



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 13 August 2025

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 March 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;
LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;
Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Wednesday 13 August 2025

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

*Petitions***Koyuga Nanneella wind farm**

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 500 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Fera Australia wind energy facility proposal in the Koyuga Nanneella area. While we support renewable energy initiatives, we firmly oppose the proposed location. Fera intends to install 25 wind turbines with a towering tip height of 265 metres and blades spanning 170 metres. The small land allotments in our area mean that many neighbours would live in close proximity to the proposed facility. Fera's proposed setback distance of only one kilometre between the turbines and neighbouring homes falls significantly short of best practices. According to the NSW draft wind energy policy framework, a turbine this size should be no less than 2.25 kilometres from neighbouring dwellings.

The proposed location lies on a floodplain and upgrades required to access roads, installation of crane pads, and soil relocation during construction could obstruct floodwater flow. This facility could exacerbate future flooding risks. The site earmarked is productive irrigatable land used for intensive food production. Installing wind turbines here would compromise valuable agricultural resources.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to withhold approval of the Fera Australia Koyuga Nanneella wind farm based on its unsuitable location.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Estate Agents Amendment (Advertising Reserve Prices for Home Buyers) Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:34): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Estate Agents Act 1980 to require estate agents or agents' representatives to disclose and advertise the reserve price of residential property, to increase penalties for offences relating to underquoting the estimated and indicative selling price of residential property, and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

*Papers***Papers**

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Planned Surgery in Victoria, August 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Statutory Rule under the County Court Act 1958 – No. 75.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 76.

*Petitions***Responses**

The Clerk: I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Roads and Road Safety's response to a petition titled 'Pedestrian crossing at Chelsea station, Nepean Highway' and Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC's response to a petition titled 'Reform WorkCover legislation'.

*Business of the house***Notices**

Notices of motion given.

*Members statements***Mental health services**

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:53): The Allan Labor government is committed to expanding access to free mental health and wellbeing supports where people need them. Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the Brimbank mental health and wellbeing local to announce that Wyndham and Maribyrnong in Melbourne's west will be two of the seven new locations included in the rollout of our locals. But that is not all that we have been delivering for Melbourne's western suburbs. We have also established the new Brimbank Melton children's health and wellbeing local in partnership with the Commonwealth, and it is providing free and easy access to health and wellbeing support for children and their families and carers. We have delivered a brand new mental health and wellbeing connect centre in Sunshine, centring the lived experience of families, carers and supporters of those struggling with mental health challenges. Connect centres provide carers the vital networks and wellbeing supports they need to keep caring for their loved ones. Whether it is new mental health beds at Western Health hospital or community-based services, I am proud that I am part of a government that does not just talk about mental health but gets on and delivers the services people need in Melbourne's growing west, close to home, and I am very proud of the investments that we have made to date in my region.

Regional Victoria

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:54): I rise to speak about the stark disadvantage many rural and regional Victorians are facing at the hands of this Labor government. Our roads are rubbish, and you only have to look at the Western Highway to see that there are more 'Slow down' signs than actual roadworks happening. The emergency services tax continues to slug rural Victorians, particularly farmers, throwing CFA volunteers under the bus. The proposed changes to the VicGrid laws, fining property owners \$12,000 if they refuse access to their land, are a disgrace. With the green drought, the government's lacklustre response is a taskforce. Their only task seems to be spin and PR. Hospital waiting lists and massive delays in emergency departments – the Ballarat Base Hospital even told people, 'Don't come here,' and turned them away. An education system with chronic shortages in teachers – many rural communities cannot even get teachers at all. An energy crisis where power bills, despite the promises, keep going up and up and up and shortages in gas – Labor's cost-of-living crisis keeps crunching country Victorians. And we have a public transport mess, where you are more likely to get a bus on a train line, and a Ballarat railway station which is being ruined in heritage aspects and completely destroyed. You have to ask the question: why does Labor hate regional Victorians so much? The Premier is meant to be a regional Victorian, but she hates country people, clearly, because she is throwing them under the bus time and time again. We on this side will never apologise for standing with country Victorians; Labor should do the same.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:56): Last week the ALP state conference adopted the policy for the second time, I might add, that cannabis should be legalised, taxed, owned and regulated by the Victorian state government and that the funds generated by a regulated cannabis industry should be directed to fund the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, the reform of the alcohol and other drug sector, WorkCover and WorkSafe Victoria, as well as health-led housing and Indigenous health, and form part of the state's contribution to the national disability insurance scheme. Goodness me, what a lot of good a government could do with an estimated \$2 billion a year that a regulated cannabis market would generate annually, and that is not even taking into account the huge amounts the state currently spends on policing cannabis policy and imprisoning people – well done. However the government chooses to spend those billions, I think we can all agree that it would be better than leaving it to serious organised crime syndicates to fund the multitude of nefarious activities that they undertake. It is time the government listened to its base, to the experts and to the community and joined the growing list of jurisdictions around the world that are adopting sensible drug policies to promote harm minimisation, enhance public health and restrict the flow of cash to organised crime. Let us start by decriminalising cannabis.

Port Fairy Football Netball Club

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:57): It was terrific to celebrate the Port Fairy Seagulls football netball club last week. The gathering had an impressive turnout outside of their usual training night to mark their new pavilion for the club and the community. The evening began with a warm welcome to country from Sherry Johnstone, and it was an honour to participate in a smoking ceremony. The change rooms are inclusive, with all access front of mind. To finally have the addition of modern women's change rooms is a huge step forward for the club, an aspiration that the club has been working towards for more than seven years. I congratulate the club, Moyne shire and the Port Fairy community for the work they have done to achieve this. It is another significant Labor investment in Port Fairy, alongside the fantastic new skate park and playground and the Albanese Labor government's recent announcement of \$5 million to upgrade the Griffiths bridge on Gipps Street, which the community is very excited but also very relieved about – it is a highly patched bridge. Port Fairy is thriving, and the Allan Labor government is proud to be part of that story.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:58): I have spoken before in this place about the great joy that comes with sharing my home with a flock of 15 sheep, all of which I hand-raised as day-old orphaned lambs of Australia's brutal winter lambing season. Over the weekend I had them crutched, a shear that removes wool around the tail and hindquarters. It is a simple procedure that improves hygiene and prevents flystrike, but unfortunately, like in most industries that focus on profit over protection, the wool industry continues to favour convenient, quicker options that come at the expense of animal welfare. In this instance it is known as live lamb cutting. Live lamb cutting is exactly as the name suggests – it is a mutilation practice. Young lambs are restrained on their backs, unable to move, with their skin removed by sharp metal shears and without any pain relief. It is painful and it is traumatising, and what is worse is that the wool industry actually committed to ending it in 2004, over 20 years ago, and they still have not honoured their commitment. Their broken promise has caused over 140 million lambs across our country to be needlessly mutilated, as detailed in the *Broken Promise* report by FOUR PAWS Australia. With over 330 global brands now publicly opposed to live lamb cutting, it is clear that our treatment of sheep is an international shame, and the government must step in and make them honour their commitment by banning live lamb cutting.

Hillcrest Christian College

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): Last week I had the great privilege of representing the Deputy Premier Ben Carroll at Hillcrest Christian College in Clyde North, which, together with its neighbouring school, Rivercrest college, has just kicked off works for its new gym

complex for students and also for the wider community to share in. It was terrific to take part in the event and to have Brendan Kelly, executive principal, as well as the deputy principals Jonathan Shrapnel, Andrew Hindle and Nicole Rietveld. Most especially, it was really wonderful to join with the students, some of whom will benefit from this fantastic new complex when it opens next year. It has all been made possible thanks to a commitment of \$3.6 million from the Allan Labor government, along with funding from the school itself. It will both be a great asset for the school community as it continues to grow and provide great educational opportunities for students in my electorate. It will also provide wonderful opportunities for the ever-increasing demand for basketball courts in the City of Casey. The Casey Basketball Association has partnered with the school and will be making use of this great facility as well. I am very much looking forward to seeing the project take shape and come to completion.

Singapore Independence Day

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): I also had the great honour of attending the 60th birthday celebrations for Singapore with the Singapore Merlion Club of Melbourne over the weekend. Sixty years is a significant achievement, but it also reflects 60 years of a strong and thriving bilateral relationship between Australia and Singapore, and indeed we see many of the benefits of that relationship here in Victoria.

Epping Secondary College

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:02): A couple of weeks ago I received an invitation from Epping Secondary College to speak to their Pacific Island students cultural program, one which offers a unique experience to students, acknowledging culture, community and belonging. This program is run by their incredible teaching staff, which puts an authentic lens on integrating cultural heritage of students as part of their core learning journey. This program is also being replicated by the school through a First Nations student group and their upcoming African cultural program.

I was given a typical warm Islander welcome by the students, serenaded by singing and dancing, followed by a showering of ulas, or flower necklaces. It was clear to me how this nurturing of student diversity was simultaneously creating a safe space where Pacific students feel accepted for who they are. By linking education with students' cultural roots, the program supports students to confidently navigate their aspirations, whether academic, personal or professional.

Programs like these go beyond traditional schooling. It is a community-centred approach that encourages collaboration, mutual support and cultural pride. The program is so popular amongst students that it averages at least 30 to 40 students every Friday when it is delivered. This model of learning demonstrates strongly how education can be a powerful tool for cultural affirmation and inclusion. I would like to congratulate Epping Secondary College for recognising how cultural capital for their students can not only influence school performance but have positive implications towards education equity.

Sandringham Primary School

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:03): Last week I had the absolute pleasure of attending the 170th birthday celebrations of Sandringham Primary School, a fantastic local school in the Bayside community. Close to my heart, it is where I went to primary school just a few short years ago. The birthday celebrations were joyous. It was great talking to some old teachers of mine who had come back to join in the celebrations, to talk to the current students about the school and to see the new buildings. The school was tragically destroyed by fire about five years ago, and I got to have a look at the new buildings and show the old students on a model that they had saved where my old classrooms were. We heard from the local historical society about the school's history and its origins as the Gipsy Village school through to the modern day. At the assembly the students delivered a superb musical performance, and they opened a time capsule from the 1990s before putting some items of their own in a capsule that will be opened 30 years from now. There is one thing for sure: the school

has come a long way since I was there, and I am sure it will thrive long into the future. Happy 170th birthday, Sandringham Primary School.

Ron Hewlitt

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:05): Eighty years is a long time in anyone's book, and for most of us it is longer than a lifetime of work – longer than those in this chamber have ever been alive, in fact. But for Mr Ron Hewlitt of the Maffra fire brigade it has been absolutely a lifetime of service. I had the privilege of meeting Ron earlier this year in May when I visited Maffra to hand over the keys for a new heavy tanker, and when I met Ron, his pride in the brigade and his dedication to the community absolutely shone through. Last weekend at the Maffra fire brigade awards night I was honoured to present Ron with a special award recognising this incredible milestone. To put this into perspective, Ron joined the brigade in 1945 as a reserve firefighter, the year the Second World War ended. Since then, through decades of change, challenge and growth, Ron has always been there answering the call whenever his community needed him. This sense of devotion to community is not in isolation. It is shared by the many volunteers of the Maffra fire brigade and all our volunteers across the state, often at great personal sacrifice. Brigades like these are the lifeblood of their communities, and we are so grateful to them. Thank you to Ron and the Maffra fire brigade.

Bills

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:06): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025.

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

Overview of the Bill:

The purpose of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025 (the Bill) is to amend the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 to:

- a. make further provision in relation to the publication or broadcasting of information that may identify parties in guardianship and administration proceedings before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). The amendments enable greater transparency while ensuring the protection of individuals involved in these sensitive proceedings. It also makes further provision in relation to the use of images of parties to a proceeding unless deemed in the public interest.

Human Rights Issues:

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025 does not limit any human right, therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter. I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Second reading

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:06): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I rise today to speak to a very important issue which has compelled me to introduce this bill. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025 seeks to make changes to the way guardianship laws are in place.

This work continues on from my colleagues Katherine Copsey and Gabrielle de Vietri.

The Greens agree with the Victorian government that people with disability should have autonomy, dignity and participation in decision-making that impacts their lives. However, it is disappointing to see that since the issue was brought to the attention of the house, the government has yet to progress in reforming this act.

A guardian is someone chosen under Victorian law to make personal or lifestyle decisions for a person who can't make those decisions themselves because of a disability. This can include decisions about where they live, what medical treatment they receive, what services they use, and who they spend time with.

The private members bill I have introduced changes the existing clause 37, which currently prevents anyone publishing or broadcasting information that could identify parties involved in guardianship and administration proceedings without the permission of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

In effect, this provision prevents a represented person from speaking freely about their experience at VCAT or with their appointed guardian or administrator.

It impedes the right of people with disabilities to make their own decisions around public disclosure, goes against the principle of open courts, and prevents transparency and safety for those under guardianship and administration orders.

The law is unfair and contravenes a rights-based approach as well as our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UN convention is not only a significant human rights treaty for people with disabilities, it also gives effect to how Australian governments set out important principles of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of all people, including people with a disability.

The Office of the Public Advocate has endorsed reform in this area. In their position statement in April 2023, they made it clear how important it is to allow people to freely share their stories and, in the process, enhance transparency and public trust in the guardianship system. They also advocate for the need to move forward from a 'best interests' approach to decision-making for people with a disability to a human rights-based approach.

In the same position statement, the Office of the Public Advocate called on the Victorian government to amend a legislative provision that effectively gags people with experience as represented persons or proposed represented persons under the guardianship order.

I raise this issue following concerns highlighted by disability advocates, particularly the case of Uli Cartwright, a young filmmaker and disability rights advocate and campaigner. Uli Cartwright joins us in the chamber today. Welcome, Uli!

Uli Cartwright spent five years making a documentary about his life titled *Life Is a Battlefield*, which aired in conjunction on the SBS channel and on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

This documentary, if you have not seen it, is a powerful film about Uli's life journey of resilience, courage and persistence as he battled chronic mental and physical health challenges. It follows not only his path of determination to overcome these obstacles but his advocacy and commitment to demand fairness and equity for people with disabilities.

However, after the documentary's release, VCAT contacted SBS channel, citing clause 37, schedule 1, of the VCAT act, and as a result, SBS removed the documentary from its website. This removal highlights the restrictive nature of the law, which prohibits individuals from publicly sharing their lived experiences and stories related to guardianship.

These actions by VCAT occurred despite Uli Cartwright no longer being under guardianship.

As a result of these restrictions, Uli Cartwright had to engage a lawyer, return to VCAT, and obtain a formal waiver just to discuss his own lived experience – essentially asking for permission to tell his own story in his own way.

This raises fundamental questions about freedom of expression, autonomy, and the principles underpinning our modern guardianship laws.

Uli has been fearless, determined and committed in his advocacy for people with disabilities.

It is essential that people with disabilities are empowered to share their own experiences of living under guardianship.

In a spotlight paper released in February this year, 2025, the Victorian Law Reform Commission identifies the need for this act to be reformed to ‘align with modern understanding of human rights’. This means removing the barriers for people with a disability to make their own choices and decisions about their lives, promoting their dignity, equality and autonomy.

The current restrictions in clause 37 are outdated and fail to uphold fundamental human rights, undermining the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the charter of human rights. Instead of empowering individuals, clause 37 reinforces paternalistic attitudes, treating people with disabilities as if they cannot make their own choices. It strips away their dignity and autonomy and leaves them silenced and disempowered.

By silencing individuals, this clause shields guardians, administrators and service providers from scrutiny – a critical flaw in how this law currently stands. Individuals who face substandard care, financial mismanagement, or other forms of abuse or neglect, are legally barred from speaking out and holding wrongdoers to account. When internal complaint mechanisms fail, what avenues are left for them? Transparency is essential to improving any system and ensuring accountability. Without reform of this clause, systemic failures will continue unchecked, and victims will suffer in silence and isolation.

The disability royal commission in 2023 also strongly advocated for reforming clause 37. It found that current confidentiality laws unjustly restrict individuals from speaking about their experiences, shielding institutions from accountability. The commission recommended reversing the current model: instead of banning disclosure by default, tribunals should only restrict disclosure when necessary, putting the agency back in the hands of the individual and prioritising their will and preferences.

This clause is also simply unclear.

Many individuals have reported they are unsure of what they can and can't say, where they can say it, and to whom. Some speak freely, unaware of legal restrictions, while others live in fear of breaking the rules. And for those who do follow the process and seek exemptions, they face a traumatic path just to tell their story. Returning to VCAT, reliving distressing experiences, navigating a complex legal system – it's a retraumatising, anxiety-inducing process, restricting the voices of people who need their stories told.

And because of the lack of clarity, the clause is often misapplied or applied inconsistently. Some interpret the clause to silence people even after orders end or when no order was ever made. Disability advocates and lawyers have reported how some VCAT tribunal members grant exemptions freely, while others demand excessive justification. Again, creating more barriers and opportunities for overreach and unfair outcomes.

The public also loses from this gag law. Clause 37 stifles media reporting, discouraging journalists from covering important stories or exposing injustices which the public would never know about. We've seen the power stories have in changing bad systems – the power of public consciousness, of having communities rally around an issue to help right wrongs. People with disabilities deserve to

have their voices heard and their issues prioritised. Reform would allow the media to responsibly report stories without fear of complex legal hurdles or unnecessary ramifications and would give transparency to all of us.

But it's not just stories of abuse either. Reforming clause 37 allows people to share positive stories as well – stories of resilience, independence and achievement of people with disabilities, which are so often lacking from mainstream discourse. By lifting restrictions on storytelling, we can challenge stereotypes, reduce stigma, and foster a more inclusive society where people with disabilities are seen as active, thriving members of the community, not just passive subjects.

While privacy protections are important, and we recognise the valid reasons to limit disclosure of certain information, the current system simply goes too far. As noted by both the Victorian public advocate and the Queensland public advocate, the benefits of reform outweigh the risks. We already allow individuals in other sensitive areas, like inpatients at mental health facilities, to share their stories.

This is about striking the right balance between protection, dignity and choice. For all the risks of disclosure, none of them outweigh the cost of silencing people and stripping them of their power and autonomy. The real risk here lies in maintaining a system that suppresses voices, perpetuates harm, and denies accountability.

People with disabilities deserve the right to own their stories.

It's important that people with disabilities are supported to speak about their own experiences under guardianship. Too often, decisions are made without fully listening to those directly affected. Sharing personal stories helps shine a light on what's working and what needs to change.

That's what the Greens stand for – dignity, inclusion, and making sure lived experience guides the way forward.

That also means listening to lived experience, respecting individual rights, and dismantling the systems and attitudes that limit full participation in society. Whether it's in education, employment, health care, housing, or the legal system, everyone deserves to be included, supported, and empowered.

As the spokesperson for disability rights and services, Greens colleagues and I are committed to building a future where accessibility is the norm, not the exception.

I would like to conclude my speech with the wise words of Mr Uli Cartwright, which remind us all of the kind of society we want to be building. I quote:

People with a disability don't want to be treated like they're disabled. We want to be treated like everyone else, because we are like everyone else, just unique.

These words challenge us as legislators to ensure that choice, control and dignity are shared responsibilities.

I commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:19): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:19): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

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

In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined below.

