of kids that are not even born yet.

That is what Labor governments do. That is why Labor is always on the side of all Victorians. That is a stark difference to the Leader of the Opposition and the speech that she has made before this place. The audacity to stand here and talk about cost-of-living relief and this and that when this is a person who sat on Sky News – I do not watch Sky News, but I saw footage of the member for Kew – talking about making cuts to schools. Who in their right mind that wants to be leader in this state sits there being interviewed and talks about cuts to schools? Unbelievable.

That says to me one of the differences between the member for Kew and the member for Laverton is that the member for Kew does not leave Kew very much. It is so important to get around this state and talk to people and find out where people are at. The member for Kew talks about all of these things but seems to have no real-life experience. It is not about age, it is about getting out and talking to people, getting out and seeing where they are at – seeing that, no, they cannot afford public transport, which is why we have introduced free public transport. In fact for folks now it is free public transport on weekends, and we have just announced free public transport on weekends for disability support pensioners and carers. We have added them in because they are another cohort that are doing it really tough, and we need to be able to reach out and give people a lift when they need it most. That is a stark difference between Labor ethos and Liberal ethos. It is in their blood to cut, and it looks like the first

place they are cutting is our schools. That is the message going out to Melbourne's west, and I have to say as a representative in one of the largest, fastest growth corridors in this country and in this state that that message goes down like a house on fire. And it is a message that I will keep repeating until the day of the election, because that is actually what is at stake here.

Labor does not just stand for upgrading, rebuilding, making sure facilities are first class, world class and kids are getting an excellent education, because education, we know, is where opportunity can come from and change lives, but it is also about building new schools. I think we have just celebrated building the 100th school here in this state over the past 11 years. That is extraordinary. That is the difference between the member for Kew talking about making cuts to schools and us on this side talking about building schools, upgrading schools, adding to them, making sure kids have got what they need to get a first-class education to access those opportunities that we know change lives. That is one of the key differences with the new Leader of the Opposition. That is why it might be a new Leader of the Opposition sitting in that chair, but it is same-same Liberal Party politics and policies. That is exactly what this MPI is; it is another false narrative, a negative narrative to try and sell to the Victorian public.

As I started off, member for Kew, it is 8 hours drive to Sydney, and I hear the weather this time of year is pretty good. I am sure you have plenty of friends over there in Vaucluse and places like that equivalent to Kew. This is a ridiculous MPI, and I absolutely, wholeheartedly reject it.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:38): What a contribution. 'It's a ridiculous MPI,' but how many times did the member for Laverton say, 'Well, we know things are a bit tough'? She said it on energy. She said it on cost of living. We know it on crime, we know it on the affordability of housing, we know it on health care – all of the issues that the member for Kew has laid out here – and the member for Laverton has not given any inkling that the government has got solutions on any of those issues. Indeed the reality is it is not about the government finding solutions, it is about the government causing the problems in the first place. That is why we have brought this matter of public importance to the Parliament today, because these things are bad in Victoria, not because we are talking them down, as the government likes to say, but because that is the reality facing Victorians every single day. It is on these things – it is on the cost of living for Victorians; it is on the crime crisis that is out of control and making us feel unsafe in our communities, not just in metro areas but in our regional areas. All of my National colleagues will know as well that crime across regional Victoria is a big issue. The issue is getting access to health care – 60,000 people on surgery waiting lists; the inability to actually get access to an ambulance when you need one – the member for Narracan can tell us a horrific story from the lady in Drouin there who was on the front page of the paper a couple of weeks ago, in an absolutely disgraceful situation; and the issue of enabling Victorians to afford their own home. It is on this one that I will pick up again the comment from the member for Laverton about the ethos and the difference in the ethos between Labor and Liberal.

There are people out there who like to talk about the duopoly in politics, that Labor and Liberal are the same thing. It is on this issue that there is a very, very distinct difference between those in the government and the Liberals and Nationals on this side, because we happen to understand that when you add taxes to a particular product, you increase the price of that product.

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN**: You do – unless of course it happens to be an agricultural product, where we are price takers and we just cop it. That is one difference perhaps. But it is astounding that today we have had the member for Tarneit –

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN**: The member for Tarneit's own government has put another \$11,000 tax on property, just today. And where are you? What were you out there saying? Here is an opportunity for the member for Tarneit, for the member for Mordialloc and for the member for Laverton to say, 'I

stand on the side of first home buyers. I stand on the side of people who are looking for a property, to put a roof over their head, and I am going to oppose this government's legislation and this government's taxes.'

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Tarneit is warned.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** There are 60 new or increased taxes – I think we are actually up to about 64 as of today, but it is hard to keep track because they come in so frequently – and half of them are on property. These economic illiterates over there then go, 'Jeez, rental prices have gone through the roof. Oh, no-one wants to build a house.' They set a target under the previous Premier of 800,000 homes over 10 years, and now they are surprised that they cannot meet 80,000 per year because people do not want to build houses. Why? Because of the taxes. Because this government has got 43 per cent of the cost of a new house and land package in government taxes. And now we had the Premier come out today and say, 'We think there should be a contribution.'

In fact the Premier's commentary in question time was quite astounding, because there was some new terminology there. When we asked about the new \$11,000 tax on investments, she said it is important to invest. That is a new one for me; I did not realise that a new tax is actually an investment. She also said – and this just astounded me – that this new \$11,000 tax benefits developers. Wow, it benefits developers. I am sure that those on our side who have been talking to the Urban Development Institute of Australia today and the Property Council of Australia have just left aside the bit where they go, 'Awesome. This new \$11,000 tax on apartments is going to be great for our businesses. We're going to go out and build heaps more new apartments because of this new tax.' I do not think that is what they said. In fact I know they did not. Literally after the Premier said this would benefit developers, we asked her a question about the impact on supply and how the UDIA and the property council have said this will dry up supply, and suddenly the Premier is saying, 'Oh, developers are horrible, terrible people, and it's not a surprise that you would support them.' She had just said that this tax would benefit them. What an unbelievable commentary from this government. It is absolutely a farce.

To have this government talking about easing cost-of-living pressures when there are 60 new or increased taxes is ridiculous. One of those is the most egregious tax we have seen in recent years, the new emergency services tax, a tax that is a complete sham on the part of this government, which is trying to argue that this is to support our emergency services. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week, thanks to the questions by the member for Mildura we saw a demonstration that this government has cut the CFA budget this year by \$7 million. The SES annual report – and I see those shaking their heads, and we know that the message has gone out, not just across the cabinet, not just across the backbench. We even had the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance last week trying to say that those figures they put in the gazette about the budgets for SES, Fire Rescue Victoria, CFA et cetera, even though that was an official *Government Gazette*, are not their budgets. That is not their budgets, because that would indicate a cut, wouldn't it, and we don't want to accept that. But we saw literally the evidence given to PAEC last week, and the minister's brief that she signed off this year shows a \$7 million cut to the CFA this year and a \$10 million cut to the SES.

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** The minister at the table should not talk too much, because Forest Fire Management Victoria is under the pump as well. Here we have got this government supposedly supporting our emergency services and charging Victorians an extra \$3 billion.

**Jade Benham:** How much?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** An extra \$3 billion. We have got a 100 per cent increase in the rate of the emergency services levy on every single household in the state, on every single business in the state.

Commercial property is 100 per cent too, and every industrial business a 64 per cent increase. And we were supposed to be thankful when they reduced the primary production rate from 189 per cent to just 151 per cent. Then they said, 'Oh, actually, this is a bit of a problem for us politically. We're going to have to put this off. We're just going to make it go quiet for a year.' I do not think the geniuses over there realised that would put it off until just a few months before an election. We look forward to seeing what the government is going to do: are they going to give another year's grace to farmers? I know regional Victoria will not buy that, because they all know: 'Okay, so what, we vote for you and then in 12 months time we get the 150 per cent increase?' Well, that is the reality under this government, because they are addicted to taxes, and it is regional Victorians in particular that are coping it.

I talked about community safety. We have seen under this government – 10 years now of this government – a 16 per cent increase in crime over those 10 years of data. There has been a 35 per cent increase in crime every year on average since this government came to office, 35 per cent every year, and in that time a 218 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries and a 96 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft. This government has failed abysmally on crime, and it is Victorians who are paying the price.

Talking about paying the price: I have talked about some of the taxes, but one of the biggest failures of this government, and it impacts on every Victorian every single day, is in the energy policy. We saw just under a month ago the article in the *Age*, again coming out of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action annual report – and I look forward to the next Labor speaker saying, 'Well, you've got it wrong. It's not accurate.' It is actually in their annual report and highlighted that last year the government expected a wholesale price range for electricity between \$17 and \$155 –

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is a very wide gap, member for Mildura. This year they are expecting a range between \$44 and \$257. That is a massive increase in the wholesale price. We hear often from the minister: 'Oh, we've got the lowest wholesale prices in Victoria in the country.' No-one really cares if the price keeps going up. We do not compare ourselves to New South Wales and go, 'Well, we only had an 87 per cent increase this year – better than the 89 per cent increase that New South Wales had.' The point is this government cannot manage money, it cannot manage energy prices and it cannot manage taxes, and it is Victorians who are paying the price, and it continues to be a disaster of this government's own making. So when the member for Laverton says it is a bit rich for us to be talking about cost of living, this is the government that has hurt every single Victorian on cost of living, on crime, on health care and on housing. In 12 months we have a choice between this government or a government that will truly govern for all the state.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:48): It is great to get up and rise on the matter of public importance moved by the Leader of the Opposition the member for Kew. I just feel a bit flat today. I feel like I have been cheated. I thought there would be a grand presentation here. We had the disruption to question time, so I thought we had a bit of time to think about what presentation we might get here. I was just looking for a pulse from those opposite during the MPI and the presentation from the member for Kew, because when you roll your leader you hope that it is going to be a grand display, and it looks like this matter of public importance has as much detail in it as the brochure that was stood up in that press conference that was put forward. We have seen Scott Morrison hold a brochure. Tony Abbott held a 'cuts' brochure. The Leader of the Opposition Sussan Ley – cuts brochure. Then we saw the member for Kew run out with a picture book that showed no detail whatsoever and less plans than former Leader of the Opposition the member for Berwick had. Then we see today the Freshwater poll come out, where the overwhelming issue the majority of Victorians are focused on at the moment is crime and the actions that have been taken by this government that are supported by 83 per cent of Victorians. So I ask those opposite: was it worth it? Was it worth it when the member for Berwick had the momentum up? I give him a shout-out, because I know he will be in the office looking there, along with the member for Polwarth, who have been some of the biggest losers out of this one. It has been a

bit nasty, and I reflect on that, and I think of how the member for Polwarth and member for Berwick came up with that grand plan: they laid it all out, they got the issue to the top of the pops, and then they have changed their leader to then the fifth order line.

And I thought then, 'Okay. Well, if the Freshwater poll' – remember Freshwater? You might not remember, but they did polling for the Liberals – remember that? The member for Kew threw a little bit of shade on them the other week. I do not know if people remember that, but there was a little bit of shade – not shade today, because they were even pegging. But right here we do not have an MPI that mentions debt, so who is doing tactics on that side, Deputy Speaker? I know you are a follower of politics, I know you look at this stuff carefully and you go 'What on earth?' And this is a message to those over the other side of Spring Street: when you are doing your tactics and you roll your leader based on crime and then you say that you are going to be on debt for the next six months, at least put it in your MPI.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind the member that 'you' is the Chair.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Oh, yes, there we go. I am sorry about that, Deputy Speaker. Isn't it an extraordinary thing that the tactical geniuses on the other side of Spring Street, that have come up with a tactical deployment here to focus on debt for the next 12 months, cannot even put it into this MPI, which has got about 35 words. So 'Knock, knock – are you in there, tactics in opposition land?' They rolled their leader when crime was the top issue, from the chap who keeps getting a spot on Tom Elliott over and over and over. We had the slowest, most second-gear performance from today, narrating a problem and never having a solution – because that is what the Business Council of Australia used to do. Remember that? I will give you a fun fact, because you know I like stats. How many times did the member for Kew mention 'businesses' in her first speech? Seven times. It is a lucky number for some. How many times did the member for Kew mention the word 'workers'?

**A member:** How many?

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Come on, Narracan. Zero times. Whenever there is a chance to be on the side of big business, the member for Kew is right there as a cheerleader. When the workers of Victoria need a government most, they turn to a Labor government. The member for Kew today narrated a problem but never a solution, and that has been consistent. It was the member for Kew's absolute mentor, the guiding force you might remember, Josh Frydenberg, the Treasurer, who was the Treasurer for New South Wales because he could not stand Victoria. We just heard a routine today that was out of the playbook of the former federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. And let us remember that wonderful leader Josh Frydenberg. You might remember, Deputy Speaker, again because you are an astute follower of politics here, that *Independent Australia* had an article – reflecting positively of course – that under the Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison governments from 2013 to 2022 government debt jumped by \$895 billion, a staggering increase of \$638 billion in just nine years, with surging government spending and huge debt during that time. What does that tell you? When Josh Frydenberg was the Treasurer, when the member for Kew was cheerleading the business council on, it was a spendathon – remember that? It was going full pelt. When Josh Frydenberg said debt was the cost of saving lives, where was the member for Kew? I am not talking about the former one – that member for Kew was over in the UK. The member for Kew did not say a word, because it is only bad news when it is not Liberal debt. When it is Labor, they go to town. Remember under the hero Josh Frydenberg, the member for Kew's idol, staggering increases of debt like we have never seen before. Treasurer Jim Chalmers has absolutely slashed the deficit. It is inconvenient news, but I would love to be in the press pack to ask those questions – 'What did you think of Josh Frydenberg just ratcheting up the debt?' The lauding over Josh in her first speech was just something else.