Overview

The Bill amends the *Worker Screening Act 2020* to strengthen the framework for assessing the suitability of people to work with or care for children. Key changes include:

- Requiring applicants to provide evidence of recent training on the Child Safe Standards, mandatory reporting requirements, and child abuse awareness.
- Allowing the Secretary to consider relevant information from any person or source when determining or reassessing an application.
- Providing the Secretary with a general discretion to refuse or revoke a Working with Children Check (WWCC) if satisfied it would pose an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children.
- Introducing shorter clearance durations for for-profit child-related work.
- Expanding suspension and reassessment powers, and clarifying VCAT's review role in discretionary refusal and revocation decisions.
- Requiring the Secretary to share clearance and applicant details with Victoria Police for inclusion in the Law Enforcement Assistance Program.

The Bill's objective is to ensure that decisions about a person's eligibility to work with children are based on the broadest and most relevant range of information, and that child safety is prioritised.

Human Rights Issues

The following human rights are relevant to the Bill: privacy (s 13(a)); reputation (s 13(b)); fair hearing (s 24); and the protection of families and children (s 17).

1. Right to privacy and reputation (Section 13)

The Bill permits additional collection, use and disclosure of personal information, including training records and personal details shared with Victoria Police. It also allows for enquiries to be made to any person or source, and for broader information sharing between agencies. Any interference with privacy is lawful and not arbitrary because: (a) the powers are exercised for the clear statutory purpose of assessing child-safety risk; (b) the information sought or shared is directly relevant to that assessment; and safeguards exist under the Worker Screening Act 2020, privacy laws, and applicable record-keeping and security requirements.

2. Right to a fair hearing (Section 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter applies to parties to a civil proceeding, including merits review proceedings before VCAT. While the Bill's administrative decision-making processes for granting, refusing, suspending or revoking a WWCC are not themselves civil proceedings, the Bill preserves existing rights for affected persons to seek review at VCAT. Those review proceedings will attract the fair hearing guarantees under section 24(1).

3. Protection of families and children (Section 17)

The Bill promotes the right of every child to protection in their best interests by strengthening the WWCC screening framework. Measures such as mandatory training, expanded grounds for refusal or revocation of clearances, broader information gathering, and enhanced information sharing with Victoria Police are directed at preventing unsuitable individuals from working with children, thereby supporting the State's obligation under section 17(2) of the Charter.

Justification for any limitations

The Bill pursues the legitimate objective of enhancing child safety in regulated work and volunteer environments. Any limitations on individual rights are: (a) prescribed by law; (b) necessary to achieve the

important purpose of preventing harm to children; and (c) accompanied by procedural safeguards, rights of review, and proportionality in application.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025 is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter, because any limitations are reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to the paramount objective of protecting children from harm.

Georgie Crozier MP

13 August 2025

Second reading

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:19): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Like all Victorians, I was sickened and horrified by the allegations of sexual assault against children in a number of childcare centres across Melbourne. I note that more than 70 charges have been laid against a childcare worker, and 2000 Victorian children have undergone testing for sexually transmitted diseases – underlining the need for urgent reform to our working with children check system.

Every day this government dithers, every day it delays, every day it fails to act on what the Ombudsman told us three years ago, Victorian kids are put at risk. Instead, we get a review into a review. This is not protecting children.

That is why I am moving this bill on behalf of the Liberal and Nationals coalition, because our children are deserving of protection today, not next month or next year when the government gets around to introducing their own bill after their so-called rapid review.

The Victorian Ombudsman reviewed the working with children check system in September 2022 and published a report making four recommendations. One of these recommendations was for the Victorian government to make sensible and straightforward reforms to the working with children check system to keep Victorian children safe. But the government did nothing. Not even the courtesy of a reply. Three years later, still nothing.

The Ombudsman's findings were clear: the system is broken because it has loopholes that have been – and continue to be – exploited by those who would harm our children. These loopholes must be closed. The then Ombudsman Deborah Glass warned that the powers of Victoria's screening authority are among the most limited in Australia. I quote:

Reforms to the legislation are needed to bring Victoria in line with other states and territories, and to promote the rights of children and families enshrined in Victoria's Human Rights Charter.

One key recommendation was that the working with children check regulator should not have to wait for a criminal conviction or workplace disciplinary finding to act. If there is an unjustifiable risk to a child's safety, the secretary should have the power to act immediately.

The Ombudsman recommended that the secretary should be empowered to 'obtain and consider any information that may be relevant to an applicant's suitability to work with children'.

That's what this bill does – faithfully implements the Ombudsman's recommendations. If the government wants to argue paedophiles deserve more process, they can make that argument. We say children deserve protection first.

The need for reform is not theoretical. We've seen examples in recent weeks that show the system is failing. In Horsham, a man convicted of possessing child sexual abuse material kept his working with children check after the police investigation commenced – and, as a result, he continued visiting childcare centres and kinders. If the Ombudsman's recommendations had been adopted in 2022, the secretary could have acted to revoke his clearance.

In Melbourne's west, the alleged offender Joshua Brown had two substantiated reports of workplace misconduct found against him, including aggressively handling children, yet he continued to hold a valid check and went on to work at 10 more centres.

The system is broken.

Our bill does more than close loopholes. It implements proactive reform. It keeps suspensions or revocations in force until appeals are heard. It raises the test for VCAT to overturn refusals. And we propose further commonsense reforms: mandatory training for those working with children on the child safety standards, reporting obligations, and child abuse awareness – developed with and backed by the Australian Childhood Foundation and survivor advocates.

The bill reduces the validity of a working with children check from five years to three years for those who need a clearance for their employment – increasing the frequency of screening and enhancing the strength of the system.

Finally, this bill will link the working with children check system to the Victoria Police database, so police can instantly see and act when a holder poses a risk.

This is a 'line in the sand' moment. The Ombudsman told the government three years ago the system was broken. They did nothing. They did not even respond.

The government has an opportunity to put politics aside today and work constructively with the Liberals and Nationals to put children's safety first.

Indeed, all members in this place can demonstrate that they don't just talk the talk about protecting kids – they can walk the walk by supporting this bill – by voting to close the loopholes and finally act on what the government should have acted upon years ago.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:24): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:25): I am pleased to move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the rising energy bills encountered by Victorian households and businesses, with supply and usage charges increasing further from 1 August 2025;
 - (b) the cost of major infrastructure blowouts, such as the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West, to be pushed onto the energy bills of Victorian households and businesses;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, copies of any briefs in the last 12 months concerning the costs of energy including electricity and gas, and the impact of these energy costs on families and businesses provided by the:
 - (a) Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to the Minister for Energy and Resources;
 - (b) Department of Premier and Cabinet to the Premier; and
 - (c) Department of Treasury and Finance to the Treasurer.

This is a very straightforward documents motion. We know that this is a serious problem for households and businesses. We know that the increases that people are facing are very significant. They are impacting heavily on family budgets, and people are struggling with these costs. Is the government concerned enough to have briefs coming from the department to relevant ministers – the

energy minister, the Treasurer and the Premier? Are those briefs thoughtful in the way they operate and thoughtful and honest in the way they are laying out the costs? Do the ministers fully understand what is going on here and what is being confronted by small businesses and households?

This documents motion is in the public interest. It is an important motion because it seeks to get to the bottom of what the ministers themselves knew and know about these increases. We know that Treasurer Pallas, for example, was provided with briefs on energy routinely. I have a number of those. We also know that the minister for energy has previously been provided with briefs on a number of these key points.

This only seeks them for the last 12 months, so clearly a very defined list of documents. The ministerial briefs are easily located for each of the three ministers and easily vetted to see if there is any reason they should not be provided. I cannot imagine what those reasons would be, but this government has not got a good record on providing documents in this way, and we will no doubt have a further discussion about that later in the day.

Jaclyn Symes: It should have been for regional development. I can give you all the Solstice stuff so you can correct that from yesterday.

David DAVIS: Would you like to modify it? I am happy to add that, by leave – the documents provided by Regional Development Victoria to the Minister for Regional Development as a fourth item. We are happy to see that.

Jaclyn Symes: If they will let me hand that over, I am more than happy to give you that.

David DAVIS: I cannot imagine why they would not. We are happy to have that. If, by leave, the government is prepared to make that modification, I am certainly prepared to do so.

Jaclyn Symes: You only had to ask. I will just add it. It is all right.

David DAVIS: Are you happy or not to make the modification?

Jaclyn Symes: Will you commit to reading out the information that corrects what you said yesterday?

David DAVIS: Sorry? I am happy to point to –

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is all getting a bit loose.

David DAVIS: I notice that in the questions around Solstice Energy –

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, I think you hit the nail on the head about anticipating the next motion – or two motions away.

David DAVIS: President, as you know, I am merely responding to the interjections and taking up the suggestions that are made. I am very happy to make that modification if others are happy to make the modification by leave.

The point I want to make here is that this is actually very impactful on families and very impactful on small businesses. Victoria is losing significant business now because energy costs have surged. We know the minister for energy promised that the costs would go down, down, but actually the costs for gas and the costs for electricity have gone up, up, up. They are still going up, and they went up further on 1 August. People – families and businesses – are being thumped by these huge surges in costs. People have a right to see what the ministers knew and what actions the ministers might have taken or were advised to take and perhaps did not take. But either way, we know the impact is there. Families are doing it very tough, budgets are very tight and these energy costs are hugely impactful.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:30): I rise to speak on motion 1021 put forward by Mr Davis relating to documents in the energy sector and regarding briefs to government. I

acknowledge that the Treasurer has already graciously offered to expand that to consider other portfolios that might be relevant as well –

David Davis: Only one. Be precise.

Michael GALEA: One extra portfolio. In the spirit of that, I acknowledge that the government will not be opposing today's motion.

It is always a good opportunity to come and speak about the energy portfolio and the investments that are being made. Yesterday Mr Davis informed Victorians that he is not necessarily knowledgeable on Snoop Dogg. It seems that he is not necessarily knowledgeable on energy prices either, because Mr Davis failed to mention in his remarks that Victoria actually has and continues to have the lowest wholesale energy prices in Australia. What are those prices? In Tasmania the volume-weighted average per megawatt hour is \$96.45. In Queensland it is \$97.77. In New South Wales it is \$102.39, in WA it is \$108.52 and in South Australia it is \$110.56. What is the figure in Victoria? It is the lowest of all six states: \$88.10. We are the lowest by some measure – 14 per cent lower in fact than New South Wales and a great deal lower than states such as Western Australia and South Australia. I think that is an important thing to acknowledge. This is a government that is committed to keeping power prices down and manageable for Victorians, and you can see that through four rounds of the power saving bonus, with an additional round that will be coming in very soon for eligible concession card holders – an additional saving directly for those people to benefit on their power bills. But you can also see it through the investment in renewable energy and in the reintroduction of the SEC.

Mrs McArthur, you have already started laughing, which just goes to show how backwards the Liberal and National parties are when it comes to providing renewable energy solutions that are actually cheaper than conventional forms, and I include the fact that those opposite continue to advocate for nuclear energy, the most expensive form of power. You only need look at the UK, where they have got an established nuclear industry – no costs involved in setting up a new industry from scratch – but to build a new power station in Somerset the cost is already exceeding A\$70 billion, and that is in a country with an existing nuclear industry. The coalition wants to do that here and cannot explain to the Australian people – never mind explaining where these nuclear plants are supposedly going to go – how these costs will be met, because we know that those costs will be met by working Victorians in their power bills.

This government is focused on renewable energy solutions that are cheaper, that are cleaner and that are going to provide more energy security and stability for Victorians in the long run. The projects which these documents refer to go towards that as well, and they go towards continuing that investment and continuing the incredible strength we saw in the previous year, when 38 per cent of Victoria's energy came from renewable sources. In a state that was so heavily reliant on coal – more than any other – that is a significant achievement, and it is one that only encourages us to keep going further and to keep doing what we can to not only reduce Victoria's greenhouse emissions but provide energy security and jobs in the renewable energy sector to Victorians right across this state. I affirm that the government will not be opposing the motion today, but I do remind Mr Davis that he failed to mention that Victoria continues to have Australia's lowest wholesale energy prices.

We have direct measures such as the power saving bonus and also the investments in renewable energy. Indeed, going back quite some time, this government doubled the wrongful disconnection payment. We did see, under the previous coalition government, the number of disconnections double. That has been arrested under this government thanks in large part to a doubling of the wrongful disconnection payment from \$250 to \$500.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:35): It is always a pleasure to rise to speak on one of Mr Davis's short-form documents motions, and today's adventure is on energy prices. Obviously, Mr Davis, in seeking to find documents about energy prices here in Victoria, as my colleague Mr Galea has said, is choosing to ignore the fact that Victoria has some of the lowest energy

prices in the nation thanks to the reforms and investments that the state Labor government has been making in technology that is helping to bring down energy costs for Victorians. It is helping to lower pressure on otherwise rising energy prices. The Victorian Labor government has a track record of providing direct support to help consumers with their energy bills. We did it repeatedly through our power saving bonus. We have got another round of that power saving bonus for those who need it most rolling out very shortly. We should also note that another Labor government, the federal Labor government, through its energy bill relief, has been providing cost-of-living support, particularly on energy bills, to all Australians and particularly all Victorians. So what we have got, quite clearly, is a topic where Labor is providing support to help keep energy costs lower. That is what Labor does. State level, federal level – Labor provides cost-of-living support to help with rising energy costs.

What we also do is ensure that the support and investments that we are making are helping to deliver lower energy costs than other states have, and we invest in technology to generate electricity that is provided at the lowest possible cost. Victoria's benchmark retail power price, the Victorian default offer, is much lower than the default price in other states. For Victorian households the 2025–26 default offer is \$431 a year, 21 per cent cheaper than the average default market offer across South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Victoria's default offer is 21 per cent cheaper than the default market offer across South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, and that is for households. For small businesses the 2025–26 Victorian default offer is \$1542 per year, 30 per cent cheaper than the average default market offer in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. That is not an accident, it is by design, because the way Victoria and the Victorian Labor government have been choosing to invest in renewable technologies and also the structure of our market means that we have a default offer system that delivers real savings for households and small businesses.

The other point to make, and I do not have a lot of time, is that not only are we providing a market that is delivering lower costs to Victorians than exist in other states, not only are we providing cost-of-living support, direct support, to energy consumers through bill relief, but we are also investing for the future in the lowest cost forms of energy generation. The latest GenCost report from the CSIRO was released on 29 July this year. The first key point:

The report found renewables remain the lowest-cost new-build electricity generation technology, while nuclear small modular reactors ... are the most costly.

It is a big report, but I think that sentence sums up the contrast pretty clearly between Labor and the Liberals. Labor backs renewables, the lowest cost technology for electricity generation, placing downward pressure on electricity prices. The Liberals back the highest cost form of new electricity generation. So if that is what Mr Davis is interested in, if he wants to know what is going to drive up power prices for Victorians, it is the policies of the Liberal Party.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:41): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion 1021. Victoria's economy operates somewhat differently to other economies in Australia. We are not Western Australia; we do not get to dig copious amounts of ore out of the ground and earn our way that way. We as a state built our wealth on manufacturing and added value, and a key part of that was of course that we had plentiful and cheap energy supplies to underpin that. Today of course, in the last 10 years, Victoria's productivity has lagged that of the rest of Australia. As a state, we can measure our competitiveness, by some degree, by our trade deficit. We have a trade deficit of \$92 billion, which suggests the state is deeply uncompetitive. Of course, energy costs have a significant part in that competitiveness. It is quite clear that in addition to levies and other costs and burdens put onto business in Victoria, the impact of energy policy is yet another knife through the heart of our competitiveness and the ability of businesses to succeed, employ and expand. It is another cut out of their cash flow and the working capital that allows them to employ and allows them to innovate and add to our productivity. It is absolutely essential that Victorians understand where this policy is going. When we have blowouts on infrastructure costs that are absolutely critical to the deployment of renewables and when the cost of that is going to be passed on to businesses and to households who can least afford it, we should have transparency on where that policy is going, where

it is going to lead the state and what is going to happen. This documents motions is, as Mr Davis would say, a straightforward, simple thing to understand: what are the deliberations, what are we signing up to and what will be the cost to businesses going forward?

Motion agreed to.

Housing affordability

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:43): I move:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 60 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, the final report of the property market review commissioned by the then Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in 2022.

The short-form documents motion I am putting before us today is very straightforward and, quite frankly, should not be contentious. I would expect that everyone in this chamber would be interested to know what is contained in the property market review from 2022. At a time when the housing crisis looms and a whole generation of people are locked out of home ownership, this property market review could provide some very useful insights into the levers available to government that the Labor government could be engaging with to ensure that people in our state have fairer and easier access to the housing market per the intentions of the document. That was the plan, and so it is time that we see what is actually in this document.

The intention of the review was to examine how our laws could be improved to make housing more affordable and accessible in Victoria, but the government has been sitting on it for years as housing prices continue, as we have seen, to rise and rampant underquoting has fast become Melbourne's worst kept secret. It can be a soul-destroying process, trying to buy your first home. I have been written to directly by constituents about this matter, week after week – they are getting their hopes up and then having them dashed when a place immediately jumps beyond their budget, even though it was advertised as affordable for them. Every weekend first home buyers and renters are trying to buy. Young families are spending their days inspecting properties, working out what they want and what they can afford. Even before they attend an auction people are pouring money into inspections and into legal fees for houses they never had a chance of securing. The system is gamed to benefit real estate agents and to keep house prices all the higher. Househunting is stressful enough without wasting the time, the energy and the money pinning your hope on a home that you should have known you could not actually afford if it was set properly.

The property market review was intended to specifically look at consumer protections when it comes to underquoting, amongst other things, and in some suburbs in Melbourne right now nine out of 10 homes are selling way above the price guide. In Clifton Hill 61 per cent of tracked sales went over the agents' highest guide prices, and in Richmond one property sold \$450,000 over the guide. Real estate agents need to disclose the reserve price when advertising a property. It is the only way that people can genuinely know if they have a chance and can actually afford a place. Without this, the cruel game of watching house after house sell for way more than you can actually afford week after week will just continue.

Preparing to bid at an auction takes time and effort, aside from the fact that you have to like the house enough to want to commit many hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy it in the first place. Finding an affordable house, choosing it as one you are prepared to buy, preparing your finances, having the place assessed, having it inspected and then turning up at the auction full of hope and expectation: it is a lot – and then it sells for \$100,000 over your budget. The next weekend the same happens, and you continue this process for months, not sure if you will even manage to find somewhere. That is not fair to put Victorians through.

We need to change the system to make it more transparent by clearly displaying reserve prices and introduce stronger penalties for dodgy real estate agents who continue to underquote. My guess is, this document not having been provided thus far, the property market review will likely support this

position and potentially have further suggestions to address underquoting and other barriers that first home buyers face when it comes to buying a home. It is an important document, hopefully not a contentious one to be released to the Parliament, and one that could provide some very useful information on ways to fix parts of our broken housing system. I hope for the chamber's support today and look forward to reading what is contained in the report.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:47): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Puglielli's motion seeking a copy of the 2022 property market review final report commissioned by the then Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. I will say at the outset that Mr Puglielli made a number of comments about the housing market, and I absolutely agree that we need to do all that we can to make sure that all Victorians, particularly younger Victorians, have the chance to buy a home. I have said a lot of times in the chamber before, though, that the only way we are going to fix the housing crisis is to build more homes. I do not disagree that this review is important, but to get to the nub of the problem here, it is Victorians being priced out of the housing market. We fix that with more supply, because that is what is going to bring down the pressure on prices. That is what is going to help make sure that all Victorians have the chance to buy a home in the suburbs that they love, and that is why this government is absolutely focused on unlocking more supply of homes, building more homes from the inner city to the outer suburbs and everywhere in between. That is what is going to make the biggest difference to making sure that all Victorians can afford to buy a home.