Seven times we had businesses mentioned in the first speech. You might want to know this one – this is a hidden gem, this one. I do not know if you see Sky News at all. You might just glance, maybe at an airport lounge just going through, and you will see Sky News. Steve Price has a presentation on there. Steve Price had an interview with the member for Kew back in August of 2024 when she was



the shadow finance minister. Remember, the member for Kew has such low confidence in any of her shadow cabinet that she is doing both jobs. You cannot blame anyone else for this statement, because she has basically taken the shadow treasury portfolio. What did the member for Kew say to Steve Price in that interview? Oh, it is a shocker, and I will tell you this one is going to be clipped. There are 52 weeks to go, or 51 and maybe a bit of change. This one is clipped for the record books:

That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

That was the shadow minister right then and those opposite on the hook. What was the context? They were talking about where our debt profile was. That is right. The context is important. The member for Kew says 'we'; well, the 'we' ain't the Labor Party, legends. Those opposite might want to speak on behalf of Victorians and say it is Victorians. Guess what, Victorians do not support the Liberal-Nationals plan to slash and burn jobs and schools and education services and health services in our state. Remember that. It means that we – and for those playing opposite, 'we' means the Liberal-Nationals – are going to make cuts to our health services, and schools are not going to be built or even fixed. Steve Price then goes, 'Staggering.' I think even he was shocked that the shadow finance minister, the new hope for them over there, the line in the sand, the moment for everything when they were polling well – remember they went 43, member for Hawthorn gone, member for Berwick gone, and now we are down and wondering where on earth those opposite are –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, whilst this is a very wideranging debate, the speaker on his feet is nowhere near the matter of public importance.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I think the MPI is rather broad, and rebuttal is part of the debate. I ask the member to continue on the MPI.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** When those opposite say – when the member for Kew and the Leader of the Opposition says – that their plan will be to make cuts to health services and schools will not be built or fixed, you go to the heart and soul of that first speech. That first speech unravels everything that we know about the member for Kew and her values. In her first speech she said:

It is business that creates jobs, not government.

Guess what, the Victorian government is one of the biggest employers in our state. The Victorian government funds nurses, it funds teachers, it funds kindergarten teachers, it funds child protection workers, it funds police officers, it funds our fires, it funds our paramedics – it funds all of those services that are critical to the functioning of our state. When those opposite come into this place and undertake their first speech, it is the one moment in time when you see a window through to the soul of the individual and their true motivations and values. I will repeat that:

It is business that creates jobs, not government.

That means teachers, nurses, fires, police, paramedics – they are expendable when those opposite do not believe that their job is valued in our economy and our sector. 'Government does not create jobs' means those people are not valued and they are not worth it. That is the playbook of the Liberal-Nationals right now: an \$11.1 billion reduction in revenue that will see devastating outcomes to our state. That is the Liberal-Nationals playbook. That is the member for Kew.

**Sam GROTH (Nepean) (16:58):** I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition in her matter of public importance (MPI), one that is very important to every Victorian: the need for a fresh start for our state. This state stands at a crossroads. We have had more than a decade of Labor mismanagement – of waste, spiralling debt, collapsing service delivery – and Victorians are rightly asking a simple but powerful question: when did it get this hard just to live in Victoria? This is not an abstract debate about numbers on a page. It is about families wondering which bill they will not be able to pay this month. It is about small businesses wondering how much longer they can keep the doors open. It is about communities wondering whether help will come when they actually ring Triple Zero.

The Liberals and Nationals have a plan for a fresh start with clear priorities and a positive vision for this state's future. It is to ease the cost of living, keep Victorians safe, strengthen our healthcare system and enable home ownership once again. This MPI goes to the heart of Victoria's future and why Victorians deserve so much better than what they have endured under this tired, broken Labor government. Victoria was once the engine room of this nation – not a net GST taker but actually contributing to the national economy – but under Labor we are now a cautionary tale. We have the highest unemployment rate in Australia, we have got the highest debt, we have got the worst credit rating and we have got the most hostile business environment in the country. Our household incomes are now 10 per cent below the national average, and that is not just a statistic, it is a direct measure of a government that has taken a prosperous state and driven it backwards.

Since 2014 the Labor government has introduced or increased more than 60 taxes and charges, and it is every Victorian who pays for that. They pay for it at the supermarket, at the bowser, on the tradie invoice, in their rental cheque or in their mortgage repayment. This government's net debt continues to grow by around \$2 million every single hour and is projected to reach \$194 billion by mid-2029. Every hour of new debt is the equivalent cost of 22 police officers, 19 nurses or 24 teachers employed for a year. Over the same period interest repayments will exceed \$1 million every hour – that is more than \$36 billion over the next four years. That is \$29 million every single day that does not go to funding a single extra nurse, teacher, police officer. And you cannot just blame COVID, bad luck, global turbulence – it is a direct result of a government addicted to taxes, addicted to borrowing and addicted to spending without accountability, and it is Victorians that are paying the price.

Across the state, families tell us the same story: we are going backwards. Ana Salzano, who runs a small deli, put it simply:

It is getting harder to do business every passing year and it feels like the government just isn't on our side.

Victorians know exactly what she means: electricity bills, up; insurance, up; registration, up; groceries, up; rates, up; and under Labor, taxes up again and again and again. We are the highest taxed state in the nation, more than any state or territory. Nearly half of that comes –

**Pauline Richards:** On a point of order, Speaker, I am just checking whether the speaker on their feet is reading their speech or referring to notes.

**The SPEAKER:** The member is referring to notes.

**Sam GROTH:** Half of their tax income comes from property – stamp duty, land tax. We have seen COVID debt repayments mean that mum-and-dad investors are paying land tax for the first time because of the reduction in the land tax threshold from \$300,000 to \$50,000. They have doubled the absentee owner surcharge. They have introduced an extra tax on our emergency services. They have introduced an Australian-first 7.5 per cent tax on short-stay accommodations, with families hit just for taking a holiday in the regions – families who cannot afford, because of this government, to pay that extra money just to take their kids to stay in short-stay accommodation. Labor's answer to every problem is the same: invent a new tax or hike an old one. But we have made a different commitment. We have committed to our lower taxes guarantee. We will reduce the taxes, fees and charges that hurt Victorian families the most.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Sam GROTH:** The Leader of the House asked what are we going to do, cut taxes? Yes, we will cut taxes, because Victorians are doing it tough under the Labor government.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Nepean, through the Chair, and I would ask you to cease hitting the table.

**Sam GROTH:** We will not introduce new taxes or increase existing ones, like the Labor government. We will stop the endless cycle of taxing Victorians to cover their own incompetence. We

also guarantee that frontline services will never be cut to pay for irresponsible budgeting. Labor says relief is impossible. We say it is essential because Victorian working families cannot withstand another four years of the economic vandalism of those on the other side of the chamber.

Nowhere has this government's failure been more destructive than in community safety. Back in 2023 it was this government that weakened bail laws, which has seen a 20-year high in crime rates across this state, with a crime committed every 50 seconds. There is a theft from a retail store every 13 minutes, a serious assault every 29 minutes and nine carjackings every single week. With the Crime Statistics Agency showing more than 627,000 criminal offences in a single year, up by more than 17 per cent, the situation continues to get worse in Victoria under the Allan Labor government. They have closed or reduced hours on 43 police stations. They have got nearly 2000 police vacancies. How can anyone seriously claim this government is keeping Victorians safe? We will fix this though, with 'break bail, face jail'. We will back police with bail and sentencing laws that actually protect the community. We will open police stations that the Labor government has closed, and we will introduce Jack's law so police have the power to scan for dangerous knives not just in designated areas for short periods of time, but in shopping centres, in train stations and in public places.

But perhaps there is no bigger human cost of Labor's mismanagement than what they have done to our health system – a decade of underinvestment and neglect, more than 60,000 Victorians stuck on elective surgery waitlists and more than one in two patients presenting with mental health concerns waiting over 8 hours in emergency departments. Ambulance Victoria's own report shows code 1 emergencies, the most urgent life-threatening conditions, are only being reached in the 15-minute time zone 65 per cent of the time, well short of the target – something the minister at the table, the Minister for Health, has dramatically failed at in her time as the minister. We have read heartbreaking accounts, most recently out in the member for Narracan's electorate. Meanwhile major hospitals like the Austin, the Alfred and the Royal Melbourne and hospitals in my community, like Rosebud, continue to go unfunded while the life-and-death situations of people in the community are left neglected because this government continues to pour money into spin and vanity projects like the Suburban Rail Loop.

This government needs a clear commitment when it comes, and that is what we will do on this side of the house. We will restore ambulance response capacity, we will cut wait times in emergency services, we will reduce waitlists, we will strengthen mental health support and we will recruit the next generation of frontline workers. But we will also restore the dream of home ownership. It is slipping away for thousands of young Victorians, not because Victorians lack aspiration but because Labor has erected barrier after barrier. You cannot trust the government, who have created a problem for 11 years, to be the ones to fix it. It is like starting a bushfire and putting it out with a garden hose. This government has no plan. They may have shiny brochures and glossies, but at the eleventh hour, in the 11th year of a government, they are trying to introduce legislation that takes rights away from local communities, that adds more than \$11,000 onto the house price and that makes homes less affordable.

A Liberal and Nationals government will turn this around. We will reduce the tax burden on home ownership and we will work in partnership with councils, not take away their rights. Victorians deserve a choice, and in 12 months time they will have that choice. They can choose a tired, out-of-touch Labor government with higher tax and higher debt, or they can choose a Liberals and Nationals government that backs police, that backs community safety, that ensures ambulances arrive, that keeps hospitals open and functioning, that gives young Victorians a chance at owning a home and that sees the taxpayers as partners, not just revenue streams. It is a fresh start that the Liberals and Nationals are offering.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (17:08): Christmas is upon us. One of the reasons I know that Christmas is upon us is because we have started to see the advertising, and the merchandise at McDonald's is the Grinch. I could not help but think that those opposite are like the Grinch of Victorian politics, trying to take away the things that families rely on. We read in the Grinch about having a heart that is two sizes too small, and looking at this I felt like it was a very apt metaphor. Something we see

in the story of the Grinch is that the Grinch disguises himself as Santa. He puts on something to disguise his true nature, the Santa costume, so that he can quietly sneak into the village.

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.**

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Just look at this matter of public importance: health, housing, cost of living. Who are they disguising themselves as? As us. They are putting on the cloak and sneaking in. Even the Grinch's little dog Max is disguised as a reindeer. I am not going to go into thoughts about that metaphor. The Grinch, just like the opposition, lives up on a mountain while lecturing those far away in the valley down below, removed from real life, watching from afar.

It reminded me that up there on the pointy end of the mountain where not many people can fit, we hear the leader of the Liberals saying, 'You down there in the outer suburbs, do not think you can live here. Do not think you can come and live here. Do not think you can join us here in the upper echelons.' Those opposite block housing in their own area. They block our policies to get people into homes. From up above they have the temerity to lecture those down below, and they believe they can decide who comes to their suburbs – their mountain. While places like Wyndham, Wallan and Donnybrook have shouldered enormous population growth, the area of Boroondara has gone backwards with thousands of under-65s leaving because it is too expensive for working families. Our efforts to get more housing available into those areas is blocked by those opposite – and personally by the member for Kew, the leader of the Liberals. Their message to millennials is simple: you cannot live here. You cannot live in Kew. You cannot live in Brighton. They want us to build on the edges of town again. We saw how that went under the former Minister for Planning, who I am so glad is here in the chamber because I know he loves when I speak about this.

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bulleen!

**Lauren KATHAGE:** In this chamber previously he has declared himself the king of housing because he turned farmland into housing estates. He got rid of green wedges and he increased populations. That increase –

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning. You can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** That increase in housing, the king of housing –

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Make it an hour.

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Actually, I will be seeking an apology from the member for Bulleen.

**Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.**

**Lauren KATHAGE:** That is not the only thing he should apologise for. His lack of investment in infrastructure in those areas he turned into housing is a shame. They do not want us in their areas. They say to us in the outer suburbs, 'This is how it is,' and we hear it today – we are hearing it today. They do not want developers to pay for infrastructure in the areas of new housing. We can see whose side they are on. They are not on the side of people living in new areas moving into housing or apartments. They are not on our side; they are on the side of developers. They want people to make money. That

is shameful. We heard from the member for Nepean that they will work with councils, not against councils. Just this week I was at one of my local schools who had large parts of surplus land, and they were having frustrations with council and others. Through our development facilitation program, they suddenly had all the doors open to them, and now they are able to turn that land near the ambulance station. We built the police station, we extended the train line and we built the schools. In that fantastic area of Mernda, there will be some more housing. That is the way that you do it – by supporting and not by blocking.

If you remember the story of the Grinch, you will recall that he just hated seeing people happy. He stole what he thought mattered most to the community, and he took from what the community needed. We see that in the area of health. What our community needs is the number one thing that is on the cutting block. We know that when they were in government, they cut \$1 billion from health. I know the member for Euroa has nobly campaigned previously around RSV vaccinations for children. She might be surprised to learn that the member for Rowville, when he was Treasurer, cut the whooping cough vaccination program, which saw notifications rise by 57.7 per cent in 2013–14 from 2926 to 4615 notifications.

For those of us who know what it is like to have a sick child, that is truly, truly shameful. But how do things look on this side of the chamber? Well, just the other week we had the minister out in Mernda opening the Mernda Community Hospital, which is going to be providing fantastic services to our local community, nice and convenient, with dialysis, with urgent care when it is needed most, and something that I know my community is looking forward to is the additional support for families who are seeking answers around their child's behaviour and want to understand if there is ASD or ADHD at play. Those facilities and those experts will be there to support those families. Jeez, I am proud to be part of this government.

But the kids that I am talking about now, we know that in the story the Grinch targeted the young first. The toys were taken first, and that is what I am concerned about if those opposite were to come into government – that they would go after the kids first: the Get Active Kids vouchers on the chopping block; free PT for under-18s, not a chance; camp, schools and excursion funds, no, poor kids do not deserve camp; tripling the Glasses for Kids program like we did, snip, snip. I can see it. Smile Squad, gone. The kids will not be smiling, I can tell you that right now. And we have got a direct quote from the leader of the Liberals:

... we're going to have to make cuts ... Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

That is in stark contrast to our school investments. Even just in my patch – Whittlesea, Wandong, Wallan East, Lockerie, Doreen – all these areas are having new schools built or being upgraded. All that is on the block when we have those opposite. Why do we know this? Because they do not offer solutions. We were asking the member for Nepean over and over again just now for solutions. They do not have solutions. They only know how to act out of spite, just as the Grinch does. The Grinch only knew how to destroy, and we heard that with their announcement of a cuts commission. They do not want cost-of-living support. They want a cuts commission. What will they have on the agenda of their first meeting? Will it be the \$100 power saving bonus? Will it be the food banks and community houses who, just this week or last week, have received news of extra support they are receiving to help feed families who are doing it tough?

The Leader of the Nationals just previously spoke about electricity prices. Well, can we remind the Leader of the Nationals that under the LNP, Victorian electricity prices rose 34 per cent? Listen, I am worried mostly about free kinder, because I am worried that for families and especially for mums, they are going to lose out on the opportunities that that provides. The Grinch tried to stop celebration. Those opposite try to stop progress. The Grinch did not succeed. Those opposite will not succeed.

**Chris CREWITHER** (Mornington) (17:18): I rise on this matter of public importance (MPI) submitted by the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition, and I want to go through it:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for their failure to:

- (a) ease cost of living for Victorians;
- (b) keep communities safe;
- (c) strengthen Victoria's healthcare system; and
- (d) enable more Victorians to own their own home.

I join with the member for Kew and my colleagues in condemning the Allan Labor government for its failures across these four areas. We will have had nearly 12 years by the next election of a Labor government, we have had nearly 23 out of the last 27 years of a Labor government. We are now in a situation where debt is approaching \$194 billion. That means that taxpayer-funded interest at the moment is \$21 million every single day, soon to be \$28 million and more in interest payments every single day. That is funding that could be spent to tackle our housing and homelessness crisis; on rebuilding schools like Mount Eliza Secondary College, which is 50 years old, and its facilities; in fixing the ambulance ramping crisis; in filling our police shortage with a gap of 2000 police who could be there proactively assisting to tackle our crime crisis.

At the same time, because of the debt levels that Labor have got us under, we have seen cuts to public education and much more, and we have also seen the highest taxes in the country – indeed 62 new or increased taxes under this Labor government. These taxes mean that people are fleeing the state and they are not investing in the state, whether it comes to small business or housing and much more. Victorians are indeed feeling the pain every single day. It is costing them more to live, more to drive and more to own a home and they are getting less in return. Victorians know that this state is headed in the wrong direction and Labor is no longer in touch with their priorities. This government's incompetence has led to record debt, record crime, a broken healthcare system, a housing affordability nightmare, public school cuts and a cost-of-living crisis, including as I have mentioned, growing homelessness.

On homelessness, we have a situation where more than 65,000 Victorians are on the public housing waitlist, and we have more than 30,000 on the priority waitlist. In terms of people living rough as a form of homelessness, Mornington has the most out of any electorate in the whole state. Indeed I have been helping many constituents who are struggling at the moment to get into public housing, to get into crisis accommodation and more. One gent at the moment I have been helping for the last five weeks has been living rough. He was at one built-up area and was moved on in the last week. He is now living rough in a tent at the foreshore. He is finally now on the priority waiting list, but how long will he have to wait to get housing under this government? I had to put a call out myself for a tent for this gentleman because he cannot even get a tent from this government. This is a government that is not supplying the basic needs for Victorians. In that situation as well, he has been there with his dog, and he has had that dog since it was seven months old, and unfortunately that dog passed away in the last couple of days. These are the sorts of people and real-life stories that the state Labor government need to help. I note the member for Narracan here is with me. He has probably done more in his area, before he was a member of Parliament, for people facing homelessness and facing family violence issues than has this state government. This is a state government that is failing in so many different areas, and if they were managing the debt crisis properly they would actually have more to spend on tackling this housing and homelessness crisis and much more.

Victorians know this Labor government have got it wrong. They are feeling it every single day, every time they receive a bill and every time they go to the shops. Indeed if these failures were not enough, the Labor government also is refusing to work in a bipartisan spirit to fix the problems. This Labor government refused recently our opposition leader's calls to work in a bipartisan manner to tackle the debt crisis. Even this week as well they refused and blocked the opposition's coercive control bill – a vital reform to protect people from family violence in the form of coercive control – simply because

it was not their idea. And they have a history of this – for example, on the Denyer bill, on bail laws and on machete laws. These were all bills that we brought that were blocked by Labor – which Labor ended up adopting in one form or another a number of months later – only because it was not their idea to start with. This is a government that would rather play politics than save lives.

On cost of living we have a situation where rents and housing costs are going up and up and up. One reason for that is land and property taxes, which keep on increasing under this government. More land taxes mean that these costs are being passed through in rent costs. They also mean that rental providers are leaving the market, leaving less rental stock altogether. At the same time we have situations with electricity and many other household bills going up and up and up. These are not isolated failures, they are the predictable result of policy choices under this government that have left supply constrained and markets exposed. It is reflective, again, of the debt level, which is not helping to resolve the cost-of-living crisis for Victorians. This debt level has been influenced of course by waste as well under this government. We have seen waste with the Suburban Rail Loop, which is still TBC on the budget papers, which will add to this current debt level.

We have seen major cost blowouts – for example, we have more than \$50 billion of cost blowouts on major projects. We have seen the enormous waste on the Commonwealth Games, which will not be held in Victoria, and much more. The consequences of this continue for locals such as Kerry Beard, for example, who helps to operate the Local 2 Community foodbank, and she has said there have never been more people come to her foodbank, and not only extremely vulnerable people; she has also seen tradies, families and older residents frequenting the foodbank who might not have come in the past.

We need a government that will help to ease the cost of living and stimulate the economy to bring investment back and to ensure investment stays in Victoria. On keeping communities safe as well, we have a government that has led to a situation where we have a shortage of 2000 police. We have a government that weakened our bail laws and has been dragged to the table to try and re-strengthen them recently. We have a government that reduced consequences for offenders and now, again, belatedly has been dragged to the table. We have a government that has put in place a situation where police stations have closed or where reception hours have been reduced at so many police stations across Victoria, including the Mornington police station, which has had its hours reduced to 16 hours instead of 24 hours across a number of different days.

We have youth crime at a record high and much more. People are afraid in their homes, a crime is being committed every 50 seconds in Victoria and offending is becoming more and more violent. Frontline police are exhausted, and they need assistance. They need assistance to increase the reception hours, to fill the shortage of 2000 police as soon as possible and to introduce things like Jack's law to actually properly take machetes off the streets instead of spending millions of dollars on machete bins where people who are committing crimes are not likely to drop them off in the first place. We also need things like 'break bail, face jail'. We need things like Restart. We need proper crime prevention and diversions through things like Youthstart.

Lastly, we also need to strengthen the healthcare system. I had a local, Beverley, write to me about a situation recently. She had to go out to a person who was struggling because the ambulance was not coming. The person was waiting for hours for an ambulance. She and her friends had to drive this person to Rosebud Hospital themselves. This person was lucky to survive, all because of this failing system under this government that is leading to ambulance ramping, 000 problems and much more. We need to invest the resources to tackle these issues.

The last point on this MPI that I want to note is that we need to enable more Victorians to own their home. We need to enable young people to invest in homes by doing things such as reducing stamp duty for first home buyers. We need to tackle the homelessness crisis and much more.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:28): I rise of course to oppose this matter of public importance, this MPI, that has been moved by the Liberals in relation to their supposed commitment

to ease the cost of living for Victorians, to keep communities safe, to strengthen Victoria's healthcare system and to enable more Victorians to own their own home. In words that I believe are most fitting, from the iconic and flamboyant lawyer, the famous barrister on *Seinfeld*, Jackie Chiles, there is only one phrase to describe this motion: it is outrageous, it is egregious and it is preposterous. It reminds me of that episode, to be frank, of *Seinfeld* where Jackie Chiles was representing Cosmo Kramer in court because the coffee that Kramer had been served at the local cafe was supposedly too hot and had burnt Kramer. But we know Victorians have been burnt before by the coffee that was being served by this Victorian Liberal Party when they were in government: cuts and closures, cuts and closures. The other thing that Jackie Chiles has over the Liberal Party is that he was able to settle the dispute with the coffee company. Much to his displeasure, Kramer got free coffee around the world. This Liberal Party is still dragging itself before the courts, before the judges and the barristers. That is all they have been preoccupied with.

I have said it before and I will say it again: this is an opposition about nothing. Like the show about nothing, this is the opposition about nothing. They are focused on nothing else but themselves: their own internal legal battles, their own shadow ministerial titles, their own cuts and their own closures. No matter how many times the Liberals approach this chamber and this place like George Costanza saying it is not a lie if you believe it, it is in the DNA of this Liberal Party to cut, close, block and oppose cost-of-living supports, health services, frontline services and infrastructure for all Victorians.

We have already seen the new Leader of the Opposition's true colours come through. On 16 August 2024 live on Sky News she made it crystal clear what a Liberal budget would mean for all Victorians:

Current spending is simply not sustainable ... That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

All the while it is this Labor government that has promised and is building 100 new schools in this state since we were elected in 2014, and 50 per cent of the new schools across this country are built here by this Labor government in Victoria.

We have seen as well that the Liberals have already been exposed for their almost \$11 billion budget black hole. New analysis that was just released a couple of weeks ago lays bare the scale of the Liberal-Nationals plan for cuts, which is the equivalent of two Victoria Police budgets over two years or shutting down seven hospitals. The Liberals have so far announced, as I said, almost \$11 billion in unfunded commitments. They have said they are going to freeze government fees, make changes to stamp duty for first home buyers, repeal the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and introduce a payroll exemption for high-fee non-government schools. These are unfunded commitments, and they can only mean one thing, which is sacking ambos, sacking nurses, sacking cops and sacking teachers to pay for this budget black hole. Such an unprecedented loss of revenue from these radical, right-wing Liberal-National parties would mean the equivalent of 4500 police officers losing their jobs or 9000 teachers losing their jobs, and 18,000 nurses would need to be sacked to fill this budget black hole of the Liberal Party.

But it is also in the Liberal leader's first speech where you can really see her philosophy of cuts and opposition to public investment and infrastructure, where it all shines through. She said in her first speech:

It is business that creates jobs, not government.

Well, I say to the Liberal opposition leader: what about all the thousands of new teachers, doctors, nurses, health workers, police officers, ambulance workers and the many others we have hired since being elected in 2014? The Victorian government, and the member for Mordialloc pointed this out, is one of the biggest employers in this state. The government certainly has a role in creating employment but also fuelling more employment through the investments through the big infrastructure build, which



is employing thousands of subcontractors, apprentices and construction workers as well. The opposition leader also said in her first speech:

It is business that invests in the new technologies to deliver for consumers and that delivers returns to shareholders ...

What I say to the opposition leader is: what about the biggest piece of public infrastructure and technology that we have just opened via the Metro rail tunnel, a project that was opposed by the former Liberal state government and a project that the former federal Liberal government also opposed and refused to fund? What about those long-lasting benefits of the Metro Tunnel and what it will provide for workers, commuters and businesses along the Metro corridor? What about the ongoing investments we are making along that corridor or the medical research sector at the Parkville med tech precinct, a world leader in medical technology, or our investments, for example, in the north at La Trobe University through its health, wellbeing, sport and agriculture hub, which is creating thousands of jobs and thousands more in investment through the private sector? She also said in her first speech:

It is business that has the capacity to unleash human potential, so in this place you will find me a champion of free enterprise.

What about the role of our public teachers in public classrooms and their role in unleashing the potential of all students and all families? What about the role, as I said, of our health workers, our social workers, our community workers, our youth workers and so many others who every day help those most in need to be supported, to aspire and to succeed?

The opposition leader's first speech as well proudly championed her previous role for the Business Council of Australia. This is the same Business Council of Australia that is vehemently opposed to our proposals to protect the rights of workers to work from home. The business council's media release of 24 September states:

The Business Council is urging the Victorian Government to abandon its plan to legislate a mandatory entitlement for employees to work from home two days a week ...

We wholeheartedly on this side of the house of course support the right for people to work from home because it is also a major cost-of-living relief measure for many. We have heard it through the statewide survey, which showed it saves people hundreds of dollars every week in commuting and other costs. My question to the opposition leader is does she support the Business Council of Australia's position on working from home? Will she support the right of people to work from home, or will she take the Homer Simpson approach and view to working from home?

There is an episode of *The Simpsons* that I draw the opposition leader's attention to when it comes to this and when it comes to the technology that now allows people to work from home. The episode is where Homer decides to leave his nuclear power plant job to start a new computer company. Mr Burns sends out an email to the nuclear power plant workers saying the plant will be closed for the day for repairs. Homer's mates Lenny and Carl and everyone at the power plant receive the email, but not Homer, because he never owned a computer. He goes out and buys his first computer and enthusiastically comes home, plugs it in and declares to his wife Marge, 'Did you know they have the internet on computers now?' It is a revelation to him.

My message to the opposition leader is that the internet is on computers now. There are also things called Teams, Zoom, Messenger, FaceTime and much more that people can use to work from home, which have been developed since the Liberals were last in office, from 2010 to 2014. But they would not really know this because the last time they won an election and formed government in this state was in 2010 when the biggest selling phone and the most popular technology at the time was a device known as a Nokia 2080 analogue phone. You could text, you could play *Snake*. It even had a phone book in there, but it was a world away from where the technology is today, when people can work from home.

The number one song in 2010, when they last won an election – I had to look this up on the ARIA charts – was *Love the Way You Lie* by Rihanna and Eminem. Do you remember that song? I think it is very fitting to remember that was the same time the Liberals were last elected to government in this state. I will quote some of the lyrics that just sort of come to mind here:

Now, I know we said things, did things that we didn't mean  
And we fall back into the same patterns, same routine

It is the same Liberal Party, whether in 2010 or today. If they get in – God forbid they do – they will cut and they will close and it will be everyday Victorians that will suffer, because the reality is that at every step, at every turn, at every opportunity, the Liberal leader has always and will always fall back into those same patterns and fight against workers, fight against families and fight against public investment in public assets and cost-of-living supports.