This motion is seeking access to a document that was handed to the government just shy of three years ago relating to a review of the property market in 2022. I am sure it contains many things that were valuable to the government in informing the policy development that has occurred since it was handed to us back in 2022, because this government in the last nearly three years, 2½ years, has undertaken significant reform, initiated significant reform, to make sure we have got the homes Victorians need. You cannot accuse the government of not being focused on housing, on the housing market and on housing supply in the last 2½ years, despite attempts by others to frustrate that agenda. This government has focused on housing. Some of the particular issues that we have dealt with and that have been absolutely informed by this review include the underquoting taskforce that has been out on the streets of Melbourne, in particular, trying to stamp out the insidious practice of underquoting. We know that it is unfair – we know that it is deeply unfair – and that taskforce is having results. It is having an effect on making sure that the practice is stamped out. It is out on Saturdays at auctions, sending a very clear message to real estate agents that the practice is unacceptable, and those that are caught are facing tough penalties.

The trial of the underquoting taskforce was such a success it is now a permanent part of Consumer Affairs Victoria. We know that it is good and we know that it is working because the other states are now copying our homework, as they often do, because Victoria leads the way in so many areas. New South Wales is copying Victoria. It has issued more than \$2 million in fines since it was launched in September 2022. It has monitored nearly 2500 sales campaigns. But it is not just about fines; it is about making the market fairer. We have increased penalties against agents each time they are caught underquoting and are expanding powers to confiscate commissions to cover all underquoting offences. Consumer Affairs Victoria late last year commenced civil proceedings in the Federal Court against agents for alleged misleading and deceptive conduct and making false and misleading statements in breach of the Australian Consumer Law, with very high penalties of up to \$50 million, and in April this year we did similarly.

The report the Greens seek has been informing government policy, and you can absolutely say that the Allan Labor government has been acting to improve the housing market in Victoria.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:52): I rise in support of Mr Puglielli's request for this document on the property market review. On the government's own website it says the Victorian government conducted a review of the property market laws to ensure they best support fair and easy access to the housing market. The review examines consumer protections and property and protects

prospective property buyers, including laws relating to underquoting and off-the-plan sales and real estate conduct. I agree that this is something that really should be provided to us.

As everyone in this chamber knows, the Victorian housing register now has over 66,000 families on the waitlist. Unfortunately, since the beginning of the Big Build that list has grown by 25 per cent. We are really in a housing crisis in this state, and it is a really important time for a document like this. I do not know why it has been hidden for almost three years and not shown, because it is a publicly funded document. It is something that was paid for by using taxpayer funds, and therefore it is in the public interest for them to be able to see it. Victoria is in the middle of a housing crisis and, like I said, since the start of the Big Build in 2022 the social housing waiting list has grown by 25 per cent. For those 66,000 families – and that list is growing – this is a serious issue. Our population is growing and our homelessness issue is, unfortunately, growing. I think this is the sort of motion that is about transparency and of course something that we are going to support.

I just want to read from an article in the *Age* that was published on 12 August this year, ‘Buried findings: real estate expert’s frustration at underquoting inaction’. I am just going to read from the first few paragraphs. It says:

A real estate industry stalwart commissioned to deliver advice on Victoria’s underquoting laws has called on the Allan government to release the unpublished recommendations ...

His name was Enzo Raimondo, and he is the former head of the Real Estate Institute of Victoria. He was one of the two expert panellists that was appointed by the government to consider if the laws governing this state’s property market, including underquoting, needed to be improved.

However, the findings of the taxpayer-funded report were buried after its completion in 2022, and the government has repeatedly declined to explain to those who contributed ... why it hasn’t released it.

This is what Enzo said:

I’m surprised it still hasn’t been released ... but certainly it should be ...

There’s a lot of work involved, and it would be a shame for it just to sit on a shelf and do nothing [but] collect dust.

I completely agree with his statements there. I think that in the middle of a housing crisis, where these lists are growing, we would like to see what is in this study and what we could be doing to improve the laws. I commend this motion to the house.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:56): I rise also to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Puglielli’s name. It is a documents motion seeking the release of a report that was commissioned by the government into the property market in 2022. The government’s position is we are not opposing this documents motion, but I just want to make a few comments about the construct of the motion in regard to the some of the debate that has been going on. It is particularly about the housing market, but we know the housing market comprises rental properties and people who want to purchase properties but also people who might be seeking social and affordable housing or public housing. I guess the thing is, the report was commissioned in 2022, and what it did was look at the property market then. It is a snapshot of the property market in 2022. It is now 2025. Things would have changed by now.

I was just looking at some of the publicly available information about the sorts of profiles of people who are property investors. Despite what you may hear on 3AW, there is actually some factual information available – things like Australian Tax Office data, which shows that 20 per cent or thereabouts of Australians own an investment property but around 1 per cent of taxpayers of those 20 per cent own a quarter of all investment properties. Information also shows that where there are mum-and-dad investors, they might only own one or two properties, but they generally sell those properties within two years of purchasing them.

The other thing, which I think Mr Batchelor commented on as well, is that one of the ways that you actually take pressure out of the housing market is to increase supply, which is exactly what this government is doing. We are building more homes across a range of areas, whether that is public housing or social and affordable housing. There is housing for workers that is being built and then just affordable housing. So looking at a range of ways to increase the housing supply is what we are doing.

In regard to this review of the property market, one of the things that came out of it was the underquoting taskforce. This was something that was stood up to address some of the things that Mr Puglielli has talked about in terms of agents and their behaviour around selling of properties. I know Mr Batchelor went to this, but it is important again to emphasise this and put this on the record. A taskforce was stood up to look at underquoting by real estate agents. There was first a trial that was initiated as a result of that review. That trial was so successful the government decided to keep that taskforce going, and it is a permanent enforcement arm of Consumer Affairs Victoria. New South Wales has in fact followed our lead on that as well. Since the taskforce was stood up it has cracked down on noncompliance with our laws on underquoting and has issued over \$2 million in fines. Since it was launched in September 2022 it has received more than 3900 complaints from consumers, monitored over 2440 sales campaigns embarked upon by agents, attended 250 auctions and issued 185 fines totalling more than \$2 million. That just shows that the government was serious about taking action on underquoting in regard to agents.

The other part that I think is quite interesting is that in October 2024 Consumer Affairs Victoria commenced civil proceedings in the Federal Court against Ray White Oakleigh for alleged misleading and deceptive conduct and making false and misleading statements in breach of Australian Consumer Law. That is important because some of the things that were advertised related to the condition of certain rental properties and the rent that was charged for them, and the rental properties were allegedly not consistent with the laws about what should be available to rent. So again, in April 2025 CAV commenced disciplinary proceedings against Nicholas Scott Real Estate after an investigation identified multiple alleged breaches of underquoting laws involving 11 properties. So in that short period of time, as you can see, the underquoting taskforce has indeed been very busy. The government has sought to stand that up in response to the review of the property market. The government has appropriately resourced that taskforce in order for it to do the work that it needs to do and be a tough cop on the beat where it has been made aware of behaviour by agents in terms of underquoting. I would just recommend, rather than debating a motion in the house and looking at more documents yet again, that perhaps we could encourage people to make complaints to the underquoting taskforce.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (11:01): I am pleased – or perhaps ‘pleased’ is not the right word; I am saddened that I have the need to move motion 1025. I move:

That this house:

- (1) expresses its concern at the rising energy bills faced by Victorian households and businesses;
- (2) notes that supply and usage charges were increased further on 1 August 2025;
- (3) further notes that households and businesses will see significant increases in their energy bills in the months and years ahead under Labor’s energy arrangements; and
- (4) holds the Minister for Energy and Resources responsible for the increased energy costs being paid by Victorian households and businesses in Labor’s 11th year of government.

This is a tired government. It is a government that has run out of ideas, and it is a government that has taken the view that Victorian families, Victorian households and Victorian businesses can cop it in the neck – that they can suck it up – as the prices go up and up and up. Let us be clear here: we heard one of the Labor backbenchers talking before about the programs that are in place. Well, there are programs

that help pensioners and concession card holders, but there is no overall energy program that relieves the bills of everyone else. That is the better off, the middling off and those who are really, truly struggling – families who are struggling. There is no federal program. One of the backbenchers mentioned the federal programs. They have ceased. They have finished. They are dead. They are over. They have stopped, and there is no state program to replace them. There is help for concession card holders, and we in no way believe that that is unimportant – we believe that is important. But those everyday families in the suburbs who are struggling with the cost of living know that their energy bills are going up and up and up.

We know that the infrastructure costs are being fed through. We heard the other day about the VNI West cost blowout going from \$3.2 billion to \$7.6 billion, with an outer limit in the estimate of \$11.4 billion, and every single cent of that will be sheeted home to Victorian households and Victorian businesses on their energy bills. They are all going to pay. They are going to pay and they are going to pay and they are going to pay even more. We know about the changes that occurred on 1 August; every company has announced significant increases in payments. I had communication from Mike in Kew, who pays his mum's electricity bill. He pays his own electricity bill, and he pays his mum's bill, which is a GloBird Energy bill. He made it clear that the new rates go up. The daily charge for Mike's mum's GloBird Energy bill in Kew goes from \$1.03400 to \$1.15500. That is the daily charge – dollars per day. The base anytime usage charge goes from 0.17050 to 0.25740. I reckon that is a big increase that is going to feed through into the costs that Mike must pay, because he generously picks up his mum's electricity bill. The anytime usage balance payment goes from 0.20790 up to 0.27. That is a pretty big increase – 0.0610. That is just one example; I can go on. I can go on and on and on with some of these examples.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

David DAVIS: You may think that these cases are unimportant. In fact they are important. I have a retiree in Box Hill South whose supplier is Lumo. Their existing supply charge is 93.5 cents per day and it is going to 103.95 cents per day. That is a 10.45 cent increase – an 11.17 per cent increase per day. That is for a retiree in Box Hill South with Lumo. That is their supply charge. There are similar charges elsewhere too. Peter, who operates a small supermarket and cafe, says his supply charge is increasing by 32.5 per cent. He said:

This becomes impossible when managing refrigerators and freezers. This is the single greatest cost for our small supermarket and cafe ...

... We have a minister –

Lily D'Ambrosio –

who is only too happy to attend a ribbon cutting ceremony but is missing when addressing the real cost issues.

These are very significant increases that are being talked about here.

Phillip and his family in Kew, who are with provider Powershop, have an estimated annual increase of \$260. The supply charge goes from 78.85 cents per day to 90.28 cents a day. That is an increase of 11.43 cents in one leap from 1 August – a 14.49 per cent increase. It is almost a 15 per cent increase. That is Phillip in Kew, with Powershop as his provider. That is a big increase for any family in my humble view. I could give another example here. There are plenty of these that come through. The supply charge for a house on the peninsula goes from 91.047 cents to 100.892; that is a 10.81 per cent increase. The general usage bands go from the existing 22.671 cents per kilowatt hour to a new 24.86 cents per kilowatt hour. That is an increase of 2.189 cents, a 9.65 per cent increase.

These are whopping increases – 10, 12, 14 in some cases and almost 15 per cent in one leap on 1 August – for families and small businesses, all getting it in the neck because of Lily D'Ambrosio and this government's failure to deal with things properly. But we are not seeing cheaper power. They are the costs that people are going to pay.

I agree with the advice to shop around. That is important. It does keep some pressure on the system. Shop around by all means. But the truth is that every one of these suppliers are going up significantly – by different amounts, but all are going up significantly. Shopping around will not deal with the deeper problem – that is, the increase that is being put on every household and every small business by every single supplier, and they are big, big increases from 1 August this year. They are actually hitting hard, and as I said before, unlike what we heard from over there, there are no programs. There is a program for concession card holders, and that is welcome – it is modest assistance – but there is nothing at all for small businesses and there is nothing at all for directly helping those families that are doing it tough in the suburbs at the moment.

I think it is important that these are seen not as nebulous things, not as distant matters, but actual increases that are being foisted and pushed onto families and small businesses now. And this is the fault of Lily D’Ambrosio. She has been minister now for almost 11 years. She needs to take responsibility for these increases. She needs to front up and explain why those prices have gone up since 1 August and why families are paying so much more.

It is not as though this government has not got a kind of a mode; we know what we feel from this long-term government, this tired government. I am in possession of a brief from 2022 from the then Treasurer Mr Pallas entitled ‘Energy affordability and the cost of living’, and in the brief the recommendation was:

That you **note** that most households are well-placed to absorb some energy bill increases in the short-term ...

That you **note** that ... medium and industrial ... users are likely to experience the greatest impact ...

That you **note** that most Victorians are well-placed to manage cost of living pressures in the short term ...

I do not think that is what most Victorians think. We call this the Marie Antoinette ‘Let them eat cake’ brief. At a further point in this it says that the biggest impact of energy costs is likely to be on small businesses. Then it goes on to say:

Living cost increases have been hard to avoid, particularly with non-discretionary expenses such as rent, food and fuel growing faster than wages.

Mr Pallas was told this, and he endorsed and signed this brief. He circled the agreements and the conclusion:

Most Victorian households have enough income, savings and wealth to manage price rises without major sacrifices.

I think this is a very, very out-of-touch brief. This shows the government at its worst. It shows Mr Pallas and those long-term ministers with an arrogant attitude that says, ‘Let them eat cake. They can all live with it.’ We heard this over here with some of these backbenchers talking just a few minutes ago. They appeared deeply unconcerned about what was happening to people in their own electorates.

Jacinta Ermacora: You have no idea.

David DAVIS: I sure do. I have an 87-year-old father who lives alone, and energy costs are hitting him quite hard, I can tell you. He is on the peninsula, and he is being hit quite hard. I could go on and on with examples, and some of the ones I brought to the table today are people who have come into my office. They have come into my office with their actual bills. They have come in with their bills from last year and their bills from this year, and you can see the increases. They have come in with a note from their provider that says the money is going up. The pensioners are paying more. The older people are paying more. Those families that are struggling are paying more. The small businesses are paying more. They are all paying more, and you do not care – Labor does not care. They do not care about these families. They do not care about these small businesses. They do not care about the pensioners. They are nasty, they are mean, they are shocking.

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis is pointing.

David DAVIS: I am pointing generically to the whole of the other side.

Jacinta Ermacora: I don't think so. It was to me.

David DAVIS: I will avoid pointing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I will admit that the pointing was not directed at anyone in particular. I ask Mr Davis to continue, through the Chair.

Bev McArthur: It is kind of a vacant space over there anyway.

David DAVIS: It is vacant in many ways. The point I am making here is that these costs are very significant. Families are being hit, pensioners are being hit and small businesses are being hit. Lily D'Ambrosio said that the prices are going down, down, down. But actually they are not going down, down, down; they are going up, up, up, up, up. They are hitting families, they are hitting businesses and they are hitting those small supermarkets, as we just heard a moment ago, with the business example. He was saying this was their biggest cost. The refrigeration costs had gone up because the energy costs were going up and up. These families are struggling very, very seriously. It does not appear that there is a moment of compassion on the other side of the chamber. They seem to dismiss this. As I say, the brief I read out from Mr Pallas – I accept he is gone – was the 'let them eat cake' brief. He said it was all fine – they can suck it up; they can cope. That is what Mr Pallas said. It was a cruel and heartless attitude in that brief, an attitude that was dismissive of what families are feeling and an attitude that was cruel and mean in its understanding of what these prices are doing to everyday families. Lily D'Ambrosio needs to get out more. She needs to understand –

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, Acting President, I think that Mr Davis has been a colleague of Ms D'Ambrosio for almost the same amount of time that he has been in Parliament here in Victoria. I think pronouncing her name correctly is respectful. It is just a repetitive mispronunciation of Minister D'Ambrosio's name.

David DAVIS: I am happy to call her the minister for energy. The minister for energy has no understanding of the impact on families, communities, pensioners, migrant groups and businesspeople – that whole spread being clobbered by the minister for energy's own policies. It is she that has jacked the prices up and up and up. The minister for energy is the minister for higher and higher and higher electricity and gas prices. That is what she has delivered for Victorians. She tries to say that it is the cheapest of all the states. One of the points here is we still have significant brown coal in the system. That is an asset that has been there for many years, and it does produce energy at a low cost. That is one of the reasons Victoria's overall costs appear good on the surface. But the point here is that it is going up and up and up and up. There does not appear to be a recognition by the minister for energy or her colleagues, as we heard from Mr Pallas, that this is hurting families, that these costs are cutting in quite hard. There does not appear to be that recognition. For those reasons we say it is time this government dealt with these matters. It is time the government looked at ways to bring down the cost of electricity and gas for everyday families and everyday businesses.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:19): It will come as no surprise to my colleagues in this chamber that the Greens will not be supporting the motion before us this morning. I guess the subtext of this motion, which we are concerned about, is the ongoing fight against the rollout of the renewable energy transition that we continue to see from the coalition. This is despite the fact that science, politics and common sense are against this position that they hold. It amazes me that the opposition does not seem to realise that their campaign against renewable energy and the complete shambles regarding net zero on a federal level is alienating a huge proportion of the Australian population. Politics aside, the time to act on climate change is now; it was actually decades ago. We absolutely have to take urgent action on climate change, and time spent being distracted by these sorts of energy debates, such as nuclear energy or the opening of new coalmines, is precious time that is wasted while we are delaying important climate action. I have to admit I was really tempted to get up today and basically say something along the lines of 'Renewables are the cheapest form of energy –

the end'. But instead I guess this motion provides the opportunity to raise a number of issues regarding the energy transition in this state.

Recently we heard reports from Solstice Energy that they will be shutting down their gas pipelines to 10 Victorian towns. It is important to note that many households in regional townships are not connected to gas mains, instead relying on LPG cylinders, while others do not use gas in their homes at all. This announcement will impact just over 1000 customers, a sizeable consumer group but small enough for the government to have it within its means to offer genuine financial support to help them electrify – support for these households to make the switch to electric appliances in their homes and cease their reliance on fossil fuels altogether. That is something the government could do, rather than forcing them to have to continue to look at ways they can stay on gas. The gas industry is already withdrawing from previously safe markets. They know that the energy transition is coming and it is no longer financially viable to keep these gas pipelines open, but currently we are not seeing the Labor government leading an orderly shutdown of gas in communities like this. Households need more notice, and many will need financial assistance to ensure the up-front costs of electrification are not beyond their reach.

On that point, Labor should be doing more to help all households access the benefits of cheap renewable power. It was disappointing to see the government quietly axe their successful no-interest solar battery loan for households earlier this year. The new federal rebate of \$4500 is welcome, but with good-quality battery systems now costing over \$13,000, Victorian Labor's decision makes it harder for lower income households to transition to cheaper renewable power. There was no good reason to cancel this largely cost-neutral scheme, and it is not too late to bring it back and to expand it so that people who face additional barriers, like renters, apartment dwellers or social housing residents, can access cheap renewables in their homes as well.

It is simple: energy efficiency and electrification will save households money in the long term. Estimates from the Clean Energy Council place Melbourne households as saving just over \$2000 a year through combined measures such as insulation, sealing windows and doors, switching to electric heat pumps and installing induction cooktops. Victoria is actually one of Australia's states with the most to gain because of the impact of climate on our homes, and whilst households have plenty to gain from the energy transition, the flip side of this is that there is also plenty to lose if we do not take action. Households stuck with inefficient gas appliances are looking down the barrel of rising energy bills as the fossil fuel industry scrambles to make money out of a defunct market. Meanwhile households can expect insurance premiums to increase as the severity of extreme weather events grows. Recent reports from climate valuation analysts estimate that within the decade one in 10 homes will either be uninsurable or simply unaffordable to insure.