We know the irony of this MPI this week, because it is the same week that the Leader of the Opposition came out with her first major announcement as opposition leader, calling for a new frontline cut squad. They wanted us as a Labor government to partner with them and get on board to make their cuts ideology appear less extreme. We of course refused. We will not be part of cutting schools, cutting TAFE, cutting hospitals and cutting Free Fruit Friday. When they were last in government they cut Free Fruit Friday at local schools. That is absolutely outrageous. We will not sit with former Liberal treasurers in the member for Malvern, the member for Rowville, Stockdale and others to make further cuts.

I have so much more to say, but essentially we on this side of the house are the only ones delivering for cost-of-living relief and for housing. We have not even got to housing, but this is the party that is here to deliver new housing for the new generation. I oppose the MPI.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (17:38): I rise today in strong support of the member for Kew's matter of public importance. This is a matter of public importance that has been raised by the people of Victoria – Victorians who are sick of a tired Allan Labor government, a government that has been in for far too long. From right across the state, from border to border, we are hearing from Victorians that they are sick of paying the price for a city-centric government that has forgotten that Victorians want reward for effort.

Victorians want to go back to that point in time where if they worked hard they were rewarded handsomely. They were rewarded by making sure they had more money in their pocket at the end of the day. They could make decisions about helping their children. It might be about sending them to art lessons or music lessons. It might be being able to pay for tutors so they could do better in school. It might be about paying for other options to help set them up in life, to maybe help them pay for a trip overseas for a gap year to get international experience. It might be about small business owners being able to work harder, keeping money in their business so they can put on more apprentices and so they can expand and create more jobs in the community. It could be about bringing innovations to this state of Victoria. But what they are finding under the Allan Labor government is that they are working harder and getting less and less. That money is being taken out of the pockets of families right across Victoria. It is being taken out of the coffers of businesses right across Victoria, and businesses are closing as a result and moving interstate.

We are at a point in time where Victorian households have less income and less money in their pockets at the end of the day. In fact household income is 10 per cent less than the national average, and that is only because the Allan Labor government continue to bring in more and more taxes. The harder that Victorians work, the more that Labor will impose taxes so that families do not get to make decisions about where they spend the money. Businesses do not get to make decisions over where they spend that money. It is the Allan Labor government who are making decisions on how their money is spent, and it is not in line with what the expectations are of the Victorian community.

Time and time again we are seeing the waste of Victorian taxpayer money. We are seeing it thrown into corrupt activities. I do not know how many reports now have been tabled by the Victorian Ombudsman or by the IBAC around the corruption and mismanagement of Victorian taxpayer money. It is so, so important for everyone in this chamber and everyone in Victoria to remember that it is Victorian taxpayer money that is being wasted. It is not Labor money; they have not got it out of thin air. The only money they are interested in in Victoria is the money that lines their own pockets or those of their mates.

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** Yes, let us not forget the red shirts and how that went and how that carried on. Meanwhile, right across Victoria we have got more and more potholes, we have got more and more crumbling roads, we have got fewer police, we have got fewer nurses, we have got fewer teachers and we have got fewer people delivering the services that rural and regional Victorians need, and that is because the only thing Labor know how to do is tax, tax, tax and deliver less, less, less for every single Victorian across the state.

In the past week the Nationals have been waving the green and yellow flag. We have been putting a clear option around the state that at the next election you have a choice. You have a choice whether you vote for a tired Labor government that is misusing your taxes or whether you get a fresh start with a Liberal–Nationals government. I have heard from so many people, as have my colleagues, like the leader Danny O'Brien. We have heard so many times from people, who are in Ripon or who are in Bendigo, who are saying, 'We don't even see our local member. They won't meet with us. They don't come to anything.' When they do manage to catch up with them, there is disappointment that what they are saying to their face in their communities is not the same as what the members say in here. We are not seeing that come through to this chamber.

Let us talk about the emergency services tax and what we heard repeated to us: 'We had discussions with the member for Ripon, but she said that she didn't really like the tax but that she had to vote for it.' Well, I have got news from the Victorian public: you are voted to be here to represent your constituents; you are not voted in here to represent your party alone. You are here to vote for your constituents, and that is what you should be here for.

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Speaker, it has been a fairly wideranging discussion, but this is well beyond the scope of the motion. I would ask you to bring her back to relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Lowan was talking to the MPI.

**Emma KEALY:** It is no surprise to people throughout the Ripon electorate that they are not being properly represented in this place. There is nobody in that electorate who wanted an emergency services tax – not one person. This is an unfair tax that country people in particular are paying the price for, because it is just a big tax grab that is not going to the CFA. We have actually got a budget cut in the CFA this year – we have got cuts. This is a great big tax grab from rural and regional Victoria to pay for the extra on all those Melbourne projects that country people get no benefit from.

In fact no Victorian gets any benefit from taxpayer money which is just frittered away, with no investment in frontline service workers and no additional services in the area. There are certainly no more hospitals, the roads are not any better, and our schools are falling apart. And then we have got this mirror of these promises. I notice one of the previous speakers said, 'We are offering free kinder.' Well, how is that working out for the students of Casterton? Parents on Monday were told, 'Sorry, we don't have enough places in kindergarten, because the government increased the hours for each child but didn't increase the total number of places.' So there are children in this state who will not have access to four-year-old kinder, because the government have cut the funding to it. We have got four-year-olds who will not get an early-years education. That is an utter disgrace for any government but particularly a government who like to sell themselves as being of the people. 'We're for families' – well, I do not know which family you are for when you have got a four-year-old child who cannot

attend kindergarten this year. That is an utter disgrace, and that will be remembered at every single school where we have got a new child starting prep who has not had that all-important year or two years of kindergarten because Labor mismanaged that program.

We have seen the way that the agricultural sector has been treated by the Labor government, and it is utterly disgraceful. Hundreds of jobs have gone in Agriculture Victoria. Let us remember it used to be the department of agriculture once; they actually had an entire department. Now I do not even know if they are allowed to even live in the broom cupboard, because there are not many of them left. In fact there are not enough left to respond to important biosecurity risks in this state. There are no staff left to be able to manage pests and weeds in this state. It is leaving our farmers vulnerable, and they contribute so much, not just to the state's economy, not just to our local communities, but to the fabric of rural and regional Victoria. Farmers are important and should be heard. But what do we see again? We have got legislation which comes through this place that takes away the voices of farmers when it comes to making decisions on their land. And yet again, what did the member for Ripon do? She voted for it. She voted against the people who voted her into this place and made a decision that she would not stand by them. That will be remembered – that is remembered, and we are reminded of that in Ripon time and time again. It was also noted in Bendigo. Where was the member for Bendigo East when we were there listening to the community about cost of living, about health, about housing, about not being able to access housing, about rental? She was in Melbourne. That is something that Andrew Lethlean has been campaigning on. He is a ripping local person, and he is sending a shudder down the spine of Jacinta Allan.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Lowan will call members by their correct titles.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnait) (17:48): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to make a contribution on this matter of public importance. I am obviously not in favour of the MPI but, frankly, I could not believe my eyes when this came into my inbox last night. Who is writing this garbage? I assume the same person that is writing the questions in question time that are falling flat one after another. 'Hey, guys, what should our MPI be? Maybe we'll just put together and collate a bunch of stuff and allow the Allan Labor government to talk to Victorians about all of the great things that they've done in cost of living, in education and in health.' Like, seriously? Seriously, they sat down and dreamt this one up. Like I said, I could not believe my eyes when this got into my inbox last night.

I listened intently to the Liberal leader's contribution at the beginning of this MPI, and I do agree with one thing. It may be the first thing that I have agreed with any Liberal leader on, any one of the three that we have had in the last 11 months. The Liberal leader said that Victorians will be presented with a choice in 12 months. I have spoken about this before, that Victorians will be presented with a choice, and of course they will. At the end of November next year they will be presented with a choice between a Labor government that is on their side, that has always been on their side, that has provided cost-of-living relief with power saving bonuses, free public transport for kids under the age of 18 and seniors on weekends, free kinder and investment in local schools – both in infrastructure and in teaching – since it came to government 12 years ago and another Liberal cut merchant. And you cannot take a point of order on me and say that is not true, because the Liberal leader has already explicitly said it. She created an \$11.1 billion budget black hole when she was Shadow Treasurer – she still is Shadow Treasurer whilst being leader, which probably tells you everything you need to know – and then went on that fantastic channel that we all love, Sky News, and explicitly went through the cuts that she would make if elected. She stated:

Current spending is simply not sustainable ... That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

Cuts to hospitals, cuts to education and cuts to frontline services: that is all the Liberal Party knows. That is all the Liberal Party in Victoria has ever known. The new leader has come out and said that she is going to reframe the argument away from crime and talk about state debt. She has done so a little bit. The member for Mordialloc went to this – we had not compared notes before this; we may

just think alike. Let us not forget that one of the new Liberal leader's previous jobs was as an adviser to then Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, a Liberal Treasurer who ran up nearly a trillion dollars in national debt, which is still sitting there and which a Labor government is now charged with trying to deal with. As an adviser to Josh Frydenberg I am sure she was not sitting there saying, 'Oh no, boss, don't do that, don't do that.' I have never heard her talk about Liberal Party debt in the national budget. I have never heard her speak about it.

The then Liberal Treasurer ran up this debt whilst not providing one red cent to an infrastructure project in Victoria – not one. We have gone it alone on the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel. It took a Labor government getting elected for us to be able to get a contribution to the Suburban Rail Loop, and we had to go it alone on the North East Link as well. Whilst she was advising a Liberal Treasurer that ran up a trillion dollars worth of debt, they gave nothing to Victoria – not a cent. I criticised the wording of this MPI and said it is a bit of a free kick for those on this side of the house. Talk about free kicks: if you would like to, in 12 months time, contest an election against us on housing and health, bring it on.

**The SPEAKER:** Through the Chair, member for Tarneit.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Indeed, Speaker. Bring it on. If they would like to contest an election with us on housing and on health, bring it on. The only advice I would give is that if that is what they are going to do then perhaps the leader should shoulder the load herself, because honestly, after she left and sent in her mates to make contributions – none of which can lie straight in bed, frankly – let us take 'old tow ball' the member for Gippsland South, who comes in here and wants to talk about housing and a story in the *Age* today –

**Tim McCurdy:** On a point of order, Speaker, I take umbrage to the wording of the member for Tarneit. Could you ask him to withdraw, please?

**The SPEAKER:** I ask you to withdraw, member for Tarneit.

**Dylan WIGHT:** I withdraw. The member for Gippsland South came in here a couple of contributions ago and wanted to talk about an article that was published in the *Age* today about infrastructure contributions. The member for Gippsland South, who got caught misleading the house only a couple of weeks ago, was either doing so again or has been in this place so long that he has lost his capacity to comprehend policy. When you build significant housing developments, whether that be in the city or whether that be in the suburbs, there are always infrastructure contributions that go with it. In some places it is just a developer contribution which goes straight to the council. But in some places, like the member for Melton's electorate and my electorate, there is also a growing area infrastructure contribution. We make those contributions in places that require significant and expensive infrastructure. That is how we pay for them.

This is nothing new. There have been infrastructure contributions on new developments for eons, and there will continue to be. If you would like to come back in and say that you are going to cut infrastructure contributions, go for your life, member for Gippsland South, because you will not be able to pay for the infrastructure that suburbs need, just like you could not between 2010 and 2014 when the member for Bulleen signed precinct structure plans without infrastructure contributions attached to them. So now we have got suburbs with no infrastructure, and we are having to retrofit it and pay for it. So if you are going to cut infrastructure contributions, it would be great if you could stump up and tell us how you are going to pay for the infrastructure that these new residents need. If you would like to fight an election on health and housing, bring it on. The opposition should go for their life in that respect.

I referenced at the beginning of this contribution some of the fantastic things that this government has done to ease those cost-of-living pressures for Victorians. We have pulled every lever available to us to provide practical cost-of-living relief to Victorians that need it most. There have been several iterations of the power saving bonus, both in this term, at the beginning of this term, and in previous

terms, to make sure that we are easing the burden on Victorian families for those energy costs. There is a power saving bonus available to concession card holders right at this minute, and the amount of concession card holders and elderly people in my electorate that have contacted my office to make use of that power saving bonus has been absolutely enormous. We had the school saving bonus at the beginning of this year to make sure that every schoolkid, regardless of their family circumstances, had the capacity to have a new uniform, the capacity to go to camps and the capacity to have textbooks – to even the playing field, to make sure that no Victorian kid goes without, regardless of your family circumstances. We also have the Victorian energy upgrades. If you have got an old gas appliance – it could be a hot-water service – that comes to end of life and you would like to switch that to an electric heat pump for instance, you have access to incredibly generous rebates on that, so when it comes to the end of its life you can switch to electric for the same amount as it would be just to reinstall a gas hot-water service, and you save on your power bills as well.

The leader of the Liberals at the beginning of her contribution said that in 12 months time Victorians will have a choice, and indeed they will. They will have a choice between a government that cares, that has been providing cost-of-living relief over not just the course of this term but the course of the government, that has built the massive transport infrastructure projects that this state needs – Metro Tunnel, West Gate Tunnel, North East Link, and we are getting on with the Suburban Rail Loop as well – or they can choose an opposition who have already told Victorians that they will have to cut \$11.1 billion of frontline services. I am pretty confident I know what they will choose.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:58): I am pleased to rise today on the matter of public importance (MPI) put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, and oh my God, have I heard some hypocrites today talk in this chamber. Actually, I am going to go straight to the point of when we talk about housing and we keep getting called blockers this and blockers that. Let us go straight to the Minister for Planning, who would have to be one of the biggest hypocrites sitting in this chamber when she talks about blocking development. In her own electorate she blocked development and, not only that, just this year blocked a 400-lot subdivision in Cape Paterson that would have delivered affordable blocks of land for young Victorians, for millennials, for Gen Zs. And why did she do it? For votes. We all know Bass is a 200-vote marginal seat – 200 votes separating Labor retaining Bass and Labor losing it – and the whole motivation behind it was for votes. That was it.

The member for Bentleigh's whole 2014 campaign was blocking development – his whole campaign was based on that – and they stand there and go 'blockers, blockers'. Rubbish. What is even worse, the Minister for Planning was in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee this year. When asked about that Cape Paterson development and asked did she supply a statement of reasons for that development, she said, 'Yes, I think I did. I'll take that on notice.' Sure, the minister actually supplied the statement of reasons, but, guess what, when you go to the council's recording, when they ask the officer present did the minister supply a statement of reasons for this, he said, 'No, she didn't.' She did not supply a statement of reasons. That is on Bass Coast council's website. So she misled PAEC; it is as simple as that.

But let us get back to the MPI and let us get back actually to what the member for Pascoe Vale earlier quoted. I will state this: 'It's not a lie if you believe it.' And that is what this government bases its whole campaign on. 'If we keep telling ourselves it's true, even though it's not, it has got to be true. If we keep telling ourselves Victoria is the economic powerhouse of Australia, it must be true. But we won't talk about the debt. We won't talk about the interest bill. We won't talk about the fact our housing targets are in the toilet. We're already 46,000 homes behind in the first two years. But no, no, it's cheap to live in Victoria. Oh my goodness, it's cheap. Everybody's doing it easy. It's that good.' It is not a lie if you believe it. It is not a lie. Oh my goodness.

Let us talk about what has gone up in this state: housing, up 6 per cent; health, 4 per cent. Education is up, taxes are up, rent is up, fuel is up, rates are up. In 2024 gas went up 28 per cent and power went up 22 per cent. 'But no, no, no, we're bringing it down, down, down.' Everything is going the other way.

Even today there is another tax on units: \$11,300 – another tax, after the new Treasurer said, ‘We won’t be introducing any more taxes. It won’t happen. Nothing to see here.’ It is not a lie if you believe it.

Honestly, this government is failing on so many areas. Actually, the member for Tarneit referenced the growth areas infrastructure contribution just before – funding for infrastructure in growth areas. What he failed to mention is that the legislation that is just passing through this Parliament at the moment gives the government the ability to move the GAIC funding out of those communities like Melton, like any growth area. They can move that funding now. It does not have to stay there. Where is that going to go? I will give you one guess: the Suburban Rail Loop, to prop up that massive black hole that is the SRL.

I have heard members here today talking about our health system. Oh my goodness, I cannot believe they went there. They have been talking about our health system, and how short is their memory from just a couple of weeks ago when we talked about a broken health system and Lois Casboubt from my electorate, the 91-year-old grandmother that suffered because of a failed health system. The Minister for Health was sitting there, and I wish she was back in here now. The Minister for Health was sitting there and actually said to me, ‘Wait till all this comes out.’ I cannot wait, because what I will also reference today for the Minister for Health’s education is that poor grandmother sat in that hospital on a Friday for 8 hours on a stretcher in a hallway because the West Gippsland Hospital, which should have been started by now, built in 1939, is not fit for purpose anymore. ‘Oh, but we’re investing in Victoria’s health. There is nothing to see here.’ It is not a lie if you believe it. That is what this government bases its whole strategy on – the continual misrepresentation of the state of Victoria.

We talk about the economy and we talk about the debt. There have been a couple of members here, actually, that talked about debt today. They referenced the federal government and what happened there. The debt in this state has gone up 415 per cent since 2014 – 415 per cent. We are going to hit \$194 billion – debt is going up at a massive rate, and the interest we are paying on the debt is out of this world. It is ridiculous. And that is if the government can hold on to the current credit rating. If the state of Victoria loses that credit rating, this state is going to be in a lot worse condition than what it is now.

I do not know if it can get any worse or not, but, I tell you what, we are in a lot of trouble, and this is why we do need a change of government. I agree with the member for Tarneit: bring it on. Bring it on, because I will argue with this government every day about housing and every day about health. I hear them talk about schools and their investment in schools. I will tell you this: in the seat of Narracan we have had not had a new state government school built for over 50 years – the highest growth area in Australia and not one new state school built in over 50 years. So where do they invest in schools? Where? In Labor seats.

This government has brought in over 60 taxes since 2014, with 31 or more of those property related. Thirty-one is a good number: I think that is the same approval rating the Premier has got at the moment for preferred Premier.

**A member** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Negative 31 – great number. I said this in my maiden speech, in my inaugural speech in this place: every tax or charge that you put on developers gets passed down the line. That is why housing is unaffordable in this state. That is why millennials and gen Zs under this government have no chance of owning a home – none at all. The 63 precincts is not a housing policy, it is a tax policy. That is all it is: it triggers windfall gains tax – and now today another \$11,300 on top of that. Every time this government says, ‘Well, you know, we’re making it affordable,’ it is going the other way. It is the opposite. There is nothing affordable. And talk about cuts: let us talk about cuts. Let us talk about the government cutting 3000 public servants – 3000 public servants announced by the Treasurer this government is going to cut. Yes, bring it on.

*Bills***Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (18:08): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025. As I always do, I would just like to say a big thankyou to the minister and her team as well as to all the people in the department who have worked extremely hard to get this important piece of legislation to this place for this important debate, and of course thanks to all the people who were involved in the consultation, all the stakeholders, to bring this to the house today. It is always great to hear from colleagues talking in support of legislation in this place and of course always great to hear from the member for Melton – always extremely articulate. I know he had two bites at the cherry – one before and after a part of debate in this place – and it is always great to hear his musings in this place, so thank you to the member for Melton. I appreciate the member for Glen Waverley for giving his spot up – well, not giving his spot up but doing the old switcheroo and letting me go in first. Thanks very much, and of course I do look forward to the member for Glen Waverley's contribution on this piece of legislation.

This bill sits under the portfolio of energy and resources. We know that Victoria has a proud resources sector. We know, however, that whilst we do have a proud resources sector, we do not have the biggest resources sector in the country. We know that there are places that are more fortunate in terms of where they sit on mainland Australia, places like WA, South Australia and Queensland. If you look at their revenue, a lot more of it is derived through resources than Victoria could possibly dream of. However, we do still have a very proud resources sector and that obviously forms a smaller part of our revenue base here. It is good, however, when we are talking about revenue, that we do have a strong partner in Canberra through the Albanese Labor government, who are now giving us a fair deal on GST. That has made a huge, huge difference to the state of Victoria and has made sure that we get our fair share, not just in our deal with GST but also when it comes to infrastructure spending. We have got genuine partners in projects like the North East Link, the Suburban Rail Loop and a range of other infrastructure projects that are good for Victoria and good for Victorians.

We know we have lost out on billions of dollars not just through where we are positioned on mainland Australia when it comes to resources, but we lost out on billions of dollars purely through the opposition and the opposition in Canberra basically talking down projects when they were in government either here in the state or federally. That has cost us billions of dollars. We had to go it alone on Metro Tunnel. We have had to go it alone in significant part when it came to level crossing removals and the West Gate Tunnel. But we have gone on and we have got the job done. Regardless of how Victoria derives its revenue, we have gotten on and delivered for Victorians.

When we come to the crux of this bill, we know it amends the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 to create a trailing liability scheme, specifying who the minister can call back to rehabilitate or fund rehabilitation if a declared mine licensee cannot meet rehabilitation obligations. The parties that can be called back include former declared mining licence holders who held a licence on or after 6 May 2022; a related body corporate of the current declared mining licence holder or former licensees who held the licence on or after 6 May 2022; and a related person, as determined by the minister, considering whether that person benefited significantly financially, influenced rehabilitation compliance or acted jointly with the declared mine licensee. It includes procedural fairness requirements, introduces a notification requirement for declared mine licensees to report changes in ownership control and makes clarifying and minor technical and consequential amendments as well.



We also know how critical minerals are to this state and also to this nation. Globally we know that lots of components in the energy transition and in 21st-century tech absolutely need those critical minerals, those critical resources. We know that Victoria is home to world-class deposits of critical minerals vital for our transition to a net zero future, and that is critically important. That is where governments are headed. That is where the private market is headed. We know that is the only way we are going to drive down energy prices. As we have seen, we have put downward pressure on energy prices in Victoria. When you look across the eastern seaboard, the results speak for themselves in terms of the prices here as compared to New South Wales and south-east Queensland on that eastern seaboard market.

We know critical minerals are crucial to that because we know we cannot have an energy transition without the key critical minerals and rare earths that we have in Victoria. For example, in north-west Victoria alone we have almost \$200 billion worth of critical minerals and rare earths, alongside other key deposits elsewhere in the state. Victoria has globally significant deposits of critical minerals and rare earths, and this includes 51 per cent of Australia's rutile and 22 per cent of its ilmenite. These are key titanium-bearing minerals vital for biomedical applications. Another example is that central Victoria has Australia's largest antimony deposits, vital for solar panels and batteries, another huge part of the energy transition and a key pillar of a lot of the policy that has been driven formerly by the Andrews Labor government and now proudly by the Allan Labor government.

We are putting hundreds of thousands of solar panels on roofs. We have committed to I think it is around the 800,000 mark of solar panels on roofs. There are the batteries. There are the solar hot-water systems. We are absolutely well on track in meeting that key election commitment we made in 2018, extremely popular not just with suppliers in creating jobs but with households. The amount of electricity that is now generated through rooftop batteries in Victoria is absolutely leading the nation. We are global trendsetters when it comes to solar energy.

**Paul Edbrooke:** You're a trendsetter.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Thank you, member for Frankston. I appreciate that. That is very kind of you. I am going to tell my wife. She might disagree with you, but I appreciate it. But we are absolutely trendsetters when it comes to net zero. We have world-leading targets. You could argue on the world-leading front. I certainly would. But certainly on the Australian front we are absolutely leading the nation. We are setting the policy tone in this nation. Again, it is great to have a partner in Canberra when it comes to that energy transition, when it comes to realising the importance of our minerals, the importance of our trading and economic partnerships with other nations around this world, and that is absolutely the Albanese Labor government. We had 10 years of absolute policy inertia. We had God knows how many different energy policies, which left essentially no sense of direction when it came to the private market. We were absolutely behind, but now we are absolutely streaking ahead from a national perspective. It is fantastic to have that partner in Canberra, as I said, not just from a GST deal perspective, realising the importance of our critical minerals, which we are very proud to have here in Victoria, as detailed, but also to have a strong partner when it comes to the energy transition and moving not just to renewable energy but to that net zero future as well.

With the indulgence of the house, this is potentially the last time I will speak on a bill this sitting year or make any contribution, so I would like to say a huge thankyou to the catering staff and a huge thankyou to all the clerks. Thank you to the Hansard team. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. Love your work – always doing great. They have to listen to all of our stuff, as exciting as it is, as blistering as it is. I would probably be low down on the list of contributors they enjoy listening to. You can nod; it is okay. You all do fantastic work, so thank you to you both and to all of your team, who are no doubt working behind the scenes constantly. To all of the attendants, to everyone in the library –

**John Mullahy** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** IT are fantastic, and security are fantastic, obviously in part led by the great man Mr Adam Boyd. He still calls me Mr Taylor. It is a bit of a thing. He is a great bloke. We love Adam and the team at security, IT and everyone else in between. Thank you so much for everything that you do to make Parliament run. Of course a huge thankyou to all of my electorate office team, and to all the electorate officers across party lines, to all the EOs in both chambers and to all the staffers, thank you so much for everything you put in this year. Finally –

**Emma Kealy:** Very wideranging.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** I did ask for the indulgence of the house. I am just saying thanks. I thank the member for Lowan for not point-of-ordering me but indulging me and allowing me to say thanks. This bill aims to ensure the mining industry remains responsible for the rehabilitation and closure of coalmines in Victoria and transitions from coal-fired energy, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (18:18): I rise to speak on the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025. This is a piece of legislation which is around the designated mines in the state, the Latrobe Valley mines. My National Party colleague the member for Morwell spoke so well on this because he knows these issues better than anybody else in this place. He lives and breathes it every single day. He understands it because he has always lived in the area, and he is always out and about fighting for a fair share for his community. I commend him for taking such a strong stand on backing his community day in, day out.

This element is around the declared mines, as I said. I understand, though, there are other areas of the mineral resources bill which have some impacts on my community, particularly when you are talking about this retrospective element of trailing liabilities for the rehabilitation of mines. My electorate of Lowan is the home of a large number of mineral sands deposits. We have so many exploration permits around the region. We see that Stavely Arc, which goes through the electorates of Mildura and Murray Plains and into the neighbouring electorate of Ripon as well a little bit, provides many very valuable minerals, some of which have been mined for an extended period of time. We have all heard about the goldmine in Stawell, which is so well known and which attracted the Chinese originally to come out from their homeland to land at Robe and traverse South Australia and into Victoria via Stawell, then into Ballarat as well, in the seat of the Speaker. It is an important aspect and something that obviously has brought a lot of wealth to our state. When we look around Parliament house, there is gold leaf on every corner that you look at because of the gold rush in this state.

However, it has been a long time since we have had a similar rush on minerals in my electorate, and there is deep concern within the community around the safeguards for mineral sands mining. There is deep concern when it comes to the risks around that and the protections that will be in place for the landholders, but also for the community. Some of that is around the concerns of our farmers around putting mining ahead of agriculture. There are many in my community who feel like they have not been heard, and there are examples around the state where mines have not been rehabilitated back to their productive value.

This legislation will deal with some of those elements. This legislation will deal with elements around rehabilitating coalmines in the Latrobe Valley. But I have seen firsthand that we have mineral sands mines across regional Victoria that have not been rehabilitated properly. There are areas where certainly the base has not been put back in in an appropriate way. It has been bulldozed in nice and quickly at the end, or to beat rain or during rain, and it has not been prepared appropriately. As a result, we have cracks in the ground which would fit me inside very easily. There are also issues with the different layers being mixed. There are chlorine and boron which have come to the surface levels, which are absolutely toxic, for those who are unaware, to grow the produce that farmers need to grow to be able to earn a living. We have also got increased rates of weeds through that sand as it is rehabilitated and as the soil is put back in that order. Because it has been sitting in a pile in a paddock for a period of time, all of the organic matter is lost. All of those things that make for a good soil combination to make for farmland, the soil that we need, is reduced.