In the meantime we have to acknowledge that climate change is much more than simple economics. The collapse of ecosystems, decreasing biodiversity, more frequent disasters – that goes beyond the human experience, let alone our hip pockets. This is all about saving thousands of species, saving rivers and saving oceans from the consequences of our own actions and then grossly negligent inaction. With climate disasters like heatwaves, fires, droughts and floods already devastating communities and global heating locked in to get us well over 1.5 degrees, meaning there is worse to come, the Greens want to see a swifter and fairer energy transition, and I only hope that those opposite can come along as partners in these changes.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:24): I think I would echo the sentiment of Dr Mansfield there. One can only hope that the opposition will come along on this path that we are well on and that is well underway. It is a pity Mr Davis is not still here in the chamber. I was looking forward to picking up on a number of his points, which I will throughout my contribution. But I am very, very excited that Mrs McArthur is in the chamber, because outside of Mr Davis and his expansive knowledge of energy policy – he demonstrated the research he has done into energy in his 20-minute contribution – Mrs McArthur, I am sure we will hear some interesting things from you. Which side do we want to look at first? Let us look at the lived experience of consumers. Mr Davis was focusing on consumers

in his contribution, which is unusual for the Liberal Party to do. It is usually very far from their consciousness. But when the Liberals were last in power, disconnections doubled to 58,000 people. I remember this at the time, and the Liberals did not care. They did not know what to do. When Labor got into power, we ensured that people could stay connected to power, that retailers were focused on consumers' lived experience of staying connected to what is an essential service. We should also note that when the Liberals were last in power, electricity retail prices went up 34 per cent. It is all very well for Mr Davis to come in here and carry on with everything he is talking about, but under the Liberals' watch, disconnections doubled and retail prices went up by 34 per cent.

To Dr Mansfield's point about wanting to just ignore the Liberals because they have no policy, I am tempted to do the same but I will not. I am going to lean in, because we could all laugh and we do laugh, but the tragedy is that they are serious. The Liberals sat in here for much of the last 18 months prosecuting their belief in small modular nuclear reactors. They had no technological fact to back that up; they had no energy market evidence to back that up. Eventually they got to a point where they realised that small modular nuclear reactors are not actually a thing anywhere in the Western developed world, so they stood back from that policy. We all know the Liberals then went to the federal election with large-scale nuclear reactors as their policy. There are many on that side who still believe in nuclear. Mrs McArthur is not one to back away from a fight. She will put her beliefs on the record, in *Hansard*, and will not hide like so many of her colleagues do, because they hide – I will refrain from using the word 'cowardly' – from what their policy positions on energy are. I will come to energy generation shortly. But the Liberals, we all know, are absolutely welded to gas.

My criticism of the Greens is that their targets on transition are not connected to physics, to economics or to where our society is at. It is the Labor Party at the sensible centre that is getting on with taking action on climate change, generating renewable energy and everything else we have to do in our emission reduction targets. How are the Liberals going to generate electricity in this state? Every evening, we need about 6 gigs. We know that Yallourn, 1.2 gigawatts, just spent nearly half a billion dollars upgrading four of their generators. It is getting very, very close to end of life. How are the Liberals going to provide the power that Victoria needs? Brad Battin just made a tweet the other day that the Liberals will lift the moratorium, so the only conclusion that you can draw is that the Liberals will lift the moratorium on fracking. Mrs McArthur, I would be very interested in your views on this, because we know that farmers do not want fracking. That is why the moratorium was originally put in place. We have some of the most pristine, productive agricultural land in the world here in Victoria, and we should absolutely fight to protect it. The moment you want to start going into underground water aquifers to get gas out of farmers' lands, it is a threat not only to their economic viability but also to the food basin of this state. Mrs McArthur, I hope in your contribution you will come clean on what the Liberal Party plan is to power this state.

The other thing is that Mr Davis obviously did not read the *Financial Review* this morning, because it has just come out that AGL had a 21.2 per cent profit downgrade. I am not here to celebrate that, but it was due to lower wholesale prices. Mr Davis, did you forget to acknowledge that? Week on week, month on month, year on year, Victoria has the lowest electricity spot price in Australia. As Mr Davis said about going on and on and on, I will go on here just for a moment. This week, as it is week on week, month on month, year on year, wholesale prices are \$88.10 a megawatt hour here in Victoria. If you go to Tassie, it is in the mid-90s; Queensland, \$97; New South Wales, \$102; WA, \$108 – it goes on. It is the same for gas prices by trading location. Victoria's gas is at \$12.45 a gigajoule. All the other states are up into \$13 and more. So it is a false argument he brings around Victorian prices. Mr Davis, much like before the last election when he was Shadow Treasurer, forgot all his budget costings. As the Shadow Treasurer he could not bring his own party's costings four days before the election. Much like that, we know he has not done his homework on the Liberal Party's energy policy.

I ask the Liberal Party: the 1.2 gigawatts at Yallourn and the 2.2 gigawatts at Loy Yang A – as they retire, as the businesses that you privatised and put into private hands determine that they are no longer going to operate, what is your alternative? The question really is for Victorians: why do the Liberals

hate technology? When one in three Victorians have solar on their rooftop, which cuts their electricity bills and ensures that within their own home they can generate their own power, why are the Liberals so against technology? And now we are seeing battery take-up explode. People are putting batteries on their homes so they can have their own power. But why are the Liberals so against this? When we first started to set our renewable energy targets the Liberals said it could not be done: 'Five per cent – can't be done. Ten per cent – can't be done.' Fifteen per cent, 20 per cent, 25 per cent, 30 per cent – have I got 35, 40? Forty-five per cent of our energy annually is generated renewably, and the Liberals will still say, 'It can't be done, it can't be done, it can't be done,' because that is their starting point on basically everything. They come to this place with no values, with no policies. If you take all of that in, it is no wonder, when Victorians look at the Liberal Party, they see no hope for a Victorian Liberal Party – let alone a Liberal party anywhere in this country, to be honest – having a meaningful policy to improve the quality of their lives or to reduce the cost of their power bills, to give Victorians the ability to generate their own power in their own home, to have reliable power.

The other thing Mr Davis did not touch on – and we taught him earlier this year that base load is not actually a thing. He could not quite get that through his head. He stopped talking about base load, so I am very happy Mr Davis has done that. I will be interested to see if a few of the others talk about base load, even if they do not know really what it is. It is the peak demand. It is the times once a month when we are paying huge, huge prices to fire up gas generators when we could be using batteries. When you go back to the record, Mr Davis said batteries would never amount to anything. We are well on our way to our battery targets. We are talking gigawatts of batteries either under construction or commissioned, feeding into the grid. Just this year we saw 60 per cent price drops in major battery storage capacity. That is why we see in New South Wales a project that was not going to go ahead 18 months ago has now doubled in size; 2 gigawatts they will get for the initial price.

We oppose this motion. The Liberals have no idea when it comes to energy, no idea when it comes to much at all in fact, and I cannot wait to hear from Mrs McArthur.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (11:34): As we have heard, the Minister for Energy and Resources has said that energy costs are going down, down, down. But the reality for families and for businesses as they open their energy bills is they know prices are going up, up and up. It is a huge cost to families. We are seeing, just in the recent quarter, prices going up by 16 per cent. I have spoken to businesses, and energy bills, electricity bills, are the biggest cost that they are facing. It is adding to our rising living costs, and it is really crushing business productivity. We know that supply and usage charges are going up further from 1 August, and the worst is yet to come when you look at things like VNI West and the cost of that. The Australian Energy Market Operator's recent report reflects much higher costs. I remember asking questions about this back in 2023. At that time the reports were that the cost would be about \$3.6 billion, shared with New South Wales. Now we have seen in the latest reports that it is looking more like \$7.6 billion and at the upper end more like \$11.4 billion. Who pays these costs? We do. It will end up on your power bills.

We have seen the impact of decisions and the anti-gas agenda of this government. Just recently we had Solstice announce gas supplies being cut off to 10 regional towns, and the majority of those are in the Northern Victoria electorate. I have spoken with people impacted, with businesses impacted and with families that have been impacted by that decision, and they are very fearful of what is to come as they are scrambling now to find out what to do because they have been forced to change back. Yet we heard the Premier in question time yesterday talk about that policy. She said it was a flawed policy because it was subsidies and subsidies that have been removed, and that causes the price to go up. Yet we do see this government subsidising solar and wind developments, and we see the power saving bonus as well, trying to help families with these soaring energy bills. But you have to ask why the prices continue to soar under Labor.

I know Peter Hunt in the *Weekly Times* talked about this issue. He said:

Households and businesses are already subsidising a third of every solar and wind developer's revenue, through the hidden large-scale renewable energy scheme charge on electricity bills ...

He went on to say:

Despite being one of the most energy-rich nations we face a future where large commercial and industrial users' electricity bills will double or triple over the next five to seven years to cover soaring transmission costs.

Just consider the impact of that – consider the impact on businesses if they have to face that kind of escalation in costs. It certainly will cost jobs.

Currently we export coal and we export gas. We are one of the world's top exporters so that other countries can use these resources to manufacture products. Some do call it emissions offshoring, where components are manufactured in countries like China that have lower environmental standards than we have. As I have mentioned before in this house, I have solar panels on my own home, but the first ones that we had ended up in landfill. I am concerned about what will happen in 25 years when we have thousands and thousands of solar panels. I know in Colbinabbin there are about over 700,000 solar panels going in. We also have hundreds and hundreds of massive wind turbines going up. At this point in time, when I have discussed this issue with others and during a recent inquiry, there does not seem to be any consideration about what is happening not too far away. There is a cost, a huge cost, and we are paying for that, but not just financially.

I know Dr Mansfield talked about changing to electric so we cease reliance on fossil fuels and depend on renewables, but it is important to point out that with renewables and wind turbines, fossil fuels are used in their manufacture, in their transportation and also just in the installation and operation of these facilities. It is not easy to say you are moving away. We have even had an information session here at Parliament that talked about how with the increase in renewables there will be an increase in mining associated with that – particularly with batteries, as they do rely on mining. But some of these projects – and I am aware because I speak with residents; I live in the region – are tearing some communities apart. Some people want to host a wind turbine, for example, and receive the financial benefit, and others do not want to have a 300-metre-tall wind turbine forever on their landscape. I was speaking to a gentleman recently who is in business – he has a farm – and he talked about the impact of the buffer zone of the wind turbine that actually goes into his property. I have heard from other families concerned about some of the caveats that are being placed on properties, which are causing some challenges when they go to sell. They do not realise what was in the contract that they signed.

There is a serious energy crisis that we are facing here in Victoria. There is going to be the closure of the Yallourn power station by 2028 and Loy Yang A by 2035, so they will take considerable gigawatts – 1.2 gigawatts and 2.5 gigawatts – out of our energy system. At the moment those coal stations do run night and day and provide that firming and consistent power. But their departure will leave big holes in our energy supply, and we are energy-hungry. Our lifestyle is certainly energy-hungry and we have a rapidly growing population, so we do not just need to replace our current energy supplies, we need to expand our energy supply to meet demand. It is important to point out in a natural disaster we see the chaos that happens when people do not have access to power. Everything shuts down very quickly.

In the rushed rollout of these projects, we are seeing massive developments on prime agricultural land, like in Colbinabbin, which I have referred to previously. Under this government we have had the right of appeal through VCAT removed, and this government continues to use standover tactics. Just with the bill that we are seeing that is coming in, the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, if you try and prevent a transmission company coming onto your property, you could face a \$12,000 fine. That is extraordinary. When you talk about batteries – I know Mr McIntosh talked about batteries and how they are so advanced now – at Hazelwood they announced the Big Battery: 150 megawatts, and it only powers 75,000 homes for 1 hour. We have

2 million homes in Melbourne and we have a growing population, so the demand for energy is only going to increase.

We still have a very long way to go. We need a balanced energy strategy, a pragmatic mixed-energy strategy that should be considered to ensure long-term affordability, reliability and environmental responsibility when it comes to our energy supply. Labor has created an energy crisis, and you wonder why your power bills are going up. Well, you can thank the Labor government.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:43): I would also like to speak on Mr Davis's motion about our energy costs. One of the issues here, which neither of the major parties is really talking about, is this idea that we have got in Australia of net zero carbon emissions. This is the driving force behind this push for renewables. But what does it really mean? Well, what it really means is that Australia – in the scheme of things our carbon emissions are almost negligible, so they do not really have any sort of measurable impact on global weather systems. But if you listened to the Labor Party and the Greens, you would think that Victoria alone controls what is happening around the world in global weather systems. What is really happening? If you push a bit further, you will hear people say, 'Well, what we need to do is do our part,' and everyone is talking about science. But all of a sudden when we are talking about doing our part, we are not talking about science anymore; we are talking about whether we are doing something for the UN or international organisations or whether we are doing something for Australia.

I think that we should abandon net zero. I think that Victorians should get the cheapest and most abundant energy available to them. I think in a different debate by Mr Batchelor the GenCost report was brought up earlier. The GenCost report is very interesting, and many of the headlines that Mr Batchelor quoted were very cherry-picked headlines and quite misleading of the report, because what the GenCost report is actually looking at are cost comparisons of new generation. What it does not look at is the infrastructure costs, and the infrastructure costs are significant – Snowy Hydro, transmission lines. All of these things that we require to put ourselves in perpetual dependence on imports from China are not included. If you actually include those costs and look at the cost in 2030, what you find is that the cheapest form of energy production is actually coal, which currently supplies the majority of Victoria's energy still. The idea that we are going to just get rid of that easily and cheaply and somehow energy bills are going to go down – the GenCost report does not look at what consumers are paying, but they sure as hell pay for whatever infrastructure is required to get that energy to their homes.

Even though we are at fairly early stages in this transition to renewables, we are already seeing a loss of social licence in many cases. The people out the front of Parliament, the farmers that were upset about energy companies forcing their way onto their property and are upset about these draconian fines for refusing to let people come onto their own property – this is only the start of what is going to be required.

The entire state is going to have to have networks running all over it, and every time that that happens there is going to be more and more and more resistance from people who do not want these things on their land. They do not want to give access to their land, and they are going to be upset about it. And ultimately they are going to pay for it. We are all going to pay for it because we are going to have to pay for all of this transmission infrastructure and all of the batteries that we have been talking about. It seems like madness when you realise that we already have really good transmission infrastructure from Gippsland, from where we generate coal-fired power at the moment.

I just think that we need to really rethink what we are doing here, because with this net zero thing, more and more people are waking up to the fact that it is really just about Australia bowing down before international forces. I think that we need to be looking at what is best for Victoria, not what is best for the UN.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:47): The government will be opposing this motion because the Liberals are the last people you would trust with household energy prices. We all know that the cost of energy is an important issue to every one of our constituents, and we also know, as much as people are worried about what their energy bills will look like next month, they worry about what they are going to look like next year, which is why it is so important that the Allan Labor government has policies to help people with their bills today. When the opposition were last in power they let their mates in big businesses run rampant at households' expense. Power prices rose by 34 per cent, and the number of disconnections more than doubled. We do not need policy on the fly. We need a long-term plan for energy production, energy security and energy affordability for the years to come, because the choices that the government made in 2015 are affecting us today and the choices that the government makes today will affect people in 2035. This is one of the policy areas where the decisions we make today really do change the shape of what our state will look like for decades to come.

Of course, as the members of this side of the chamber know, bringing back the SEC was one of the biggest promises that the government made at the last election. It was an important pledge, and it is one that we have fulfilled. Today the SEC is powering Victorian government buildings with cheap 100 per cent renewable energy. That means our public schools, public hospitals, trains, trams, traffic lights, museums and even our zoos are well powered by the SEC. Not only that, but starting later this year the SEC will be filling in a market gap and providing retail energy to commercial and industrial businesses, offering 100 per cent renewable energy to medium and large businesses. When businesses benefit from cheap and reliable energy, everyone else will benefit too, because it will reduce their costs and allow them to invest more in staff, their products and keeping their prices down. If a business cannot keep on the lights, then it cannot keep its employees in a job. That is just one of the reasons why the SEC is so important.

But the SEC is not just about retailing energy, it is also about producing brand new government-owned energy production and storage. The two big projects currently underway are the Melbourne renewable energy hub and the SEC renewable energy park at Horsham. The Melbourne renewable energy hub is expected to come online later this year, bringing Victoria closer to achieving its renewable energy targets by 2035. This project will provide enough energy storage to power 200,000 homes during the evening peak. The SEC renewable energy hub in Horsham will be up and running in 2027 and will produce enough energy each year to power 51,000 homes. These are the sorts of projects which are going to give this state the energy production and storage we need to keep bills low in the long term.

One of the most exciting things about the SEC is going to be up and running next year, that being the SEC one-stop shop. This will be a free online service that will help Victorians to navigate the often confusing and difficult process of installing rooftop solar and energy-efficient electrical appliances in their home. By giving tailor-made advice specific to the circumstances of individuals, the one-stop shop is going to be one of the most effective tools that we have ever had for helping families to save on their energy bills. The idea here is simple: provide families with a cost-effective analysis of installing these systems specific to their household; provide them with a network of reliable, accredited, honest, SEC-endorsed installers; and let them weigh up the decision for themselves. My prediction is that we will see many more families making the choice to go solar next year, and we will have the chance to see whether or not history will bear me out on that one.

There are questions which many Victorians have about installing solar energy-efficient appliances, which can only be answered by advice that is expert and impartial and does not have a financial interest in the decisions you make. I think a lot of people appreciate having someone other than a salesperson to answer their questions on whether going solar might be appropriate for them, but it is not every location, because not every location is geographically suited to it. And not every household's energy use habits would lead to solar being a good financial investment. So individualised, expert and impartial advice is something that people across the state can look forward to and benefit from. I might add as well how wonderful it is that the Allan Labor government has a partner in the federal

government, which is providing families with subsidies to install home battery systems so that they can get the most efficient use and best possible value out of their rooftop solar.

Victorians like the idea of being able to generate energy for themselves, of not being captive to the energy market, of knowing that their energy that is being produced is an asset that they own themselves. Not only is it good in concept and popular in concept but helping families to install rooftop solar is one of the most effective ways that the government can help families with the cost of energy bills. These investments are not one-off bill relief; they keep bills down long term.

One thing that the SEC one-stop shop reminds me of is the extremely successful existing service that the Victorian government provides, the Victorian Energy Compare website. Using this website is the easiest way that Victorians can get their monthly bills down and one of the most cost-effective and fair ways that the government can help families with the cost of living. The energy market can be confusing. Sometimes it can be confusing by design. Nearly a decade ago now, the energy minister in the other place, who today continues to hold that portfolio, introduced Victorian Energy Compare to give Victorians the facts and figures about what was best for them.

Another long-term, big-picture reform we have made is the creation of seven renewable energy zones in locations geographically most suited to hosting renewable energy. Landowners in these zones will be offered the chance to host renewable energy generation and storage on their land in exchange for significant compensation. This is what will enable us to build the energy generation infrastructure of the future: working with the private sector. Those of us on this side of the chamber in the Allan Labor government know that in the 21st century it is renewable energy that will keep the lights on, the living standards up and the energy costs down. When our existing local coal-fired power stations come to the end of their natural lives, something is going to have to replace them. Sadly for the great ideological devotees of coal, capital is not interested in investing in new coal-fired power stations and neither are the Victorian people. That is why we have our new renewable energy zones.