So it has got a twofold impact. On the one hand, we have got an increased cost of production because it costs more in chemicals to get rid of the weeds. On the other hand, the productivity is lower; we have got lower growth rates. We are not seeing the same production possible in areas that have been mined compared with an area right next to where that mine was. This is where there needs to be a consideration for trailing liabilities in other areas of mining, not just around those three mines that are rehabilitated coalmines, but also looking at making sure that if mining is to go ahead, there are appropriate safeguards in place to make sure that our Victorian farmland, if it is used for mining, will be rehabilitated to a point where that production value is maintained. And if that production value cannot be achieved again, there needs to be compensation back to the landholder. But there also needs to be a recognition that if this land cannot be rehabilitated, if there is not the scientific research to back it in that it can be rehabilitated, there must be an additional value put on the net amount of agricultural land that will be taken out of this state, because we can never forget what agriculture contributes to the state of Victoria. It is not just about putting food on our table or of growing fibre that puts the clothing on our backs. It is also about being an economic driver for the state of Victoria. It is about being an economic driver for Australia as a nation, but also it will always be the economic backbone of our rural and regional communities.

There are many people in the farming sector who feel like their voice has not been heard by the Allan Labor government. There are people in this community who have questions that could be answered, and I think that it is absolutely reasonable that they have the opportunity to ask questions of government officials when at the same time the government is talking about how mineral resources are going to help fund Victoria's future and how we are going to ride the wave of a mineral sands boom. You need to take the community along with you. You need to be able to ensure that they understand what those safeguards are. Is there going to be input along the process of any mining approvals? Particularly through the technical reference group, will there be a voice of agricultural professionals – of experienced people who understand the local soil types – to give input and reference to the EES process? At the moment, the voice of agriculture and the expertise of our local farmers are not included in consideration of the environment effects statement. Are we going to have greater access to information from Resources Victoria, as in a front-facing shopfront where people can come in and ask basic questions so they can understand more about whether there are any exploration licences on their land and they can understand what the processes are for when they can give some input into how their land is utilised, how it will be rehabilitated, what work plans are in place and particularly if there is a variation to a work plan? They need to be able to understand when they will be able to have their voices heard.

We also need to make sure it is fair and equitable. We know that mining companies can afford the top end of town lawyers. It is not fair that our farmers do not have similar supports to back them in, particularly when agriculture is one of the most important drivers of our rural and regional economy. These are things that the government should consider when they are considering amendments to legislation such as this before us today, but it is also about how we can make sure our community understands that mining can work alongside agriculture or, where it cannot, that it should not go ahead. We are not hearing that from the government. Farmers have just been shut out from that discussion, and people are very, very angry. They are very, very angry that they have not been heard. They have been talked about, but they are not being heard in terms of what the impact will be on their land, what the impact will be on the future productivity of the land that they own and what the impact will be on the net agricultural sector and production within the state of Victoria. While we see this legislation bringing in trailing liabilities for the Latrobe Valley coalmines, I do urge the government to take a similar amount of time to look at what is in place for mineral sand mining. In particular, if there is one thing you can do today, you can make sure that the voices of people within Ag Vic are included and working with Resources Victoria to understand what the impact will be on our local soils to make sure that we do not stuff it up, because you can only stuff it up once and it is gone for good. It is too important to get this wrong. We need to have more information to our communities, our communities to be listened to and appropriate action to be taken so that we have the safeguards we need for mining

to go ahead in the first place and that there is accountability but then the rewards come back to the communities that will host those mining areas.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (18:28): I rise to speak in support of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurances) Bill 2025. That is a big mouthful. It is good to hear that those on the other side also want to make sure that our environment and agricultural land and all that are protected and that when mining companies do go out there and dig up our resources they make sure that the land is returned to the way it should be. This is an important and necessary piece of legislation, and it strengthens the regulatory framework, protects Victorian taxpayers and ensures that those who have profited most from Victoria's coalmines are the ones who properly and fully fund their rehabilitation, not the public, not local communities and not future generations. I would like to acknowledge the contributions from both sides of the house. I would like to acknowledge the member for Morwell, who gave a wonderful contribution based on his local community, because this will affect his local community directly, but also the member for Bayswater, who is a great member who gives wonderful contributions. We will miss him after the next election, but I know he has got a whole lot more to give over the next 12 months or 11 months. I look forward to what he will be giving to us here in the chamber.

This bill delivers on a clear public commitment made by the government in May 2022 to introduce a trailing liabilities scheme for declared mines. The three vast open-cut coalmines in the Latrobe Valley are Hazelwood, Yallourn and Loy Yang. These mines have powered our state for decades. They have supported jobs, industry and economic growth. But as Victoria transitions away from coal-fired energy, we must also confront the reality that these sites are among the most complex, risky and expensive to rehabilitate anywhere in the country. Communities in the Latrobe Valley know this. They live alongside the consequences – the impacts on land stability, hydrology, water quality and public safety – and they rightly expect that rehabilitation will be done properly, safely and fully and that the companies who reap the profits will meet every dollar of their obligations. This bill helps guarantee exactly that.

Across Victoria operators are already required by law to rehabilitate mine sites so that the land is left safe, stable and sustainable. That work begins long before mining starts, from planning to progressive rehabilitation during operation and ultimately the full restoration of the site at closure. Most operators do the right thing. They plan responsibly, they lodge bonds reflecting the true cost of rehabilitation and they progressively reduce the disturbed footprint over time. They work with Resources Victoria on compliance, reporting and inspections, and they restore land so that it can support new environmental, cultural or community uses. There are examples across our state where this long-term work has been done successfully: parts of the Fosterville Gold Mine returned to box-ironbark forest, former farmland near the Splitters Creek facility restored to wetlands and progressive rehabilitation underway at sites such as the Davis pit near Stawell. These examples demonstrate what responsible rehabilitation looks like.

But the scale and complexity of the Latrobe Valley coalmines, the only declared mines in Victoria, demand a much stronger safety net. These are mines where the physical and geotechnical characteristics, the vast voids and the interaction with groundwater and surface water all pose significant and ongoing risks to public safety, the environment and the critical infrastructure. Hazelwood is already progressing through its rehabilitation approvals, Yallourn will close in 2028 and Loy Yang has a scheduled closure in 2035, and each of these sites will require decades of careful planning, engineering and long-term monitoring. The Victorian community deserves certainty that these obligations will be met not just today but long into the future.

This bill introduces a trailing liabilities regime – a measure of last resort, but a vital one. The purpose is simple: if a declared mine licensee fails to meet its rehabilitation obligations or is unable to do so, the government will have clear and robust powers to call back those who have had significant financial benefit or substantial influence over the operation of the mine. This means former licensees; it means related corporate entities, including parent companies and subsidiaries; and it means any party that has

materially benefited from the mine or shaped its operations to such an extent that it is fair and reasonable that they contribute to rehabilitation. Crucially – and this is important – employees and contractors are explicitly excluded. This addresses a longstanding community concern and ensures responsibility sits where it belongs: on those who made the decisions and profited from them. The bill's call-back provisions are consistent with the Commonwealth's approach for offshore petroleum decommissioning, again reflecting that major industrial assets require a major accountability framework. This regime is not a substitute for existing obligations, it does not shift current responsibilities and it will not be used lightly. It is a backstop, a safety net, designed to protect the public from the worst-case scenario, and that is exactly the kind of robust, responsible regulation Victoria expects.

Beyond the trailing liabilities regime, the bill also makes a series of important technical and administrative amendments. It strengthens the operation of the rehabilitation plans, ensuring declared mine rehabilitation plans are regularly reviewed and updated as mine closures progress; it improves the minister's power to vary mineral licences and work authorities, particularly in emergency situations or when new risks emerge that require swift regulatory action; and it clarifies how the code of compliance will operate under the new general duty model introduced in 2023, a reform that will fully commence in 2027. It represents a modern risk-based approach to regulating mines and quarries, and it includes a range of minor amendments to ensure consistency, transparency and ease of operation across the act. These changes may be technical, but they matter. They improve certainty for communities and clarity for industry and confidence in the regulator.

At the heart of this bill is a simple principle: if you profit from a mine, you are responsible for its rehabilitation – not the Victorian taxpayer, not the next generation, not the people who live beside the sites or who have carried the impacts for decades. Local communities in the Latrobe Valley know better than anyone the scale of this task. They know the importance of stable land, safe water systems and a rehabilitation process that respects environmental, cultural and recreational values. They know what happens when rehabilitation is not done properly – risks to public safety, to waterways, to infrastructure and to confidence in the future use of the land. This bill demonstrates that the government has those communities' backs. It shows that we are not only planning for the end of coal-fired energy, we are planning responsibly for what comes after.

Although this bill focuses on rehabilitation and accountability, it is also part of a broader story about Victoria's resource sector. We are modernising regulation, we are supporting responsible exploration and we are unlocking the quarry materials and critical minerals that will power a clean energy future. Critical minerals such as copper, antimony and high purity silica and rare earths will be essential to battery technology, solar panels, advanced manufacturing and the global transition to net zero. Victoria has world-class deposits – billions of dollars worth – in the state's north-west alone. That opportunity comes with responsibility to ensure mining is safe, sustainable, culturally respectful and aligned to community expectations. Responsible regulation, the kind that is strengthened by this bill, is central to achieving that balance.

It is the 171st anniversary of the Eureka Stockade today, when miners in Ballarat decided to take on the government to ensure that there was no taxation without representation. It is pretty similar to the reason why the Americans got rid of the British over there. Essentially mining has a long and storied history here in the state of Victoria. We know about this building and that at one stage Victoria was actually the richest place in the world by GDP based on the fact that we were digging out so much gold at that time from Ballarat and Bendigo. We know that we will continue to do mining. We need to make sure that we are doing it correctly and doing it right. I think this is a bill that completely backs that up. We need to make sure that we do it in a sustainable way.

We need to take advantage of how many critical minerals we do have here in Victoria. We saw an agreement between Anthony Albanese and Donald Trump recently between our two countries about exploring critical minerals and making sure that if we are going to explore that here in Australia, and if we are going to dig it up from Victoria, we get a return on that investment. The fact is that these

resources are the Victorian people's assets. If they are going to be dug up from Victoria, then we need to make sure that we get a return on that capital and a return on that investment so that we can pay for education, pay for health care and pay for the transport system we need for the growing economy here in Victoria.

This bill is about fairness. It is also about accountability. It is about ensuring that the enormous responsibility of rehabilitating the Latrobe Valley's coalmines is carried out by those who profited from them, not by the people of Victoria. This bill provides that assurance. It is fair, it is responsible and it is forward looking, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (18:38): I rise to make a contribution to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025. Before I get onto what I was going to talk about, I just might comment on the member for Glen Waverley's contribution, where he talked about the Eureka Stockade and the rising up there and a couple of things. I will remind the house of what I actually said in my member's statement yesterday about a rising up of the farmers in Victoria who are violently opposed to some of the renewable energy projects, particularly the Western Link and particularly VNI West. They will rise up, but they want to do it to get rid of the Labor government. And they will. They will get rid of the Labor government because the Labor government has treated them appallingly, Acting Speaker Addison, as you would know as a member who represents some of that particular area there. So, yes, there will be more rising up and it will be from the farmers there, because, as I said, Sally McManus, the ACTU president, said bad laws are made to be broken, and those people are going to break the law there and make sure that VicGrid does not go on their land to build that powerline. I am emphatic in my support for them, and all power to them for what they are doing around that.

When we talk about mining in this state, we look at the gold rush that we had here in the 1850s and the 1860s. The lovely building we are in is a benefit from mining. For those that have the opportunity to go to functions at Government House, that is a benefit of mining. And the story about the ballroom at Government House, which we go to for large public functions, is that it is 1 yard longer than the ballroom at Buckingham Palace. Why did Victorians do that? Because we could. Because we had gold. It is longer than the one at Buckingham Palace, just to stick it up those redcoats that were there at that particular time. If you go to the State Library, that is another beneficiary of it. So we have a proud history of mining in this state that has stood us in good stead, right from the gold rush times.

The coal power stations that this piece of legislation is talking about – and it is legislation that is necessary to make sure that those coalmines are rehabilitated appropriately – have provided this state with cheap power for the last 80 or 90 years. Sir John Monash's vision has been absolutely brilliant for this state. We created a large manufacturing industry here in Victoria because we had reliable, cheap power. We actually do not have that anymore – which is a separate issue to the debate on this particular piece of legislation – because we now find industry is moving away from this state because the cost of energy is too great. But this is about rehabilitating those mines that provided tens of thousands of jobs to this state and a huge economic benefit to this state through the cheap and reliable power that we had.

When we think about Australia as a nation, we have the standard of living that we have in Australia particularly because of the mining in Western Australia and Queensland. It is the coal exports, the iron ore exports and the natural gas exports that actually keep Australia's economy afloat. It is not people that work as baristas making coffee and doing all those other jobs that people talk about, it is the mining industry. One of the people I know in Echuca did his trip around Australia a couple of years ago, and he said that when you look at the ships lined up at Port Hedland and when you look at the ships lined up at Gladstone to take away coal and iron ore, it is like a taxi rank: they are queued up to come and get it. If you think about the jobs, the wealth and the tax that has been created for this nation from those particular industries, that is why we enjoy the standard of living we do. There is an opportunity for a new generation of that here in Victoria. But as the member for Glen Waverley said, we have got to make sure it is done well.

We saw reports of the recent trip by our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to America and his discussions with President Trump. The US desires to have a more independent supply of some of the critical minerals to get away from its reliance on China and on Russia, where a lot of the critical minerals, the mineral sands, are and where the antimony supply is. There is an opportunity for Victoria, because we have had mineral sand mines and potential for quite a few more. But this legislation, I think, will flow on from the coal industry to those particular mines to make sure the rehabilitation is done right.

One of the particular concerns that a lot of farmers have is about yes, there will be a mine and, yes, the company that has that mine will have every intention of doing the right thing, but what happens if with five years to go on a mine it is flipped to an offshore owner who is in the Cayman Islands or somewhere else in a tax shelter and there is no-one to chase to actually get the money to make sure that rehabilitation is done. My understanding is that this legislation, with the follow-through powers to connected entities, has a way of solving those particular issues.

I would like to see that mining and agriculture can work together in this state. At the moment there are a lot of tensions from the mining point of view. I think it is exacerbated by the issues around renewable energy projects like those I just talked about, VNI West and the western link, but there is an opportunity for us to create wealth for the state and for the nation out of the critical minerals that we have here, out of the antimony and out of the new generation of goldmines in this state. Those that I talk to effectively say there is still more gold in the ground than Victoria has actually taken out over that particular time. So there is a real opportunity for wealth for us into the future out of those mines as well. But it is so important that the rehabilitation is done well.

What has raised concerns for farmers where there are new proposed mineral sand mines is that there is a chequered history of how well that rehabilitation has been done. The member for Lowan talked about that particular issue, and I am sure the member for Mildura will also talk about that issue in her contribution. Some mines have been rehabilitated well. The soil has been layered back in appropriately, and with work there are crops and pastures able to be grown on that land. There are others where it has not been done well. There is one particular example in the north-west where unfortunately for the mining company – it is one that is very, very vocal and well respected – they started to fill the mine in, as I understand it, with the proper layering of the different layers of soil, and then near the end they got a rush of blood in a hurry and pushed a lot of it in with a bulldozer. That country is not growing crops anywhere near as it should. This legislation will give the opportunity for the government to actually follow the path and find the people that have to come back and rehabilitate the likes of that mine properly into the future.

We will not be opposing this particular piece of legislation, but it is something that we want to make sure is used responsibly to make sure that remediation is actually done properly. For those that drive down the Princes Highway through the Latrobe Valley, there are some very big holes in the ground there that will need a plan. Some of those plans, as I understand it, are about filling those mines with water in the future, because as those that were around when we had the Hazelwood mine fire know, there is a very real risk with those old mines. If the coal that is left there catches on fire without the workers and the water there, there is a real risk that it will burn for a long time. I felt so sorry for the people of Morwell that lived through that mine fire and the ash and everything that was in the air, let alone the issue about when the highway nearly slipped into the mine as well, which predates that.

This will ensure that there is the opportunity to make sure that on ENGIE, Energy Australia and AGL actually do the right thing in those rehabilitations. Being large, major corporate entities in Australia that will have a history in the future here because they are all, in one way or another, getting into the renewables energy market, they are not going to blot their copybook by doing something dodgy and spinning it off to an offshore entity that does not have the money to finish it, but they still need to be held to account to make sure it does not happen into the future. This will be, I hope, legislation that ensures our next golden era of mining in this state, which I think will be around the critical minerals and antimony. There is a real opportunity for this state to do it well. Historically maybe we did not do

it as well as we could, but let us try and do that better into the future. As for those that ask ‘What is antimony?’, just to finish off, it is effectively the hardening material that makes bullets and that makes tanks less prone to being shot through and so on. Most of that comes out of China and Russia. There is a real opportunity for us in this nation to be a supplier to the Western world around these critical minerals and antimony.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (18:48): I am very pleased to rise to speak on reform of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990. It is certainly some very important regulatory reform, because I think fundamentally it is about respecting the land that has been utilised for a mine. I know that there is an emphasis, certainly in this state, upon rehabilitating the mine as you go – as you are working the mine – and not leaving it to the end. It is also about accountability in the way that you leave the mine, certainly having reaped the financial benefits of having made the mine in the first place. I do not know if you say made or dug – there is probably a more appropriate word – but in any case we know what the point is. Under this legislation – we are looking at the purpose – the new provisions will:

... reduce the likelihood that rehabilitation costs are passed on to Victorians; and provide the Government with a new tool to require those who derived greatest financial benefit from mining projects to be responsible for remediating the rehabilitation risks and liabilities caused by the project.

I am very pleased to say that we do have good examples of appropriate rehabilitation. It can be done. Therefore regulating in this way certainly has a good purpose, a sound purpose. I will give examples. There are parts of Fosterville Gold Mine, a currently operating goldmine outside of Bendigo, where in 2021 an open pit was returned to box-ironbark forest, and since 2017 around 3.7 hectares of farmland neighbouring the Splitters Creek evaporation facility has been restored to its original wetlands landform. This has provided a habitat for native and terrestrial species as well as an open space for the community. This is what we are talking about when it comes to accountability and return and respecting the land that has been used for a mine.

I will just refer to the technical element of this bill when we are talking about what is a declared mine, which is if the minister is satisfied that there are geotechnical, hydrogeological, water quality or hydrological factors within these sites that pose a significant risk to public safety, the environment or infrastructure. I should say currently there are only three mines that meet these criteria which have become declared mines: they are the open-cut coalmines at Hazelwood, Yallourn and Loy Yang in the Latrobe Valley. I do want to commend the workers who over many decades have provided – and will be continuing to provide – energy for this state. Of course we are on a steady transition and we are committed to that, but I do want to respect those communities who have worked so hard and made a significant contribution to the energy that has powered hospitals and powered the whole state over many, many decades. They have certainly made a very important contribution, and I want to pay respect to that as well.

When we are talking about what powers or further powers et cetera this bill will have, the trailing liability regime will be a measure of last resort, and it will allow the minister to call back a former licence-holder of one of the three declared mines in the Latrobe Valley. The minister could then direct a person to contribute to rehabilitation costs or comply with other rehabilitation requirements that apply to a declared mine licensee if they have failed in their obligations under a declared mine rehabilitation plan.

I did speak before to opportunities, or I was referring to the transition of energy in the state. We know that there are certain opportunities when it comes to deposits of critical minerals that are vital for our transition to a net zero future, but at the same time we must be sure that when we are talking about any exploration or mining, it is done in a way that protects the environment and cultural and social values and is in line with the expectations of traditional owners and regional communities. Further to that I will say our critical minerals boom could lead to 7000 new jobs in the north-west of Victoria alone



and ensure Victoria has a place in the global spotlight when it comes to these essential logistics chains for the future economy.

If we are talking about that very important subject of energy transition in this state, what does that actually look like? I am very pleased to say that the Minister for Energy and Resources, the member for Mill Park, announced just a little bit earlier this year that 42 per cent of the state's electricity was produced by cheap renewable energy. This was over the last financial year, putting Victoria well on track to meet its legislated renewable energy target of 40 per cent by the end of this year. Victoria has met every renewable energy target it has set to date and is well on the way to meeting the next ones, of 65 per cent renewable energy generation by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. Victoria now hosts over 90 large-scale renewable energy projects, thanks to our Allan Labor government, adding almost 7 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity to the grid, which is helping to lower energy prices for Victorian households and businesses. I am really pleased to say that Victorians are also embracing rooftop solar on their offices, warehouses and homes, with panels contributing almost 11 per cent of Victoria's energy in the last financial year. I know businesses in my electorate are getting on board with that; we have seen that in Fishermans Bend. They can see that into the future, if they do not plan ahead and get solar on their facilities, they are going to have considerable costs to offset. And I am pleased to see a number of businesses are taking advantage of our energy rebates. That is a market decision, that is an economic decision, but also a sense of accountability when it comes to the emissions being generated by their various enterprises.

I should say another important point – because we hear a lot about energy prices, quite rightly; it is a very important point – is record investment in renewables means Victoria consistently has the lowest wholesale energy power prices in the country. Over the last financial year Victoria's average wholesale price was \$107 per megawatt hour, compared to \$115 for Tasmania, \$127 for Queensland, \$138 for South Australia and \$151 for New South Wales. That is not by accident, that is by design, certainly by investing in renewables but also by investing in legislative tools that help give people more choice, and the Victorian default offer as well.

These well-constructed legislative reforms have certainly assisted Victorians in being able to have access to fairer retail prices. This is also the impetus for further investment in the renewable energy sector. There are more than 50 gigawatts of proposed or committed renewable energy projects in Victoria, and this shows strong investment interest in the state and a pipeline of projects ready to replace the old coal-fired generators. We know that with coal-fired generators again it is the market that is driving this. Often there are concerns about – perhaps for those who are less concerned about the environment or energy prices – government's involvement when it comes to the phasing out of coal, but it is the market that is driving it. There are economic imperatives and there are sound decisions being made about transitioning to more energy-efficient sources but also as a way to curtail energy prices into the future. These are fundamentally economic decisions but also environmental ones.

Coming back to that issue of the critical minerals and what they can mean, in the north-west of Victoria alone we have almost \$200 billion – that is quite a large figure – worth of critical minerals and rare earths, alongside other key deposits elsewhere in the state. But I will put the caveat of needing to respect – and much has been said in the chamber about this – agricultural land and land more broadly to make sure that where mines are invested in there is appropriate regulation and rehabilitation so that the community does get to have the benefit returned to them but also so that we restore biodiversity. We know now more than ever that all our existence is dependent on respecting our ecosystems and also making sure that we maximise energy efficiency to create a much kinder and safer future for all Victorians, thinking not only of ourselves here in the chamber but also the future generations, because we will leave a legacy one way or another. It is having that accountability and this stronger regulation and the ability when it comes to declared mines to make sure that Victorians themselves are not having to pay for situations where mines have not been sufficiently rehabilitated to a standard that meets our community expectations.

I am certainly buoyed by this legislation. It is very important. We have seen examples of where there has been positive and appropriate rehabilitation, and we want that to continue into the future.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (18:58): In the about 90 seconds I have it is still worth me getting up to go to bat for our food and fibre producers, as I always do in this place, particularly when it comes to mining and rehabilitation of land. The Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment (Financial Assurance) Bill 2025 introduces a trailing liability scheme in relation to the declared mines, but as the member for Lowan pointed out, the same sort of scheme might be considered for farmers.

As the member for Albert Park noted, in the great north-west of the state our soil is unlike any other in Australia, not only the red loam soil for growing just about anything but the incredible deposits of critical minerals and rare earths that are underneath that. Yes, there have been some very successful mines and very successful rehabilitation programs that have taken place, but there has also been a very poor rehabilitation program. The same sort of scheme would be very beneficial for those food and fibre producers who are considering or have mining companies knocking on the door.

I have heard a lot of talk in this place this afternoon about renewables. As the member for Murray Plains stated earlier, there are a lot of those food and fibre producers who are very, very angry with the renewables projects going on in that part of the state.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Polwarth electorate schools**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:00): (1459) I rise this evening on the adjournment debate, and the action I seek from the Minister for Education is for the restoration in full of funding for the P–12 schools in the Polwarth electorate. What I am referring to specifically are the changes flagged in a circular sent to P–12 principals advising them of the following individual funding lines that will be 100 per cent cut over the next four years. We are not talking just a little cut or a tweak, we are talking a 100 per cent cut. Those five areas are the P–12 complexity allowance; the mobility allowance; the split-site/multi-site allowance; language units; and, really importantly for some of the schools in my electorate, the joint community program. P–12s in an electorate like Polwarth are vital. I have P–12s in Lorne, Apollo Bay and Lavers Hill, and I have them in Timboon and Derrinallum – right across my patch. These are schools that provide an essential service to what are relatively isolated communities. They are complex because communities and country towns ebb and flow a lot: one year they have got a lot of students in prep, next year they have got no-one in prep; sometimes they have got four or five kids in year 12, then there are none. What this funding cut does is take away the flexibility that the principals in these schools desperately need to keep providing good quality, ongoing education in regional Victoria.

This state allegedly calls itself the Education State. In fact we are forced to drive around our communities with ‘Education State’ written on our numberplates. Yet when my communities tell me that, for example, in Lorne, just one small community in my electorate, next year they will have 25 extra students and they will have two less teachers because of these cuts – two less teachers, 25 more kids – that is devastating in a small country community. For example, in Lorne the Lorne school has no football oval. It has no outdoor recreation space. It does not have a hall. It does not have any of those facilities. It has and has always had a joint arrangement with the local community and the local shire. They have to pay a contribution to those facilities – great footy oval, great hall, really important for that community, vital in fact, essential – yet the funding is being taken from that, and the only other spot that Lorne school community can get those funds is to take them from their teaching wages. It is wrong, and I call on the minister to immediately reverse those cuts.

**Bushfire preparedness**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (19:03): (1460) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to explore options for ensuring that every person moving into a bushfire-prone area in this state receives clear, practical information about bushfire risk and preparedness. The Monbulk district is a truly beautiful part of Victoria, home to the Dandenong Ranges, lush forests and vibrant communities, but it is also one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world. The Yarra Ranges has been identified as Victoria's highest bushfire-risk region, with thousands of homes at risk if a major fire occurs. What concerns me is that around a third of the residents in this region are new to our area within the past five years, and many may not fully understand the bushfire risk or what they need to do to prepare. This is not just about protecting property, it is also about saving lives. Providing clear information at the point of moving into the ranges, whether through real estate transactions, rental agreements or consumer information channels, could make a significant difference to people's preparedness. It would help new residents understand the risks and take steps to prepare, such as creating a fire plan and knowing where to find local resources. This could be a simple, practical measure that could strengthen community safety not only in my very fire-prone district of Monbulk but across our wonderful state. I look forward to the minister's response.

**Victoria Police mental health**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (19:04): (1461) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to restore the mental health funding for vital mental health support for the police in the Shepparton electorate. I recently met with our local police, who are calling for desperately needed mental health support following funding cuts that have left police stations with no immediate mental health support. The government cut funding to the vital police mental health and wellbeing hubs that were promised but never delivered to regional police stations. These hubs, announced at a cost of \$100 million, were designed to assist the growing number of officers on WorkCover and those suffering from trauma related to their service and were intended to provide early intervention, preventative care and ongoing psychological support for police officers. Frontline officers are first responders and are faced with the most tragic of circumstances, including road trauma, family violence, complex mental health incidents and the compounding social challenges created by limited local support services.

Locally we recently had the tragic and devastating drowning of an eight-year-old child, which had a significant impact on the officers who attended the incident. It took up to eight days for these police officers to be able to access clinical health support, which is just astounding. The emotional toll on officers in regional areas can be even greater because they frequently live in the same communities where these traumatic events occur. Police chaplains, who are mainly volunteers, are doing all that they can to support our police officers, but they are not qualified clinicians. Without dedicated clinical support, we risk worsening mental health outcomes, increasing burnout and increasing numbers of police leaving the force.

Nearly 1000 injured officers are currently waiting for support to return to duty. Instead of strengthening assistance for the men and women who keep us safe, this government has effectively pulled the rug out from under them. With more than 1100 police vacancies, it is crucial that support be given to our frontline police, who every single day put their lives on the line to keep our communities safe. The least this government can do is to provide them with the mental health and wellbeing support that they desperately need and deserve. I look forward to the minister's response.