State governments have many important jobs, and keeping the lights on is one of them. By providing support at an individual level and reform and investment at a statewide level, the Allan Labor government has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that energy will be cheap, dependable and clean for the decades to come. This state's plans for energy in the coming decades are not just about production, they are also about consumption. The Labor government's Victorian energy upgrades program is also helping families cut their power bills by upgrading their houses to more energy-efficient heating and cooling and appliances by providing easy access to power-saving products and services. The VEU encourages investment, employment and innovation in these industries for the future to support Victorians long term. In the last year alone the VEU program saved households almost \$54 million on energy bills statewide. The program also supports insulation upgrades. The rollout, expected in early 2026, will halve the average cost of ceiling insulation. This will save households with limited insulation hundreds on their heating costs every year. The Allan Labor government continues to facilitate the switch to electricity by helping Victorians convert existing dual homes to all electric. And with that, I will leave my comments there.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:56): I rise in strong support of Mr Davis's motion, which rightly exposes the escalating energy crisis gripping Victoria. It is just the latest example of this government's failure. Across every area of life in our state the consequence of Labor's inability to manage budgets, projects, systems and markets is clear, and the pain it is causing is becoming even greater. It is particularly sickening in the area of energy, because after 11 years in power this government has taken a system that once was a competitive strength for our state and turned it into an expensive, unreliable liability. Victorian households and businesses are being hammered by soaring energy bills. I am so pleased Minister Tierney and Dr Mansfield are in the chamber, because they should know that one of the groups that are greatest affected by the soaring energy prices are the dairy farmers in our electorate of Western Victoria Region. Their costs have gone through the roof at a time when they are suffering exponentially from drought and the impact of extra taxes on their businesses. They ought to be ashamed to suggest that there are not high costs of energy in this state.

Victorian households and businesses are being hammered by soaring energy bills. From 1 August this year, supply and usage charges jumped again. We have seen it with gas tariffs, we have seen it with delayed electricity market adjustments, and I just looked at the market spot price of energy in this state, and guess what, it is the highest outside of Tasmania. I also looked at where the generation is occurring, and it is not being generated through wind and solar.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: The vast amount of energy in this state right now is being generated by coal. So, Mr McIntosh, you need to look at what is actually happening. Go to PocketNEM and you will find out exactly what the cost of energy is and where it is being generated from.

Tom McIntosh: And how will you do it in the future, Mrs McArthur?

Bev McARTHUR: Well, how will you do it? You have had 10 years, and you are a total failure. And the worst thing about all this is it was totally avoidable and easily predictable. There has been no catastrophic war or natural disaster. You cannot even blame the international markets, which is what you like to do. You cannot blame on the war in Ukraine the fact that you have stuffed up the energy system. What we are seeing now is a self-inflicted wound. It is what happens when a government surrenders policy to green ideology and feel-good rhetoric instead of sound economics or engineering. They have chased the loudest voices in the room – the activists, the lobbyists and the inner-suburban Greens voters – while ignoring the practical realities faced by households, by businesses and especially by regional Victoria. Shiny slogans like ‘Net zero by 2045’ and ‘90 per cent renewables by 2035’ make great media releases –

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Mrs McArthur, I need to interrupt your contribution.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Members

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Absence

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:00): I would like to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today Minister Blandthorn will be accepting questions on behalf of Minister Erdogan’s portfolios.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Labour Hire Licensing Authority

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (997) My question is for the Minister for Industrial Relations and is related to the Victorian Labour Hire Authority. I have been contacted by a constituent who has experienced an incredibly extended delay in renewing his licence. In the Labour Hire Authority’s strategic plan the first item under their values statement says that they are responsive, and the first heading under their strategic priorities states ‘Create and maintain a fair and lawful labour hire industry’. The problem that my constituent has is that to review a decision at VCAT the authority actually has to make a decision. If the LHA simply investigates him forever, his business will be destroyed without the ability to seek a review. But the LHA annual reports do not list any performance measures against benchmarks for processing renewals. Can the minister confirm if there are any targets for processing licence applications or renewals and comment on how the LHA is performing against these benchmarks?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:01): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and indeed his previous engagement with my office on this matter. Mr Limbrick, we are seeking advice in relation to the specifics of the matter that you have raised. We are currently doing labour hire reforms, and we will

have a bill in October that is picking up on some of those matters. I think the feedback that you have provided and potentially what we learn from the case that you have presented may indeed inform some of those reforms. I would be very happy to keep you updated as that progresses.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): I thank the minister for that response and also for the engagement on that particular issue. The Labour Hire Licensing Act had a statutory review last year, as the minister mentioned, with the government making various commitments to implementing reforms. Many of the recommendations and the government's response and commitments relate to the construction sector, where we have seen huge problems with infiltration of organised crime, frequently involving labour hire businesses – and let us hope that any reforms that the government proposes will assist in cleaning up this mess. The Libertarian Party do not believe that creating more regulatory authorities and red tape is the answer to productivity or bad behaviour, but when they do exist, they should be fair and efficient. Right now it is difficult to see if this is the case or not. Without a clearly defined and published expectation on how long things should reasonably take, there is no way for the public to look at the LHA and assess whether they are achieving this. Given that the government has already committed to amendments to the act, will the minister commit to ensuring that there are clear benchmarks and reporting on them in the annual report?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:03): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and for his engagement on this issue. We will consider the matters that Mr Limbrick has raised, because they have merit, and I am very happy to look at them.

Early childhood education and care

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): (998) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, today the ABC has reported that a male educator kissed and groomed toddlers and was consequently prohibited from working in a childcare centre. It was also reported that this individual retained a working with children check. Minister, do you accept this tragic failure is indicative of the siloed approach to child safety adopted by your government and that your government systems do not adequately protect children in child care or early childhood education?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:04): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Indeed in one sense she answered it herself by pointing out that the worker concerned was prohibited from working in an early education setting, as reported in the press. I will not go to individual matters, because that is not something that should in that sense be discussed, but what I will say is once a worker is prohibited they are breaking the national law if they work in an early education setting. To the other element of Ms Crozier's question in relation to the working with children check, as I have said here before, they are matters for the Attorney-General. Indeed the recent changes that she has made to the Worker Screening Act will address some of those issues and can then take into account the prohibition notice in the issuing of a working with children check. But I would leave that to the Attorney to discuss.

We have announced a rapid review into the working with children check and child safety in early education and care settings, and indeed one of the things that I have publicly said on the record – and I said it again this morning on the record – is that I am absolutely interested in ways in which –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Would Ms Crozier like an answer to the question or not? I am endeavouring to answer Ms Crozier's question, and as I have said this morning and I will say again now, I absolutely think that there is a role for the working with children check and the other regulatory authorities that work with vulnerable children, whether there is definite –

Members interjecting.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Sorry, I cannot actually hear myself think because of the interjections opposite. If they are interested in an answer, I would ask that they give me the due courtesy of listening to it. As I am trying to indicate, we have announced a rapid review which indeed will specifically, as a term of reference, look at the way in which regulatory authorities talk to each other and ensure that the appropriate considerations are made when ensuring that those who are working with our children are indeed safe to do so. But I will at the outset make it very clear that when a worker is prohibited from working in an early education setting, then they are breaking the national law to do so.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): That was a good deflection or a good try by the minister to deflect over here. I think the interjections were very pertinent, because it was prohibited four years ago. My supplementary is: can you rule out that that individual worked with a working children check in an early childhood centre or anywhere else with children in Victoria?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:06): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, and as I indicated, I will not talk to individual circumstances. Indeed in doing so I would be speaking outside of the confines of what the national law allows us to speak about when it comes to the prohibition of workers. But what I will make clear is that if a worker is prohibited from working in an early education setting, then they are breaking the national law to work in an early education setting.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, it is my understanding that this individual was blacklisted from working in child care in 2024. He was sacked in 2020. So, Minister, are you across the detail of your own responsibilities?

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order. You do not get another question too.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I have indicated, I will not speak to individual circumstances in this house, but what I will say is that where a worker is prohibited, they are prohibited from working in an early education setting and they would be breaking the national law to do so. What I have also said, which relates back to Ms Crozier's substantive question, is that the rapid review is looking at ways in which we can ensure that regulatory authorities, and indeed other bodies that might hold information about the safety of people to work with children, can talk to each other better so that we can keep children safe wherever they are.

Ministers statements: drought

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:08): We know that rainfall and drought are impacting many farmers across the state, and that is why –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we reset the clock?

Gayle TIERNEY: We know that low rainfall and drought are impacting many farmers across the state, and that is why, as part of the government's total \$144 million drought support package, we are delivering a catchment management authority drought employment program. This provides meaningful off-farm employment opportunities for farmers and farm workers experiencing hardship because of dry conditions to take a role with their local catchment management authority. These jobs will be available with the Glenelg Hopkins and Corangamite CMAs, supporting the areas of our state that have been hit the hardest, and I am pleased to announce that expressions of interest for these jobs are now open. Impacted farmers and farm workers in 11 south-west council areas can now apply through their CMA to be involved. This supports farmers and farm workers to earn an income, apply their skills and build confidence in future employment opportunities. At the same time, this supports CMAs to bring forward essential local environmental and waterway works. This includes works such as riverbank fencing, pest and weed control and revegetation, delivering important outcomes for our vital waterways.

A range of flexible part-time and full-time roles will be offered, depending on what workers need. This will also give farmers time to get back on their feet, with a break from paying wages while the CMAs keep local farm workers locally employed. While many farmers and regional communities are still grappling with the challenges of drought conditions, it is important that we all continue to follow statewide permanent water-saving rules. Every drop is precious – something our regions absolutely know too well.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: When a minister makes a ministers statement and refers to other political parties or their policies, they might ask for a bit of interjection. But when a minister is giving a ministers statement just about information, I expect them not to be interjected at. We are lucky enough to have a small chamber compared to the other chamber, where I fully understand the Presiding Officer tips people out. But here we do not like doing that, do we? Mrs McArthur, you have been warned, and I am going to start warning people from all sides, because I am kind of over it. As I said, I prefer us to be able to control ourselves a little bit.

Drug harm reduction

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:11): (999) My question today is to the Minister for Mental Health. Just yesterday we saw a Coroners Court report reveal that overdose deaths in Victoria are now at their highest level in a decade and that three-quarters of the deaths were in metropolitan Melbourne. 584 people died in 2024 from a drug overdose – that is 37 more than the previous year. Each one is a person, is a life tragically lost – a family member or a loved one. These are 584 unique people with lives and stories that came to an abrupt end, which is absolutely devastating. I say this noting the government’s statewide drug strategy, noting what is included within it, and that my colleagues and I are supportive of these initiatives. Things like naloxone vending machines, pharmacotherapy, outreach services and more are all important tools. Minister, can you outline to the house what modelling you have to show that the current policy settings in this strategy will reduce these increasing overdose death rates in Melbourne?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:12): I thank Mr Puglielli for his important question. Of course at the outset I do want to acknowledge the incredibly painful impact that any death by drug overdose has on the immediate family and indeed the broader friendship group and community that that individual comes from. We have seen a steady increase in the number of Victorians who have tragically, and I think preventably, died from overdose, which is why when I came into this portfolio I was absolutely focused on all of the measures that our government can take to try and reverse this trend.

You touched in the preamble to your question on a few of the initiatives that we are implementing, but what I would say about the approach that I have tried to take is that I have listened closely to those that work in the AOD sector day in and day out and deal with some of the most complex examples of addiction. As we know, many people who suffer from serious addiction, particularly opioid or methamphetamine addiction, also have other challenges going on in their lives. So it is important that we listen to those on the front line working with these Victorians to come up with a suite of initiatives that are going to not only address and reduce risk but also wrap other supports around people.

We do have our statewide action plan. That has got a number of important initiatives in it. We will be trialling some innovative and new ideas, including the overdose prevention hotline, which will be an Australian first. We will be, when we open the community health hub at 244 Flinders Street, running a trial of hydromorphone for those that are resistant to other pharmacotherapy treatments. We have been developing an AOD 10-year strategy for our state, which is a first. I think that once that strategy is publicly launched you will see that it is quite detailed in terms of some of the areas that we know we have to improve. But our government is absolutely committed to that work, and –

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, the question was about modelling – just on relevance.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was relevant. I will ask her to continue.

Ingrid STITT: I was moving on to talk about the types of data that my department share with me, the important work of other agencies, including of course the coroner, who regularly reports on these matters, and also the data that we have access to via those frontline services that deliver AOD – (*Time expired*)

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): Thank you, Minister, for that response. I look forward to future conversations with you about this data. Minister, if a plane crashed in our city and the number of people that I have just mentioned – 584 people – died, I think about the amount of attention from media, for example, and action that we would see immediately occur following that event. That would be understandable because it is a horrific loss of life. I think this is a stark reminder of the real-world implications that stigma around drug use is having in the real world – stigma which costs lives and in my opinion has seen limited government action to date. Why else would we not already have a medically supervised injecting centre in the City of Melbourne? We know that these centres save lives. We can look to North Richmond for the prevention of loss of life that we have seen in that facility. Melbourne needs a supervised injecting centre. We know the lives it will save. Minister, have you received any advice advising you to reverse your government’s position on this issue?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:17): There was a lot of commentary in that supplementary question, really based on your opinions, and the difficulty I have got with it is that it implies that somehow we are not taking these issues seriously. I have just gone through for a good 3 minutes, or as quickly as I could, all the reasons why it is so important that we continue our efforts here, and reducing stigma is a huge part of that. It is embedded in all of the different initiatives that we are implementing in the statewide action plan, and we have a specific project on how we reduce stigma for some of the most marginalised people who use drugs, particularly in the CBD and other parts of the city, where it is often combined with homelessness. That harm reduction is really at the heart of all the work that our government is pursuing, and we have been very clear about our position on the medically supervised injecting room.

Early childhood education and care

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): (1000) My question is again to the Minister for Children. Minister, this morning it has been revealed that G8 Education have been found to have repeatedly failed to protect children in their care. I refer you to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 and specifically to section 6, which requires you, as the minister, to:

... promote the co-ordination of Government programs that affect child wellbeing and safety.

Minister, given this key role, is it not a fact that, given the terrible revelations of abuse of children, you have failed to effectively discharge your role as minister?

The PRESIDENT: Are you asking the minister for an opinion?

Georgie CROZIER: No, a fact.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:19): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I would reject the premise of the question, but I would point out that the *Age*’s reporting today is actually using information that has been published by the regulatory authority, demonstrating that action has indeed been taken against the operators concerned in response to the breaches of national law that occurred, so the very reporting itself is based on the action of the regulator.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:20): Minister, thanks for that response. But you do have a key role, so I ask: how can parents have confidence your government is committed to protecting children given your failure to release key documents, requested in this chamber, related to childhood and child safety? You just referenced the regulator.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: The minister can answer as she sees fit.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:20): I again thank Ms Crozier for her question. As I pointed out in relation to the substantive question, the article in the *Age* is based on published enforcement actions in relation to where there had been noncompliance with or breaches of the national law, so the regulator was indeed doing its job in relation to the very points that were being raised this morning. It is using information that has been published by the regulatory authority.

In relation to the remainder of the question, in a number of ways, as I regularly update this house as Minister for Children, across the breadth of my responsibilities from maternal and child health, early education and child protection through the implementation of things such as child safe standards, our reportable conduct scheme, the work that we do to implement the findings of and reports of the Commission for Children and Young People to our record investments in things like our Best Start, Best Life reforms, our universal maternal and child health system and our threefold increase in family services investment, we are working in the interests of children.

Ministers statements: Changing Places

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:21): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting all Victorians to participate in activities across the state through our investment in Changing Places facilities. For those who may not know, Changing Places facilities are larger than standard accessible toilets and have extra features such as a tracking hoist and space for two or more carers, and we are delivering these facilities right across the state.

Just last week I was pleased to open two new Changing Places. On Wednesday I was in Eltham with the member for Eltham from the other place and members of Nillumbik Shire Council to celebrate the Alistair Knox Park redevelopment, including the opening of the Changing Places facility. It is one of the prettiest Changing Places I have visited, and I was very pleased to meet Kylie and other artists from Araluen who painted a beautiful mural on the facility. It was fantastic to see the many accessible features within the park that were also made possible by our government through the 2022 universal design grants round. We provided \$233,431 for additional accessibility upgrades, including door widening, accessible pathways and outdoor areas.

On Thursday alongside the member for Bellarine from the other place, I opened the Changing Place at Ocean Grove main beach. It was wonderful to be down on the Bellarine and to hear from the members of the Barwon Coast Committee of Management and Jeremy from the Disabled Surfers Association about what this facility will mean for the community.

As these two examples show, these specially designed facilities allow individuals with high-support needs, their families and their carers to take part in all elements of community life. Here in Victoria we are leading the charge in making Australia a more accessible place for people with disability, with 170 of the 347 Changing Places nationally located in our state. I am proud of the fact that the Victorian government has provided \$11.4 million towards Changing Places since 2015 to build these facilities. This includes \$180,000 for the Alistair Knox facility and \$315,000 for the Ocean Grove Changing Place. A key commitment in *Inclusive Victoria* is to create more inclusive outdoor spaces so all Victorians can take part in nature and community life. Facilities like the new Changing Places in Eltham and Ocean Grove will help us to reach this goal, and we are proud of our continued commitment to the Changing Places initiative alongside our work in *Inclusive Victoria* to make Victoria more inclusive.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:24): (1001) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture. For months the local community in Mount Eliza has been begging authorities to intervene at a property where a former horse trainer is starving dozens of horses. A few weeks ago a colt was found dead with his ribs and organs exposed after months of neglect. Authorities have continued to state that our state's weak animal protection laws have made it difficult for them to act. The government committed to replacing these laws almost 10 years ago, but they have failed to introduce them into Parliament. This is despite the bill being written, and animals are literally dying as a result of it. Will the minister introduce the new Animal Care and Protection Bill into Parliament this year?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:24): I thank Ms Purcell for her question. This question will be relayed on to the Minister for Agriculture for a response.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:25): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Victoria has some of the lowest penalties in the nation for offences against animals. Not only are our outdated laws making it difficult for authorities to intervene, in instances where they do, offenders are merely receiving a slap on the wrist. Even under the government's draft new laws, for an offence to commit an act of cruelty the penalty is 250 penalty units or 12 months imprisonment. In comparison, Queensland's penalty is \$272,000 more for the same offence and Western Australia's penalty is five years imprisonment. Will the minister amend the draft bill before it is introduced to have penalties reflective of other states?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:25): Again I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question, and again, that will be passed on to the Minister for Agriculture for a response.

Energy policy

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:26): (1002) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. BIG4 Bendigo Marong Holiday Park was offered a \$5000 incentive just six years ago to convert to natural gas and connect all its holiday cabins to CNG, a project that is still in progress. They have spent \$150,000 on the conversion to date and now face tens of thousands of dollars of additional costs to convert back, due to the closure of the local CNG network. Operator of the network Solstice Energy had a 20-year contract with the state government. Why did the Labor government agree to break the contract 10 years early, leaving customers like BIG4 Bendigo in the lurch?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:26): I thank Mrs Broad for her question. The scenario that she has put forward is different, but the topic is exactly the same as yesterday. I think that impacted members were offered a briefing on Solstice and the decision to work with them to ensure that customers did not face a 50 per cent increase on their gas bills because of the challenges of supplying CNG to those towns by truck. I went through this at length yesterday. This is a decision that had to reverse basically a dud policy that was going to saddle these communities with unpayable bills because of how expensive the supply of gas by truck was going to be. We took our time to work out the best solution. We were at pains to work out the best solution, and the best solution was to cancel the dud National Party policy and replace it with the ability for the company to pay impacted customers cash for them to use it to transition, using either bottle gas or flipping to electricity. Commercial arrangements will have bespoke transition support, and if BIG4 are not already speaking to Solstice about this – and I would be surprised if they are not – through you, if you want to provide me with any information, if they are not connected already, we can make sure that that happens, because those arrangements are open for discussion between commercial entities and the company.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:28): Janelle and John Maynard run the Broken Willow restaurant in Nathalia. They have spent \$40,000 in the past year setting up their restaurant to use CNG, and with the closure of the network they now face a minimum \$20,000 bill to replace their appliances. Because their appliances are new, they will not be eligible for any government rebates to convert to electric, and their site has no room for LPG bottles. Given the shutdown of the CNG network is only occurring because the government has agreed to terminate a contract, will the government now ensure that John and Janelle and hundreds of others like them are not left out of pocket?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:29): Again, the issue that we have, Mrs Broad, is that this was effectively a dud program. It would have been a white elephant, and we have had to fix up the mess that we inherited. The cost to proceed with CNG –

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: You should be apologising to them, because you put them in this position. I have had to work to try and find the best solution for impacted communities.

Members interjecting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I cannot hear the minister and her answer because of the constant barrage and unruly interjections that are coming from the other side. I would ask that the minister be allowed to continue her answer in silence.

The PRESIDENT: I will uphold the point of order. I will bring the chamber to order.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think it would be timely to remind people of the quote from the Solstice CEO that I read in yesterday: this is not about gas networks, energy policy or the energy transition; it is about shutting down a very expensive network. Shutting it down is the best option.

I am certainly not saying that it is an ideal situation, but this is fixing a mess, and it is the best way forward. There is assistance available. I encourage BIG4 –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: We are trying to fix the problem. That is how long it took to try and work out whether we could come up with a solution to fix your problem. We are trying to fix a problem and trying to get the best outcome.

Ministers statements: Boollam Boollam Aged Care Centre

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:31): Last week I had the honour of officially marking the completion of the Boollam Boollam aged care facility at Monash Health's Kingston Centre in Heatherton, one of Victoria's largest public residential aged care services and a landmark achievement for the community. I was pleased to be joined by the local member for Clarinda Meng Heang Tak, whose advocacy for older Victorians in his community has been steadfast. His support for this project has been instrumental in seeing it come to life. This \$139.6 million investment, a four-storey facility, delivers 150 modern single rooms with private en suites designed with dementia-friendly and complex care needs in mind while preserving the warmth and familiarity of a home-like environment. It is absolutely stunning. The facility features cluster-style households, natural light-filled spaces, terraces, sensory gardens and shared kitchen, dining and lounge areas that support independence, promote mental wellbeing and enhance the quality of life for residents. Located at the Kingston Centre, Boollam Boollam provides seamless access to integrated healthcare services including dementia, memory, falls and mental health clinics, ensuring residents benefit from coordinated, high-quality care tailored to their needs. Delivered by the Victorian Health Building Authority in partnership with Monash Health and builder Icon, this project supported more than 240 construction jobs, boosting our local economy while also creating long-term opportunities in the aged care workforce.

‘Boollam Boollam’, a name gifted by the Bunurong Land Council meaning ‘butterflies’, symbolises transformation and the journey of life, which is very apt and captures the welcoming spirit of this facility. The Allan Labor government is committed to delivering investment in vibrant, person-centred public sector aged care. Boollam Boollam stands as a testament to our commitment to ensuring that older Victorians receive the quality care they deserve, close to home.

Disability services

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:33): (1003) My question is directed to the Minister for Disability. Responsibility for supported independent living residences, SILs, used to fall to the states. In 2014, ahead of the NDIS rollout, then opposition leader Daniel Andrews promised that SILs would not be privatised. Two years later SILs were transferred to five private companies. Workers in SILs have retained the proper staffing ratios and protected training and supervision time embedded in their EBA as the state government has provided subsidies to fund them – hugely beneficial to SIL residents but not covered in individual NDIS packages. The additional funding runs out in December, Minister, putting all of those benefits at risk on the eve of Christmas. As this funding runs out in less than five months, what is the government proposing to do to address this distressing problem?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and his interest in these matters, which we have discussed on a number of occasions. Obviously, in 2018 government-operated accommodation respite services were transferred to the non-government sector, and that was designed to deliver a successful transition to the NDIS in Victoria and provide for more choice and control over services and supports. I would note at the outset that the Victorian government’s contribution to the national disability insurance scheme is around \$3 billion. Five non-government providers were chosen, with commercial contracts put in place that end, as Mr Ettershank said, on 31 December 2025. They were non-government providers. This was not seeking to privatise but was seeking, in the context of the national disability insurance scheme and what that meant for supported independent living, to assist in the transition of government-supported workers to non-government providers. There were indeed transition arrangements put in place to ensure that staff were supported through this change.

A phased approach was taken, and this included wages and conditions being protected until the end of the contract period, including transferring of incentive payments, secondment to their new provider rather than an immediate change in their employer, an offer of employment and acceptance process at the end of 2020 and then direct employment with their new provider from 1 January 2021. The final step in the transfer was to move the supported independent living funding from in-kind arrangements to direct NDIS plan funding for residents between February and June 2021. This was an important element of the transition to the national disability insurance scheme.

I would also note that the government worked collaboratively with the union through this process and that prior to the 2018 state election decision to transfer government-operated services the government worked collaboratively with those relevant employee representatives. Consultation is guided by an MOU between the government and those representatives relating to matters regarding that transfer process.

We know that this sector faces workforce challenges, and the NDIS review recommends the need to attract and retain and indeed train in order to be able to have for that retention a workforce that is responsive to participant needs and participant requests for support in a timely way. We are continuing to work with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to ensure that the recommendations of the national disability insurance scheme are implemented. I would also note that the Victorian government invests in this workforce. We have got the \$202.9 million fighting for students with disability package, which was delivered through the 2023–24 budget, and that included \$3.75 million allocated over four years to deliver a disability workforce strategy.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:37): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I think we almost got to an answer there. Nationally, workforce turnover across the NDIS, particularly within supported independent living facilities, is atrocious, with one in four disability workers leaving the sector annually – three times higher than the overall Australian workforce. It impacts the quality of care in SILs, with dire consequences for residents, who are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Our Victorian SILs have the lowest workforce churn, as the EBA provides good wages and conditions and the capacity for career progression. It mandates staffing ratios and supervision. Victorian subsidies pay for this, as NDIS funding does not cover these benefits, nor will it. When the subsidy lapses there will be a mass exodus of disability support workers if this is not rectified. So I ask the minister: will she here and now publicly commit to maintaining this additional funding to protect disability workers entitlements and continue the delivery of quality care in SILs?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:38): I would refer Mr Ettershank back to my substantive answer to his substantive question, which did indeed answer his question and spoke to the fact that these were transition payments in the establishment of the national disability insurance scheme and the new measures around supported independent living, of which the state government is not a provider but did provide financial support for that transition period. SIL services are funded by the NDIS. Providers are regulated by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, and funding decisions such as SIL supports for NDIS participants are the responsibility of the NDIS. I would also note that the state government contributes \$3 billion to the NDIS for the NDIS to undertake its role.

I, along with my other state and territory colleagues, am constantly working with the Commonwealth to ensure that the implementation of the NDIS review and indeed other recommendations that also came out of the disability royal commission, insofar as they are relevant, is in the best interests of each of the states, given that we do contribute, and Victoria is one of the largest, contributing \$3 billion. But ultimately the matters that Mr Ettershank is referring to relate to SIL services funded by the national disability insurance scheme.

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): (1004) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to a brief on energy affordability and the cost of living signed by your predecessor Mr Pallas. The material put to Mr Pallas notes:

... most households are well-placed to absorb some energy bill increases in the short-term ...

And it states that:

... most Victorian households are well-placed to manage cost of living pressures ...

I ask therefore: do your briefings show that Victorians are well placed to manage energy cost increases, or is this a cruel lie?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:40): Mr Davis, you are quoting from a document that you have described as a document that was prepared for my predecessor. It makes it difficult when you are quoting from a document that you have not previously shown me. I think in answering your question I am not going to detail the briefs that come into my office. That would take a very long time. What I would say is that in relation to assisting households with their energy costs and their cost of living the government – this is a focus of ours. Cost-of-living support – whether it is helping eligible people reduce their power bills through the power saving bonus, and a round just opened recently, or discounts and rebates available for transitioning to electric products to reduce people’s household costs – is about recognising that there are families under pressure. There are a range of initiatives that we continually talk about and are very proud of on this side of the house, which I am sure you are well versed in, because we continually talk about them.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): It is a fact that the minister obviously does receive similar briefs, and she has not answered the question about whether they show a similar attitude. Treasurer, the brief continues:

Living cost increases have been hard to avoid, particularly with non-discretionary expenses such as rent, food and fuel growing faster than wages. Most Victorian households have enough income, savings and wealth to manage price rises without major sacrifices ...

Mr Pallas was told. I ask: is it your government's policy –

Members interjecting.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, given your rulings from earlier this day, could you please ask the backbench over there, who are squawking very loudly, to refrain, because I could not hear the question.

The PRESIDENT: Can I call the whole house to order, please. Getting back to when a minister provokes the other side, they should not be too sad about people reacting to that. I kind of feel that it is not a one-way street.

David DAVIS: To conclude:

Most Victorian households have enough income, savings and wealth to manage price rises without major sacrifices ...

Mr Pallas was told and that is signed. Treasurer, is it your government's policy that most Victorian households have enough income, savings and wealth to manage price rises without major sacrifices?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:43): I think that is certainly inviting me to talk about the \$100 round of the power saving bonus for eligible households with a concession card. Mr Davis, I think that would indicate that we are very, very conscious of the pressure that families are under. We know that energy costs can be a significant impact on cost-of-living challenges. It is why we have run four rounds of the power saving bonus, continuing with the one that we just opened in August.

Ministers statements: Regional Worker Accommodation Fund

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:44): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting projects that create more affordable housing and accommodation so employers can attract and retain workers in country areas. The Regional Worker Accommodation Fund is providing new housing and accommodation for regional communities where workers in key industries and their families are struggling to find suitable housing. More than 20 projects were funded through round 1 – thank you to the previous minister Ms Tierney – delivering around 1000 key worker bedrooms and almost \$250 million in new investment in housing accommodation.

Last week I had the privilege of announcing a further 23 recipients, which unlocks more than \$120 million in further investment in new worker housing, delivering around 750 bedrooms for workers. I was in Wangaratta, and I was on a former school site where Nestd Development are transforming the site into a healthcare worker accommodation hub. This will really go a long way towards helping Northeast Health attract more staff. The hub will feature 34 dwellings capable of housing more than 100 workers.

I also visited Mansfield last week, and I met Callum at Alzburg Resort. His family have been running the accommodation and ski hire business for decades and have spoken of the challenges in finding suitable accommodation for their workers. They received funding to support the construction of two units suitable for up to 12 workers. In Noorat, the old butter factory will be redeveloped into 13 new dwellings to support agricultural industry workers. Riviera Fresh in Lindenow – I think that is near Mr McIntosh – will construct accommodation for 18 workers. On Phillip Island, Moda will deliver

accommodation for more than 100 workers, supporting the healthcare, food, beverage, retail and tourism industries. On this side of the house we will continue to back programs like the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund, which ensure rural and regional communities have the skills, workforce and infrastructure they need so they can to continue to thrive.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:45): Minister Tierney will get answers for Ms Purcell from the Minister for Agriculture.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (1727) My question today is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the recent announcement of extended bus routes in the City of Casey and Shire of Cardinia, namely route 831 and route 928. I am sure Mr McGowan has a great interest in this as well. I am very much looking forward to you joining me on the buses out in the south-east and showing you all the wonderful places that we can connect to, including travelling on the newly built McKenna Drive bridge over the railway line in Beaconsfield, which replaced that level crossing. My question for the minister on behalf of my constituents is: how will the new extended services of both routes 831 and 928 support getting around the south-east more easily and efficiently?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:47): (1728) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the perilous state of the Western Highway. We are not talking about some goat track in the bush; we are talking about one of the most important pieces of infrastructure in the state, which runs right through my electorate. I have got to say it is in a very poor condition due to low state government funding. Roadworks are so badly needed. We are talking about potholes left, right and centre. It is like an obstacle course, trying to stop damage to your own vehicle, and some people have incurred thousands of dollars in damage. We are not talking just heavy vehicles; we are talking about cars, commuters and bike riders as well. It is not good. My question to the minister is: do you actually have a plan to fix this? Will you actually do something about it? Because it has been in a state like this for a long time. We see plenty of money being thrown around Melbourne, but a fraction of it is sent to country Victoria – a fraction. It is a total disgrace. The constituents I represent are not asking for anything outlandish; they just want to get home safely. It is not that big an ask. Why is country Victoria treated so badly by a Premier that is meant to be from there? She does not care.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv Puglielli (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1729) My question is to the Minister for Ageing. In my electorate there is a significant number of older people whose first language is Mandarin, Cantonese or other Chinese dialects, and as they reach a time of life where perhaps they find themselves in the situation where they require aged care services, it is really important that they have the option to access culturally appropriate aged care, with staff and services available in their first language. There are not currently, to my understanding, any state-run Chinese residential aged care services in Victoria. There are a few small non-government-operated centres, but that is it. In my electorate, as I am sure you are aware, we are talking about a significant diaspora community, a really, really vibrant and valued group of members of our community, who engage with me regularly, and they need access to this care. So, Minister, will you open a state-run residential aged care centre in my region that is specifically set up to care for our older Chinese community members?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1730) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. How is the Labor government upgrading health facilities for those who need health care in the Southern Metropolitan Region? Quality health care is fundamental for this Labor government, and we continue to invest in our hospitals. In the 2023 budget we put \$118 million into upgrades at the Alfred. Earlier this year we invested in new facilities at the Sandringham and Moorabbin hospitals, and now we are improving health care at Monash Health in Clayton, with new equipment that is going to help better diagnose conditions and support safer surgery for patients. Furthermore, the Alfred is going to benefit from upgraded neurological equipment, meaning treatment for conditions such as brain cancer, epilepsy – which is something very close to my heart – and trauma-related injuries will be much more sophisticated. We know there is only one side of this house that supports our hospitals, and Labor will continue to invest in our healthcare system.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1731) Just like my Labor colleague opposite I too am very concerned about transport, but in particular I am concerned about policing matters. This is for the Minister for Police. Recently I have taken to doing some spot checks because we do know with the state government: trust but verify. It is the old Reaganism – ‘trust but verify’. I have had to verify at a number of local train stations whether in fact there are PSOs. Well, to my horror time and again –

Members interjecting.

Nick McGOWAN: Well, there are no toilets. We know there are no toilets already because we have established that; you can spend all of \$3 billion and not actually have one single public toilet. But what we are discovering now at train stations right across the suburban network is there are actually no PSOs. Despite the previous government’s policy of putting PSOs there for the safety of every citizen, young and old, this government it appears is systematically removing PSOs from train stations. That is actually out of order.

David Davis interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It is incredibly dangerous – thank you, Mr Davis, for that. I would ask the Minister for Police to make sure that they actually reveal all of those suburbs and all of those stations that have absolutely no PSOs – *(Time expired)*

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1732) My question is to the Minister for Education. At the Monash Children’s Hospital School in my electorate – a government school servicing young people from across Victoria – staff who are also Australian Education Union members have contacted me to express deep concern about the government’s decision to delay delivery of Victoria’s full share of public school funding until 2031. The school’s AEU members say that this breaks a clear promise, cuts billions from education and undermines the learning opportunities of children in their care. They note that Victoria’s public schools remain the lowest funded in the country, and our teachers are the lowest paid. They believe that delivering 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard now is vital to address staffing shortages, improve pay and ensure all students receive the support they need. Minister, when will the government reverse its disastrous decision to delay this funding and deliver full and fair funding for Victoria’s public schools?

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:53): (1733) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Minister, what support can drought-affected farmers in Eastern Victoria access as part of the government’s drought support package to assist them through this exceptionally dry period? Last week I visited the Benambra region with East Gippsland shire and Agriculture Victoria. We

visited a number of farms. We met in sheds and around kitchen tables and discussed the issues affecting those farmers on their farms. We also went to the rec reserve. We met with over 30 farmers. We sat down and talked about the issues affecting those farmers, whether it is productivity on the farms, the input costs – a variety of things that are impacting them – and what as a government we can do to assist them. We heard how farmers have had failed crops, they have had to destock and they have got high costs on feed and their concerns about what rains will come in future seasons.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): (1734) My question is for the Minister for Children. Within the last week I was contacted by parents in Wonthaggi regarding the processes for, and the reliability and safety of, children in childcare. When serious allegations are made against a childcare worker, determining their credibility quickly is crucial. Without this, educators under investigation can move between different centres while allegations are being resolved. In a recent case one such worker was able to work at four different centres while allegations were unresolved, and they said this:

If something goes wrong from today onwards, you can't chase me. So if I post those photos, and something goes wrong now, you can't blame me, because I am terminated.