**Waste and recycling management**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (19:07): (1462) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is to meet with the minister to continue to emphasise my strong view that no planning or development licence be issued around waste-to-energy at HiQ Bulla until the findings of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into these matters are

finalised and tabled. I want to put on record tonight my thanks and appreciation for all those in our community who have raised this issue with me and my office, and I note and share these concerns. I want to caution those who wish to spread some misinformation on this issue, and I want to commend those who have advocated respectfully and in a decent manner. I have had the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Planning previously on this matter, and I want to reiterate the importance of the work around environmental health amenity impacts and the work that will be done by the committee via what will be a rigorous, transparent and public process. Indeed I make the point that members of the community will have the opportunity at the appropriate time to form a submission as per the practices of committees. It is my belief that this is a very important process and this needs to occur. I want to sum up by again thanking everyone who has spoken to me, who has raised this issue with me and of course the office, and I want to thank and acknowledge the minister for her work locally and right across the state.

### **Shady Creek battery farm**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:09): (1463) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the minister reject any battery farm in my electorate. There was a meeting last night in Shady Creek and 200 farmers turned up. The representatives of Samsung were there to explain about the battery farm in my electorate. There was a very, very clear message from the 200 farmers: 'Not here, not in this area, not on prime dairy farming area.' Not only that, the Baw Baw shire has rejected this as well.

If I can just read the headline in the *Weekly Times*: 'It is simply wrong: farmers slam battery storage plans near their land'. Regional Victoria is bearing the brunt of the government's renewable agenda. There is no doubt about that. Right across regional Victoria, whether it is a battery farm, a solar farm or a wind turbine, regional Victoria is bearing the brunt. This government has to actually listen to the concerns of locals and how it affects them directly. When you have got farmers, tough men, breaking down in tears because of it, take note. I am glad the Minister for Emergency Services is at the table tonight as well, because some of these locations are actually in fire overlays. Now, in one of these locations I know the Nilma fire brigade, in a catastrophic fire event, cannot go there. They cannot go there to even suppress the fire that will occur if the batteries catch on fire in a catastrophic fire event. It is a real risk in my community.

The community have spoken. I need the minister to listen to them. These are their concerns. Samsung turned up – they are the provider in this case – and there was a very, very clear message to Samsung: not here, not in this location. I am not saying I am against battery farms. I am saying the locations have to be well thought out and put in a place where they are not a risk to the community if they catch fire. I am asking the Minister for Planning to address this problem because, to be honest, if these go ahead, I can see a lot of farmers on the steps of Parliament protesting against this. It is just not fair. They need to listen to their concerns and address the issue.

### **Westvale Men's Shed**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (19:12): (1464) The action I seek is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers to provide an update on when the Westvale Men's Shed in Kororoit will formally receive the \$100,000 in funding that was allocated under the Victorian government's 2025–26 men's shed funding program. The wonderful Westvale Men's Shed, which is in Kororoit, as I mentioned, is a group that is truly at the heart of our local community. Last week I had the pleasure of visiting the shed and speaking to everyone who was there. It was a full house, with such warmth and such generosity. Tony, one of the longstanding members, presented me with the most beautiful handmade pen, crafted with such care and pride out of wood, and the rest of the group absolutely spoilt me with a collection of puzzles, which I will admit I do not know how to do, but I will give them my best shot.

Beyond the laughter and kindness, there is a serious and important need for men's sheds all over Victoria in my opinion. The Westvale Men's Shed has outgrown its current space, with so many men

relying on the shed for connection, for wellbeing and for community, and overcrowding has become a major issue. Although it is called a men's shed, there is also a women's group that attends it every week as well. It is very well attended. That is why I was so pleased to see that the Victorian government had allocated \$100,000 from the men's shed funding program in the 2025–26 budget to support an extension of the Westvale Men's Shed, doubling its size and ensuring it can continue delivering programs that keep men and women healthy, supported and, of course, socially connected. I ask the Minister for Carers and Volunteers for an update: when will this funding be released so that the Westvale Men's Shed can begin their much-needed expansion and continue the incredible that they do for the community?

### Youth justice system

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (19:13): (1465) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Victorian Labor government to walk away from the punitive and panicked laws they put through the Victorian Parliament this week to lock up kids for life. Well, we must be in an election season, because Labor and the Liberals are again in a race to the bottom about who can be harsher and who can be crueller when it comes to criminal justice policy. But, you know what, I did not expect the Victorian Labor Party to be taking a lead on criminal justice policy from the right-wing Liberal Party in Queensland. But here we are: that is exactly what Victorian Labor have done.

Victorians have every right to be angry about this, because everybody deserves to feel safe in their homes and on their streets, and right now many Victorians do not. But in response to community fears, I would expect a good government to actually sit down, look at the evidence and do what works to keep people safe, rather than just panicking and adopting the *Herald Sun's* latest brain fart. Do you know what works to keep communities safe? Making sure kids have a stable home. Instead, Labor is demolishing public housing right across Melbourne.

Do you know what works to keep the community safe? Making sure kids have a sense of belonging and achievement so that they are not dragged in when organised crime comes knocking, asking them to steal cars and do their dirty work. Instead, Labor has cut funding for youth programs. And do you know what works? Mental health support and drug and alcohol support, but these are also chronically underfunded in Victoria. There is barely a single public drug rehab bed available in the whole state right now. And do you know what works? Investing in programs that prevent crime before it happens. But instead, again, Labor has cut crime prevention programs by half. Here in Victoria Labor spends billions on prisons and police dealing with crime after it has already happened but peanuts on crime prevention.

But do not just take it from me: if we want to see what works to reduce crime and keep communities safe, we only need to look to Glasgow. Twenty years ago Glasgow had the highest violent crime rate in Western Europe, and they halved it. But they did not do it by locking up kids for life. Instead, Scotland built a system that treated violence as a public health issue. They identified kids at risk and intervened early. They brought them together with family and mentors. They gave them real opportunities to get on a better path. Sure, there were consequences, but there were also genuine opportunities to help them turn their lives around. And lo and behold, it actually worked. Because the evidence – yes, the evidence – shows that longer sentences actually push young people further into criminal activity, because when young people see no hope for a way out, that is when they believe crime is their only option. It is not just bad for the kids, it is bad for all of us, because it makes our community less safe. But Labor does not seem to care about the community being less safe in the long term; they just care about winning enough votes to win the next election. But for what? What even is the point of Labor winning when all they do with power is copy the Liberals from Queensland?

### Bemin Secondary College

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (19:16): (1466) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the \$37 million upgrade for Bemin Secondary College in Truganina. As the Deputy Premier knows, our government

has a very proud track record of delivering for schools right across Victoria, and this could not be clearer than in Wyndham. Over the past eight years we have built more than 100 brand new schools, and over 20 of them have been built right across this municipality, from Manor Lakes all the way to Point Cook and Truganina, schools like Dohertys Creek, Garrang Wilam and Warreen Primary School, a great local primary school, which have been built in my electorate by our government. This also includes Bemlin Secondary College, Truganina's first ever high school, which we opened last year and are continuing to support with \$37 million in this year's budget to deliver stage 2 at the senior campus. This school has fast become beloved by my local community. It is a major win, with two whole campuses, which are also a major win for my growing community.

Unlike those opposite who talk about cutting from our schools, our government ensures not only that new schools get built but that they get fixed up as well. When in government last, those opposite cut \$1 billion from the education budget and scrapped the Victorian schools plan. Can you believe that: \$1 billion? That meant that not a single new school was opened in 2016 once we got back into government. Since then, we have invested more than \$18.5 billion over 10 years in capital upgrades for our schools, compared to a mere \$200 million a year. Victorians know that education, supporting our local schools and ensuring kids get a world-class education are absolute, fundamental Labor values. They are a key part of what our government stands for and what I stand for as the local member. We will always, always, back in our schools. That is why I know that this fantastic local school community in Truganina would greatly appreciate an update from the Deputy Premier on where we are at with delivering this incredible upgrade.

### **Metro Tunnel**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (19:19): (1467) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I ask: what is the government's plan to manage the Metro Tunnel's big switch, when Pahran constituents will face forced transfers, overcrowded Frankston line services and thousands of new activity centres with residents with less connectivity to the CBD? On 1 February 2026 – that is just two months away – the big switch will introduce a new timetable across buses, trams and regional and metropolitan trains. The Cranbourne, Pakenham and Sunbury lines will run exclusively through the Metro Tunnel. This is being hailed as a triumph, but the government has been remarkably silent about who wins and who loses in this situation.

The electorate of Pahran is currently served by four train lines: Sandringham, Frankston, Pakenham and Cranbourne. Of these, only the Frankston line will then run through the city loop. Pakenham and Cranbourne trains run express from Caulfield, bypassing Toorak, Hawksburn, Armadale and Malvern, and from 1 February will also bypass South Yarra and Richmond entirely, no longer stopping at any city loop stations. Direct journeys become forced transfers. These are the losers from the big switch.

My constituents fear less connectivity and not more. After eight years of planning this project we still have no clear indication of what our constituents will face. Eight years to plan – still no timetable. The government rushed to open the Metro Tunnel services in November without finishing the timetable. You do not open a railway without telling passengers where the train is going. Two months from the big switch, commuters still do not know how their journey will change. Where is the detail? Where is the full timetable? None of the existing train stations in my electorate will connect to the Metro Tunnel except Anzac, and only one Frankston train will run through the city loop, forcing Cranbourne–Pakenham line passengers to change at Caulfield, exiting the station entirely before boarding a crowded train from Frankston.

This matters even more because of the government's own planning agenda. Pahran, South Yarra, Hawksburn, Windsor and Toorak are all designated activity centres. Thousands of new residents are expected. Here is the contradiction: more density and less connectivity. The government encourages high-density living near train lines while simultaneously making it harder for residents to access the city, with more people, fewer direct services, new bottlenecks at interchange stations and simple journeys made more complex. As Shadow Assistant Minister for Melbourne I say my constituents

deserve answers, not announcements. We need to make it easier for people to work in and visit Melbourne. We want Melbourne to be marvellous again, and a key ingredient is people. But they are facing less connectivity, more congestion and longer journeys at precisely the moment the government is packing more people into these neighbourhoods.

### Climate change

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (19:22): (1468) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Climate Action, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate and provide an update to my community on the launch of the Victorian Labor government's new climate change strategy 2026–30. Our environment is fundamental to all life on earth, and we also know that fossil fuels and coal-fired energy generators remain the leading cause of carbon emissions, fuelling the effects of climate change. In fact 65.3 per cent of Victoria's emissions continue to come from coal-fired power stations and the burning of coal and gas. That is why we continue to take that real action to combat and mitigate the impacts of climate change and to help build a more sustainable and resilient renewable energy network to drive down emissions via bringing back the State Electricity Commission, the SEC, for an initial \$1 billion investment in renewable energy projects. We will continue to lead Australian jurisdictions in renewable energy efforts, with the earliest net zero emissions target of any Australian state. We have got the ambitious global target of 75 per cent to 80 per cent carbon reductions by 2035. Forty-two per cent of electricity produced in Victoria was renewable energy in 2024–25, and we have reduced our carbon emissions by 31.4 per cent, and we are within our 2025 emissions target. Thirty per cent of Victorian homes have now installed solar thanks to our Solar Homes program, and 100 per cent of electricity is now supplied by the State Electricity Commission for Victoria's hospitals, schools, trains and other government operations. Eight times more zero-emission vehicles have been sold in Victoria compared to 2021, and 1.8 million hectares of state forest is now protected by the ending of native timber harvesting six years earlier, thanks to the Victorian Labor government.

As our emissions have been driven down, our economy has of course continued to grow. Every \$1 invested to improve climate resilience, the strategy has shown, is envisaged to deliver a \$9.60 return on investment over the coming years. Victoria's energy workforce is projected to grow by more than 60 per cent by 2040, to 67,000 workers. But it is also about the local investments we have been making across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West on Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek, Edgars Creek and Westbreen Creek. It is about the work we are doing through recycling, the circular economy and the container deposit scheme, where people are able to recycle their bottles, cans and containers to get that 10-cent refund, because plastic will continue to remain an ongoing problem. I just want to quote former member for Pascoe Vale the Honourable Kelvin Thomson, who best summarised this, I believe:

When I was young, there was hardly any plastic around at all. But now, on average, every Australian produces 100kg of plastic waste every year, that is, more than their own body weight! Unfortunately, plastic waste tends to end up in our waterways and oceans. Scientists estimate that the way we are going, by 2050 the weight of plastic in our oceans will equal or exceed the weight of all the fish! It is estimated that 99% of seabirds worldwide have ingested plastic.

It is for that reason that we need to continue taking that real action on climate change.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the minister, the member for Prahran's question was more in line with a constituency question. Which action did you seek from the minister?

**Rachel Westaway:** Can the minister provide an update on the government's action plan to manage the Metro Tunnel's big switch?

### Responses

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:25): The member for Polwarth had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Education, wanting to be advised on future funding for schools in his electorate. The member for

Monbulk sought for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, seeking that those who move into bushfire zones receive full and frank advice regarding bushfire awareness. The member for Shepparton had a matter for the Minister for Police, seeking mental health support funding for her local police members. The member for Sunbury's action was for the Minister for Planning to meet with him to understand his view regarding a proposed waste-to-energy facility being built in his community. The member for Narracan had a matter for the Minister for Planning regarding battery farms in his community, seeking her attention to his concerns and that of his community. The member for Kororoit had a matter for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, seeking an update on when Westvale men's shed received their funding, as recently announced. The member for Melbourne sought for the Premier to change her mind on adult time for violent crime legislation. The member for Laverton asked the Minister for Education to update her on the upgrade of the Bembin Secondary College. The member for Prahran's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, seeking an update on information regarding transfers on the Frankston line. The member for Pascoe Vale had a matter for the Minister for Climate Action, seeking for the minister to come to his electorate to give an update on the government's climate change strategy 2026–30. These will be referred to the ministers.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7:27 pm.**