Disgusting. Will the minister explain what steps the government will take to ensure credible allegations are identified rapidly, without months- or years-long delays, which are typical for a lot of abusers, and then also tell us how they will inform parents and childcare centres involved without risking further crimes being committed?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (1735) My question is for the Minister for Health. Gateway Health in Wodonga recently announced that it would be unable to continue funding the CP@clinic community paramedic program. Delivered by two local paramedics since April 2024, the program has assessed more than 1000 people in communities across the north-east region, from Chiltern to Corryong. The clinic was able to identify vulnerable members of the community and manage their health issues to keep them out of hospital by reconnecting them with local GPs and health services. Since the program launched there has been a major decline in ambulance call-outs and emergency department attendance. It is estimated that the program requires around \$150,000 to run, but we know that investing in preventative healthcare programs like this one ultimately saves money. Will the government intervene to ensure funding for this immensely successful community healthcare initiative in my electorate?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1736) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Education. We know that this government is committed to ensuring every student in Victoria has access to a safe, modern and world-class learning environment, because when we invest in education we absolutely invest in our future. Just last week the minister and I had the pleasure of visiting Brunswick North Primary School in my electorate to officially open the newly redeveloped school quadrangle, made possible thanks to our government's Capital Works Fund. This upgrade saw the quadrangle receive new landscaping and shade, transforming the space into a vibrant, welcoming and inclusive area for students to connect and that their school community can be truly proud of. So my question today is: how is the Allan Labor government helping to deliver modern and safe spaces for students in the Northern Metropolitan Region?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:57): (1737) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. A constituent has raised with me that two units in a public housing block in Geelong West have sat vacant now for many months. One is boarded up with no sign of repairs, and it is alleged the department even evicted the squatters from it. Minister, these are public assets, and we face a

housing crisis, with soaring public housing waiting lists and thousands of Victorians in urgent need. If Labor cannot build enough homes, the least they should do is manage the existing ones properly. So, Minister, how many public housing properties in my electorate of Western Victoria Region are currently vacant, how many of them are boarded up, what is the average length of vacancy between tenancies and when will these two units in 1A Lawton Avenue be returned to full occupancy?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1738) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. The Shopping on Clyde precinct in Cranbourne has always experienced parking shortages since its initial construction in 2015. When the parking lots on either side of Morison Boulevard reach capacity, parking spills out into adjacent dense residential streets, reducing visibility of pedestrians and limiting space for cars to manoeuvre and park. Construction is currently underway at Shopping on Clyde to expand the number of shops at the site. A significant amount of parking has been blocked off to facilitate construction during this time, causing headaches and safety concerns for locals and backlogging traffic into the middle of the Berwick-Cranbourne Road intersection. What is more concerning is the lack of additional parking planned for the precinct once the expansion is complete. Given the number of pedestrians in the area from nearby residents, aged care facilities and the Blue Hills retirement village, what measures are being taken by the government to ensure current and future traffic flow in the area does not compromise the safety of local residents and precinct workers?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (1739) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Planning. Blackburn is renowned as a neighbourhood of local character, great tree canopy and some beautiful areas – a very balanced community. The community are rightly concerned about the announcement of an activity centre. They have looked at the activity centre template on the government website, and they understand that there will be a high-rise near the station and other high-rises. But they are concerned to know exactly how high. They want to know exactly where. They want to know when the consultation will begin. So I would ask the minister: can you please explain to my community when the consultation will begin and what advance materials they will be provided so they know actually what they are being consulted on?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1740) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. My constituent is a resident of Chelsea and leads the Fix Dandy Buses community campaign. He recently welcomed advocacy from Kingston council to improve bus services in the south-east. Kingston is advocating for upgrades to routes 828 and 708, which only run once an hour on weekends. The frequency of the popular 903 route will also increase to reduce crowding. This campaign aims to address a longstanding issue for commuters across the south-east. With no funding allocation in this year's budget, suburbs in my electorate remain underserved. My constituent asks: will the minister address community concerns and respond to Kingston council's Better Buses campaign?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (1741) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, when will you put more carriages on the Seymour line train services so that my constituents can travel safely and with dignity? A constituent has reported that on a recent 4:36 pm service to Seymour on a Sunday afternoon only two sprinter carriages were running, leading to serious overcrowding. Many commuters were trying to get home at the end of the weekend, and at least 20 people in each carriage had to stand or sit on the floor for a 1½-hour journey into the country. It is simply unacceptable that while the Allan Labor government spends tens of billions of dollars on metropolitan train tunnels, it refuses to put extra carriages on regional train

services so that people can sit down on long journeys. Commuters are outraged by the Labor government's appalling neglect of the Seymour line services. The minister must immediately put more carriages on Seymour line trains.

Sitting suspended 1:02 pm until 2:06 pm.

Motions

Energy policy

Debate resumed.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:06): As I was saying, shiny slogans like 'Net zero by 2045' and '95 per cent renewables by 2035' make great media releases. They keep Labor's political partners happy, but they do not keep the lights on and they do not pay the bills for the farmers across my electorate or help manufacturers in Geelong trying to keep the doors open, staff employed and families housed and fed. And yet this is what governments, state and federal, are doing in persisting with current energy policy. Yes, reductions in carbon emissions to date may have been significant, but the truth is the first cuts are the low-hanging fruit; they were the easiest to make. As we move closer to so-called net zero, every further reduction becomes technically harder and exponentially more expensive. Achieving net zero as an absolute inflexible target is not a pragmatic environmental strategy, it is an ideological, extremist and damaging position. A practical approach could deliver substantial emissions reductions at a fraction of the financial and environmental costs that a renewable-only solution will inflict, but that requires an energy-agnostic policy, one that assesses every technology on its merits, not through an ideological filter. Instead Labor's rush to renewables has been done without any real plan for the infrastructure to support them.

We have seen it most clearly with transmission. I have spoken many times in this place about the reality of the massive transmission system required to connect distant wind and solar farms to the grid. Projects like VNI West have doubled in cost, now at \$7.6 billion and projected to increase to \$11 billion, carving through farmland and driving up expenses that land directly on the bills of Victorian families and businesses. And it is not just VNI West or the Western Renewables Link – the new Victorian transmission plan outlines four new high-voltage lines, each costing billions. Yet the government consistently understates the total cost, conveniently ignoring the broader fallout: the devaluation of productive farmland, the environmental damage of hundreds of kilometres of new easements and the loss of regional amenity. Worse, and with predictable dishonesty – or should I say ideological fervour, the absolute belief that the end justifies the means – they separate the analysis of generation from transmission in order to hide the true price tag. They will talk about the cost of building the wind farm but they will not include the cost of the transmission lines needed to connect it, and they certainly will not count the enormous social, environmental and health impacts those lines have on regional Vic communities.

One particularly offensive aspect is the land tax imposed on these transmission easements, a tax that is then passed straight through to every Victorian power bill. This year alone the state will collect a record \$268 million in land tax on network assets. For AusNet Services alone the regulator has approved a \$61 million pass-through for 2025–26 just for easement taxes. In one stroke of a pen that is over \$70 a year on the average household bill, and it is going up. The government is financing consolidated revenue directly out of the pockets of Victorian energy bill payers but making the power companies send out the bills. It is a bit like forcing councils to wear the political pain of sending out demands for the new emergency services levy, which is a tax. This is a government without accountability, which takes no responsibility, frankly, and which has no shame. This easement land tax is not a tax on the power companies; it is a tax on every Victorian energy user hidden in their bill, and it is a tax that is being levied to fund a questionable build out of transmission lines driven by an ideological energy plan that has failed to consider more affordable and less disruptive alternatives.

Farmers are rightly furious. These easements are often imposed without proper consent, reducing the value of their land, restricting how they can operate and impacting their livelihoods, but in the Labor Party's political calculus regional Victorians do not count. The only votes that matter are in the inner suburbs, inside the tram tracks, where residents will never have a tower in their paddock, will never lose a hectare of productive land and will happily post hashtags about climate action. This government's obsession with chasing Greens preferences inside the tram tracks has left suburban Melbourne as well as regional Victoria to pay the price, literally and figuratively, for a power system that does not work.

And let us not forget the direct cost to business and industry. I have spoken in this chamber about the disastrous impact of these policies on manufacturing in Victoria. We have seen gas consumption in industry drop, not because businesses have magically become more efficient but because they have shut down entirely. Gas-reliant manufacturers simply cannot compete under Labor's anti-gas, high-cost regime. The closures are real, the job losses are real, and they are directly linked to the skyrocketing cost of energy in this state. Under some plans prices are up by 16 per cent. The Victorian default offer is up again this year – 1 per cent for households, 3 per cent for businesses. But many market – *(Time expired)*

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:13): Well, it is really hard to know where to start in response to this motion. What brings to mind –

David Davis interjected.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I am so glad you are here, Mr Davis, because really, reading the motion and then listening to the speakers – particularly you, Mr Davis – makes me think that the theory from the opposition is: if I just keep saying it, it might become true. It is just so not true about energy pricing – absolutely not true – and it is a bit rich that the party that caused the massive energy price rises by selling off the SEC to the private sector is now abrogating culpability for it. Victorian energy consumers absolutely know the relationship between privatised energy production and energy price increases. As I said, I think if they say something often enough they might convince themselves that it is true. But the independent data does not agree with that proposition at all.

We know that the Kennett government privatised energy and sold it off to multinational companies, but there was also another four-year period where a further stuff-up was achieved, and I was fascinated that you raised it in this chamber yesterday. That was trying to blame our government for the mess created by the privatised fake gas scheme, where the prices were going to go so much higher because of the failed private sector model that you put in place when you were last in government – that small four-year window where you got to meddle with what was going on and really things did not work very well – when it was the coalition government that brought in the private company Solstice Energy under its regional gas infrastructure program. It was not purchased, it was brought in. It is worth noting that just last week, on 7 August in the *Standard*, it was reported that from the closure of the program:

... customers would ultimately be better off with lower energy bills.

A Solstice Energy spokesperson said costs had increased over the past few years, which the company had been absorbing, but that was no longer viable.

So there we have it: the opposition blaming us for their own failed program. Solstice have said themselves that if the program did not close prices would have skyrocketed beyond the current levels.

I am not sure if Mr Davis realises that Victorian Labor has a proven record on cheaper household energy bills. You just cannot keep saying that is not true. The Liberals –

Members interjecting.

Gayle Tierney: On a point of order, Acting President, I request that you call the house to order. There have just been incessant interjections, and now we are having adjectives used against a member which I find offensive.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Ms Ermacora, do you request a withdrawal?

Jacinta ERMACORA: I do request a withdrawal.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Mr Davis, will you withdraw?

David Davis: I do withdraw the word 'goose'.

Lee Tarlamis: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis knows that it is unparliamentary to withdraw by restating what he has been asked to withdraw. He should withdraw without reservation.

David Davis: I withdraw.

Jacinta ERMACORA: The Liberals have a proven record of driving prices up when it comes to energy, and the truth is that when the Liberals were last in government retail power prices soared by 34 per cent. Disconnections, as my colleague Mr McIntosh said, doubled from 28,000 to 58,000, leaving vulnerable Victorians without power or heat. Since the Liberals privatised our energy system Victorians have been exposed to a model designed to protect corporate profits, not people. Jeff Kennett's government sold our energy assets to multinational corporations. This delivered billions in profit for them and thousands of job losses. In the process they stripped the government of the tools needed to keep power affordable.

It is a bit rich Mr Davis is today complaining about energy costs when Labor has been working step by step, year by year, to fix the system we inherited from their sellout. We have tackled rising costs head-on. We have strengthened consumer protections. We have invested in public renewable energy to put power back in the hands of the public. We introduced the Victorian default offer, cutting standard prices by 24 per cent in its first year. This has kept bills nearly 10 per cent lower than they were in 2019. We have made Victoria's energy consumer protections the toughest in the country, and this has stopped unfair disconnections and price gouging in embedded networks. We have rolled out Solar Homes and Victorian energy upgrades to help millions of households save hundreds on their bills, and we have revived the State Electricity Commission, with \$1 billion in public renewable projects to deliver the cheapest new power available – renewable power.

This is an incredibly important milestone with so many positive outcomes. In May Premier Jacinta Allan and Minister for the State Electricity Commission Lily D'Ambrosio announced the signing of retail contracts to power all Victorian government operations with cheap renewable electricity. This means that from July this year the State Electricity Commission is powering Victoria's schools, museums, trains, trams, traffic lights and more with clean, reliable publicly owned renewable energy. It is the first time that the SEC has been delivering power to Victorians since it was sold off by the Liberals 30 years ago. I certainly hope that we never have to go backwards again, back to the way things were last century, because if the Liberals had their way, they would scrap most if not all of these programs; they have told us this repeatedly. Minister Lily D'Ambrosio warned on 27 May this year that if Brad Battin and the Liberals are elected they will cut the SEC, just like how they sold off Victoria's energy and sent profits offshore in the 1990s.

Instead the Allan Labor government continues to focus on our future. Our investments are creating new energy jobs, and we are supporting renewable energy skills. The Allan Labor government has made a \$116 million investment in six new tech schools across the state, including in Warrnambool, and also invested \$10 million to establish the Clean Energy Equipment Fund for new and existing tech schools. Our TAFEs are busy training up the newest generations of tradies in renewable energy construction skills thanks to our Minister for Skills and TAFE here in the chamber right now. This government also invested \$5 million at Warrnambool's Sherwood Park campus for exactly that task, and its funding towards jobs, which include green plumbing, solar battery electrical systems, sustainable integrated building designs and new construction technologies, is underway. I am very proud of our response in this space and our systematic transition, and I do not think anybody should believe a word the opposition is saying in this space.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:22): I rise to speak on this very important motion put forward by Mr Davis, and I thank him for bringing forward this motion, as it will give me the opportunity to put on record my disappointment and concern that after 11 years of the Andrew and now Allan Labor government energy bills continue to rise for Victorian families, especially those in the Western Metropolitan Region, my area, where a good mixture of multicultural, diverse, socially disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, through no fault of their own, continue to suffer.

Those opposite keep blaming history for their failure. They keep blaming the coalition of 20, 30 years ago for their failure, but they have been in government for 11 years and they have not fixed the problem. Those opposite have been 11 years in government, and next year at the election Labor will ask Victorians to give them 16 years in power. After 11 years Labor have delivered higher taxes, whacking Victorians with 63 new or increased taxes since coming into office, racking up an enormous \$194 billion in debt. \$194 billion – let me put in perspective what that is: 1000 million is 1 billion. The West Gate Bridge only cost \$200 million to build. How many West Gate Bridges could we build with \$194 billion? How many Eiffel Towers could be built with \$194 billion? How many hospitals, how many police stations, how many social housing buildings could we build with \$194 billion?

Energy bills keep soaring due to waste and the mismanagement of projects the government is directly responsible for. Imagine the damage there will be after another four years after 2026. And throughout all this, why are energy bills soaring so incredibly high under the watch of the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister D'Ambrosio? Since she came into office in 2014 we have witnessed a significant rise in energy infrastructure cost blowouts. Please take note: these cost blowouts are identified by the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO. It identified that rising infrastructure and energy delivery costs are hurting customers in the market. Victorian households, families and businesses are hurting as the price of energy continues to go up, up and up under the Allan Labor government. AEMO has found transmission costs have risen, particularly for overhead lines, and that these increases in costs for electricity transmission network development significantly impact bills of consumers. It is a no-brainer: if it is going to cost energy companies more due to tax and operation, it will flow down to our consumers, at a time when people can least afford it, during a cost-of-living crisis under the Allan Labor government. Moreover, the government has increased land tax for private, business and commercial property, which includes electricity transmission easements. This easement land tax will ultimately pass on to consumers as electricity providers attempt to recover their increasing operation costs. So this government, with its massive and continued blowouts on almost every project it touches, contributes to the cost-of-living crisis, and households and businesses are paying the price.

You need to look no further than the massive blowout on the VNI West project, the electricity transmission project connecting western Victoria and New South Wales. The figures on this project are startling. No wonder energy prices keep going up, up and up. Estimated costs for this project are anywhere from \$5.2 billion and could double to as much as \$11.4 billion. This is a good example of the cost escalation under Labor. Every cent of this cost escalation will be shouldered by our consumers, our Victorian families, our Victorian businesses, the normal mums and dads, and the massive cost of project blowouts will eventually contribute to rising energy costs under this Labor government. They can blame us as much as they want. They go back 20, 30 years to blame us for their failure right now. The fact is they have been in government for the last 11 years. What have they done?

Every billing month constituents come and speak to me, saying that compared with last year, the year before and the year before, their costs are going steadily up, up and up. The cost increases can be directly attributed to construction delays, labour costs and of course landholder compensation and easement costs, which under this government have been increasing over the years. It seems that cost blowouts are in the Allan Labor government's DNA. The problem is not that the government is seeking to build new infrastructure; the problem is the government is consistently accepting cost blowout after cost blowout as a new norm. And who is paying for it? You, the mum and dad, every Victorian who is trying to earn a living and look after their family.

I can recall when the former Premier Daniel Andrews arrogantly boasted in the other place in response to a question about costs. He said, 'Things just cost what they cost.' Well, it looks like Minister D'Ambrosio seems to have taken a leaf out of the former Premier's book and wilfully accepts the price escalation, dismissing criticism from the community and AEMO. The minister claimed that in spite of the inflated price tag, the government intends to proceed with the project and hold the agent of the project accountable. The other question is: when will this government become accountable? When will this government accept responsibility for the cost blowouts and the price of energy going out of control under their watch, under their management?

I think this motion by Mr Davis is important, because we are holding the Minister for Energy and Resources responsible for those increased energy costs and not allowing her to once again pass the buck, as this government continues to do. She needs to be accountable for the pressure Victorian families and small businesses are enduring right now. She is the Minister for Energy and Resources and holds the ultimate decision. Whether it is electricity infrastructure or transport infrastructure, under the Allan Labor government costs blow out the budget each time, costing Victorian taxpayers more at a time when they simply cannot afford it.

It is not just soaring electricity prices Victorians are suffering from. Under this Labor government we also see a less secure power grid. Labor is running a chaotic and mismanaged energy transition. It takes the shadow minister Mr Davis and his FOIs to reveal just how out of touch this government is, laying bare that its much-hyped 2025 VicGrid transmission plan is nothing but a laughing stock. The documents have shown the government's plan shows significant delays to infrastructure projects like the VNI West and other critical infrastructure that we are facing and that there are no serious plans to bring down the rising costs for Victorians. We know because supply and usage charges increased further from 1 August 2025 for both electricity and gas.

We on this side of the house have always opposed the Labor government's reckless ideological war on how Victorians cook, heat their homes and manage their energy bills. We oppose Labor's rebate for replacing old gas appliances because we believe in choice in the energy system and that Victorians will make the right choice for their own homes. Labor's plan is unfair and is not based on choice; it is based on ideology and government imposition. Unlike those opposite, we on this side always back the right to choose. Whether you cook with gas or you choose the energy to suit your home, it is your budget at the end of the line and your way of life. We understand the pressures that rising bills are having on families. In the last minute I want to say to all the constituents in my electorate: on this side we will continue fighting to make sure energy prices go down. We will make sure that governments account for what they are doing as the bills go up and up and up again.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:32): This is an important motion because it goes to a key factor in the cost-of-living crisis in Victoria. Victorians are paying more on every turn, and their standard of living is falling. Income per household and income per head in our state are falling. That is the record of the Andrews and Allan Labor governments over almost 11 years in government now. But costs are rising, and costs have been rising faster than the household income of so many Victorians. Victorians are being squeezed, and a big part of that squeeze is energy costs. Electricity costs have gone up, gas costs have gone up and people's bills have gone up, and on 1 August most of the companies in this state put up the costs further. They put up the costs of the supply charge and they put up the charge that is paid for electricity by volume and gas by volume, so almost everyone in this state will feel those increased costs.

It is true you can shop around and you may trim a bit off the bill, but it is also true that through almost every outlet, almost every firm that is supplying this energy, the costs have gone up. Lily D'Ambrosio has tried to say costs will go down, down, down, and that is what she said in the lower house just a year or two ago – costs will go down, down. She was aping the ad, the Coles ad, but actually that is not what has happened in Victoria since then. Costs have gone up, up and beyond – further up. The sad thing is that this is squeezing Victorian families and it is squeezing Victorian businesses, and it is important that the chamber makes this very clear.

People have got a lot of views on how to fix it and a lot of views on how this has come about, but the essential facts are that energy costs have gone up. We have heard somebody try to blame the Kennett government back from 1992, noting that privatisation actually began under the Cain–Kirner government in 1991 with the sale of Mission Energy – so let us just get that very clear in people’s heads. Through the latter period of the 1990s and the 2000s, under John Brumby and under Steve Bracks, actually energy costs were very low – historically low – and low compared to other jurisdictions, and they were a major part of Victoria’s revival through that late 1990s period and indeed beyond. But under this government – 11 years of government – the standard of living of Victorians has fallen, the cost-of-living crisis has deepened and this government has allowed energy costs to surge upwards. The surging upwards is going to get worse the way we are going under this government. The government has loaded more and more and more onto the supply charge that is being paid by everyday Victorians.

Victorians can feel the pressure. The screws have been turned on Victorians by the Allan Labor government, and they have been tightened and tightened and tightened again. It is time we stood up to the Allan Labor government, it is time we stood up to the Minister for Energy and Resources and it is time that Victorians were able to call out this government’s failure on energy policy and the prices they are paying for energy.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (20): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Production of documents

Production of documents

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): I will not say I am pleased, but it is my melancholy duty to rise and move motion 1028. I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the failure of the Leader of the Government to comply with 38 resolutions of the Council requiring the tabling of specified documents in the Legislative Council by particular dates;
- (2) further notes that in:
 - (a) 21 cases no documents have been provided and no adequate excuse has been offered;
 - (b) 17 cases some documents have been provided but executive privilege has been claimed, and the government has failed to adhere to standing order 10.03 that allows for the adjudication by an independent arbiter to occur;
- (3) further notes documents have not been provided and no adequate excuse offered for the following orders:
 - (a) Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, on the motion of Dr Mansfield on 22 March 2023 for which documents were due on 12 April 2023;
 - (b) Albury Wodonga Health, on the motion of Ms Lovell on 6 March 2024 for which documents were due on 27 March 2024;
 - (c) Victoria’s bus network plan review, on the motion of Mr Luu on 6 March 2024 for which documents were due on 27 March 2024;

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- (d) transition out of commercial native forest logging, on the motion of Dr Mansfield on 31 July 2024 for which documents were due on 21 August 2024;
 - (e) municipal population targets and activity centres, on the motion of Mr Davis on 16 October 2024 for which documents were due on 6 November 2024;
 - (f) road and rail bridge infrastructure, on the motion of Mrs Deeming on 30 October 2024 for which documents were due on 27 November 2024;
 - (g) unprotection of dingoes order in Council, on the motion of Ms Purcell on 13 November 2024 for which documents were due on 22 January 2025;
 - (h) land use in the Grampians and Arapiles region, on the motion of Mr Limbrick on 27 November 2024 for which documents were due on 20 January 2025;
 - (i) *Plan Melbourne*, on the motion of Mr Mulholland on 19 February 2025 for which documents were due on 12 March 2025;
 - (j) native bird hunting 2025 season, on the motion of Ms Purcell on 5 March 2025 for which documents were due on 2 April 2025;
 - (k) amendments to the Victoria Planning Provisions, on the motion of Mr Davis on 5 March 2025 for which documents were due on 26 March 2025;
 - (l) Suburban Rail Loop Authority, on the motion of Mr Mulholland on 19 March 2025 for which documents were due on 9 April 2025;
 - (m) water grid plan, on the motion of Dr Mansfield on 19 March 2025 for which documents were due on 9 April 2025;
 - (n) 2022 rollout of HEPA purifiers in government schools, on the motion of Mr Limbrick on 2 April 2025 for which documents were due on 30 June 2025;
 - (o) energy documents, on the motion of Mr Davis on 2 April 2025 for which documents were due on 23 April 2025;
 - (p) briefings provided to the Treasurer, on the motion of Mr Davis on 14 May 2025 for which documents were due on 4 June 2025;
 - (q) Upfield, Somerton and Wallan service enhancement planning feasibility study, on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio on 14 May 2025 for which documents were due on 4 June 2025;
 - (r) Great Outdoors Taskforce, on the motion of Ms Purcell on 28 May 2025 for which documents were due on 9 July 2025;
 - (s) payroll tax for general practitioners and other health professionals, on the motion of Mr Davis on 28 May 2025 for which documents were due on 18 June 2025;
 - (t) planning scheme amendments, on the motion of Mr Davis on 18 June 2025 for which documents were due on 9 July 2025;
 - (u) early childhood education, on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio on 18 June 2025 for which documents were due on 18 July 2025;
- (4) further notes that documents have been identified, but have not been provided or have been partially provided with executive privilege claimed over certain documents that have been withheld, although the government has failed to comply with standing order 10.03 for the following orders:
- (a) staff shortages in the public health system, on the motion of Ms Crozier on 8 February 2023, for which 11 documents were identified and only two documents in full and one in part were provided;
 - (b) Assistant Treasurer briefs on the banking and financial service contracts, on the motion of Ms Crozier on 8 March 2023, for which eight documents were identified and three documents in full and five documents in part were provided;
 - (c) seasonal changes to the 2023 duck hunting season, on the motion of Mr Bourman on 3 May 2023, for which 65 documents were identified and 54 documents in full and seven documents in part were provided;
 - (d) gas and electricity supplies, on the motion of Mr Davis on 15 November 2023, where 21 documents were identified and 12 documents provided;
 - (e) redevelopment of high-rise public housing sites, on the motion of Dr Ratnam on 15 November 2023, for which 158 documents were identified and only 12 documents were provided;

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- (f) kangaroo harvest management plan, on the motion of Ms Purcell on 29 November 2023, for which 254 were identified and 227 documents in full and three documents in part were provided;
- (g) Commonwealth infrastructure review, on the motion of Mr Davis on 29 November 2023, for which 36 documents were identified and 11 documents in full and three documents in part were provided;
- (h) Port of Hastings' application for offshore wind turbine facilities, on the motion of Mr Davis on 7 February 2024, for which 37 documents were identified and 23 documents in full and two documents in part were provided;
- (i) Better Regulation Victoria's review of Victoria's approach to illicit tobacco regulation, on the motion of Mr Limbrick on 7 February 2024, for which 139 documents were identified and 130 documents in full and one document in part were provided;
- (j) medically supervised injecting room in Melbourne's CBD, on the motion of Mr Ettershank on 21 February 2024, for which 18 documents were identified and four documents in full and three documents in part were provided;
- (k) recreational native bird hunting arrangements, on the motion of Ms Purcell on 20 March 2024, for which 36 documents were identified and 21 documents were provided;
- (l) 2026 Commonwealth Games bid, on the motion of Mr Limbrick on 1 May 2024, where 353 documents were identified and the government claimed executive privilege over 350 documents in full and three documents in part but failed to provide the three documents in part;
- (m) ministerial advisory committee on infrastructure contributions, on the motion of Mr Davis on 15 May 2024, for which 11 documents were identified and nine documents were provided in full;
- (n) government agreements with Elbit Systems and the Israeli Ministry of Defense, on the motion of Dr Mansfield on 15 May 2024, for which only one document in part was provided out of the three documents identified;
- (o) amalgamations of Victoria's health services, on the motion of Ms Crozier on 29 May 2024, for which 26 documents were identified and one document in full and one document in part were provided;
- (p) funding Victoria's health services, on the motion of Ms Crozier on 14 August 2024, for which production was due on 28 August 2024 and 83 documents were identified but none were provided;
- (q) review of the Wildlife Act 1975, on the motion of Dr Mansfield on 5 March 2025, for which production was due on 2 April 2025 and two documents were identified but none were provided;
- (5) affirms the privileges, immunities and powers conferred on the Council pursuant to section 19 of the Constitution Act 1975, and the power to make standing orders under section 43 of that act;
- (6) affirms the right of the Council to require the production of documents;
- (7) requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, by 12:00 noon on 26 August 2025, the documents ordered by the Council in the motions identified in paragraphs (3)(a) to (u);
- (8) demands the Leader of the Government provide to the Clerk, by 12:00 noon on 26 August 2025, all documents for which executive privilege has been claimed so that these can be assessed according to standing orders and any involvement of an independent legal arbiter, to be appointed by the President, can be determined; and
- (9) permits that if the Leader of the Government has not complied with standing orders 10.01 to 10.03 in relation to all the documents listed in paragraphs (3) and (4) within the timeframe specified in paragraphs (7) and (8), the Council will, at the conclusion of formal business on Tuesday 26 August 2025 (or if formal business does not occur that day, at the conclusion of formal business on the next sitting day) give precedence for a non-government member to move, without leave, 'That this house suspends the Leader of the Government from the service of the Council for the remainder of today and for the next two subsequent sitting days'.

The motion notes that in 21 cases no documents have been provided and with no legitimate or even reasonable excuse, and in 17 cases some documents have been provided but executive privilege has been claimed and the government has failed to adhere to standing order 10.03, which allows for adjudication by an independent arbiter. That is modelled on New South Wales, as we know, where independent arbiters are routinely used. Retired Supreme Court judges, they are persons of eminence – persons who are trusted to independently and quietly, behind closed doors, look at the documents and

make a fair and reasonable decision. The New South Wales Labor government and, prior to it, the New South Wales Liberal government were prepared to work with the chamber and the presence of arbiters, but this government refuses to allow the appointment of an arbiter to look at these documents. I think we should go ahead and appoint an arbiter on a speccy rate so that they would be there as required at relatively short notice. That would lower again the excuse that the government might have.

These documents are in two large tranches, and I am not going to detail them all because it is obviously a huge task. Paragraphs (3) and (4) in the motion, on pages 3 and 4 of the notice paper, lay out in great detail the dates, the source of the motion and the numbers of documents. The motion then moves on to affirm the right of the Council to require the production of documents, and that is a right that derives from 1856. The House of Commons presented to the chamber the powers of the House of Commons, in 1856, to call for people and documents, and the Bret Walker legal opinion backs that up, as does the Sydney Water case that went to the High Court from the New South Wales Legislative Council. The powers are there.

The motion requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council by 12 noon on 26 August 2025 the documents ordered by the Council as identified in those various paragraphs. I am going to presage that Ms Lovell will move an amendment to make a later date for the provision. Some have said to us that the date is too soon, and we have listened to that. That is a fair point. We understand that the government ought to have provided those documents as time went by, one by one, item by item, but they have not.

Sonja Terpstra: Because we can't.

David DAVIS: Of course you can.

Sonja Terpstra: Says you. How many documents motions did you actually acquit?

David DAVIS: Many.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: We did. All bar one actually were acquitted properly – all of them. They were. By the way, there was no sessional or standing order of this nature at the time. I was here; I know. I went through, and I was assiduous about it. In cases where we could not provide something for a very good reason, we actually communicated that to the chamber in thoughtful letters. You can go back and read them if you wish. But in this case the date can legitimately be adjusted, and we have no quibble about those points.

We are also aware that the issue of executive privilege has got to be dealt with at some point here, and I note the government has decided to move tomorrow a motion to ask the Procedure Committee to look at some of these matters. What they have not got on that list is the issue about the arbiter, and I will indicate that we intend to seek to amend the government's points on those matters to add a number of additional items. We think that if we are looking at documents motions, we should look at it more comprehensively. I am not opposed to some of the points that the government is proposing. If the government believes that it is impossible to satisfy one particular motion, sure – communicate that back to the chamber and engage in dialogue. I am completely open on that. But in some cases, with some of these documents, it has taken years, and it might be one or two documents. Even with the most recent ones that were provided to the chamber on my motion in February 2024, the documents on Hastings and the wind facilities down there, it took until just very recently for those documents to come through, and none of those documents that I could see ought to have been cabinet in confidence. Some have been claimed –

Sonja Terpstra: Based on what expertise that you have? None.

David DAVIS: I have been a minister. I have actually been on the exact committee that looks at these things inside government. I was on the Parliament and legislative committee of the government between 2010 and 2014 that looked at exactly these points.

Sonja Terpstra: Things have changed since then.

David DAVIS: Well, there is a new standing order, for example, and the lack of transparency is extraordinary. However, I am trying to be deeply reasonable here to say we will support the referral tomorrow. We are going to seek to modify that and add one or two items. That is entirely reasonable in my humble view.

In terms of the eighth point in our motion here, this sets up an arrangement whereby the deadline is there. If the government has not provided the documents by a deadline, it will trigger a debate. We think that is important, so we will keep that in there. The question is: what should the words in the debate be? We are again open to discussion on that point. So we will adjourn this motion after about an hour's debate, and we will have further discussion.

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: We are actually quite serious. Perhaps with Dr Mansfield's say-so I might just put on the record one suggestion, which I think is a reasonable suggestion that has been made by some, that we could look at an alternate rather than throwing the Leader of the Government out for a day or two or three. We could look at some alternate mechanisms limiting some of the actions of the minister in the chamber until the documents are provided. We are open to that discussion, and we will have that further discussion in the coming days. So we will adjourn this when there has been sufficient debate.

Sonja Terpstra: Is that a bit of a late development there, Mr Davis?

David DAVIS: Well, no, we are actually listening to people. I do not understand why you think that is a problem.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: Well, I think that actually it has moved the Leader of the Government forward on some of these matters. The government has decided that they will have a discussion on this, and we have always been prepared to have a discussion. So what I would say here is I am going to pick a couple of examples.

Members interjecting.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, members on the back bench are very exercised over there. They are just really, you know, cracking on.

David Davis interjected.

Georgie Crozier: They are fractious. They understand that this is an excellent motion that needs to be highlighted. I would ask you to ask them to quieten down a bit.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order.

David DAVIS: I am trying to lay out a reasonable set of steps to go forward to deal with these issues. The fact is the government has not provided so many of the documents, and I am going to pick on the Commonwealth Games documents as the most obvious. Mr Limbrick and the committee requested a set of documents through the chamber. 353 documents were identified; for 350 documents executive privilege was claimed in full; then for three documents privilege was claimed in part. But do you know what? In that case, even for the three documents where they said, 'We can give you part of it,' they could not be bothered giving a part of those three documents to the chamber. I wonder why. And when was that? That was back in May 2024. So we are looking at these huge lengths of time.

And the failure to provide documents – even if you accepted their claims about executive privilege, what about those other three? Why did they not provide them?

Sonja Terpstra: You don't want them. This is a fishing expedition.

David DAVIS: Well, no, no, no. And the Hastings documents – I have looked at those very carefully in detail recently, and it is clear that some of the background work that has been done is not cabinet work. It is not material that has been decided on by cabinet; it is background work being done by departments. So in my humble view, an arbiter, an independent legal person or an eminent legal person would look at this and go, no, that is not a cabinet document. I would be prepared to have that tested, but the government is not prepared to have that tested. Why?

Sonja Terpstra: Put in an FOI.

David DAVIS: We may well do that. The member on the other side brings up the matter of FOI. We see in FOI the deterioration in the performance of the government, and if anyone doubts that, go and read the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner report on their website that looks at the deterioration in FOI performance over this government's time. That report is damning about FOI and the failure of the government to provide documents. I have quite extensive experience on FOI with this particular government. Recently we had a case that went to the Court of Appeal. The government appealed all the way to the Court of Appeal to block one document. My goodness, it would have cost tens of thousands of dollars of public money to block access to a document that ought properly to have been in the public domain. They went on seven grounds. The three judges of the Court of Appeal, the highest court in Victoria, decided 7–0, 7–0, 7–0 that the appeal should be dismissed. So you had a Supreme Court judge hear the VCAT case –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: You want to bring up FOI; I could go for quite a while. But my point is, at a deeper level, this is a secretive government. It is a government that is blocking access to documents, and it is doing this on a legendary scale. People should just read the pages of documents that have been blocked: page after page after page of documents blocked by a secretive government. It is trying to cover up. It is trying to cover up its mistakes, it is trying to cover up its decision-making processes and it is trying to prevent Victorians knowing what they properly ought to know.

This chamber's job is scrutiny. This chamber's job is to hold the government to account. That is what we are seeking to do, and that is what we will continue to seek to do. I think most of the crossbench have quite a strong view on this. They really do believe that the government ought to be more transparent and the government ought to cooperate more here. We have tried to work our way through, to find a way that we can both send a very clear signal to the government that they are doing the wrong thing here and provide a remedy for that so that there is a clear solution. But we will continue to talk to the crossbench in coming days to make sure that we find a way through on this. We will join in the Procedure Committee activity to have a discussion. We are not opposed, as I said, to engagement with the Department of Premier and Cabinet on these matters. But the government's bad faith on these matters is absolutely clear and the government's failure to submit material to the arbiter is absolutely clear, and the government's motion does not deal with any of that. So we are, fairly, looking for a solution and trying to hold the government to account. That is our job on behalf of Victorians.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:57): I rise to speak on this motion put forward by the Liberals. At the outset can I say that the Greens share the concerns highlighted in it. I think I can speak for all non-government members in this place in saying that we have some really serious concerns about how documents are handled by this place. We have been here before and we are back again, just as I predicted we would be if nothing changed or improved with respect to documents requests. I looked up *Hansard* to see what I have said about this before, partly because I did not want to plagiarise myself –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Dr Mansfield, could you just cease for a minute. Excuse me, I can hardly hear Dr Mansfield for all the side conversations going on, so either take them outside or just cease them while Dr Mansfield is speaking.

Sarah MANSFIELD: It turns out I have spoken about failure to produce documents or failure to follow the standing orders with respect to executive privilege 11 times so far this term. Back in May last year, following an identical argument to the one we are having now – the only difference being that the list of documents has grown, and at that time, it was resolved after the government committed to introducing new sessional orders – I said:

Should the government continue to ignore the will of the Parliament, should they engage in bad faith when it comes to introducing these new sessional orders, should they choose to simply ignore the sessional orders, we will have no qualms about reigniting this matter, including looking at sanctions or other levers we have as a Parliament.

Over a year on we still do not have these new sessional orders, and we continue to see the government fail to produce documents and ignore standing orders with respect to executive privilege. So it is no wonder that we are here again. Can I once again emphasise how serious this matter is and our disappointment that there has not been more progress towards improved transparency. When the Parliament resolves to make a request of the government, that should be complied with. Our whole democratic process relies on the will of the Parliament being respected. Just because one party is in government, the make-up of this Parliament means that they should not have free rein just to do as they please. Yet that is what we see all too often in this place. The Legislative Council is treated like a nuisance and ignored rather than as legitimate representatives of the Victorian community.

The government's response to the childcare documents demonstrates perfectly the cultural problem that has developed regarding documents in Victoria. We have essentially the same standing orders as the New South Wales Parliament. An almost identical motion was passed for childcare documents here to one in New South Wales; in fact, if anything, ours was narrower in scope. The New South Wales government complied with the documents order, including appointing an independent legal arbiter to examine documents where claims of executive privilege arose. I know this matter is ongoing, but so far in Victoria, in response to our request, we are told that there are over a million documents that have been identified, and we have not seen a single one to date. Based on our experience of many other documents requests in this place, it would amaze me if executive privilege does not get claimed over most of them, if not all of them – and that is if they are ever produced at all. Unlike in New South Wales, we know that this government will not abide by the standing orders to provide the documents to the mover of the motion as required under section 10.03 of our standing orders and they will not allow for the appointment of an independent arbiter if there is a dispute over these claims, because they never have – not once – and they have said that they never intend to.

It should be noted that in recent weeks the government have indicated that they are open to discussions about addressing the issues they have highlighted around the scope and timing of documents requests. It is disappointing that it has taken this long and it has taken pressure from public scrutiny over the failure to produce the childcare documents to get some movement on resolving these issues, but we welcome the shift, and we are willing to engage in good faith to keep things moving. In particular I note and welcome the motion tabled today, intended for referral to the Procedure Committee, regarding the scope and timing of documents requests, and I sincerely hope this item is brought on as soon as possible for debate.

The government has told us that in some instances the way departments interpret our documents requests has produced a massive volume of documents that are not even necessarily what we are even seeking. We acknowledge that it is in no-one's interest to waste time poring over thousands or even a million irrelevant emails or notes or little tidbits of information, so if a formalised process to enable sensible negotiation over the scope is required, we accept that. Likewise we understand that sometimes

additional time is required to fully comply with the documents requests. Again, if we need specific sessional or standing orders to allow some flexibility here, then so be it. That said, numerous documents requests are relatively simple. Some are just a single document, including several of the ones that have been listed out today. We know they exist, and some of them are years old. They have been sitting around. They are a single document. So this argument that it is too wide a scope or it is too short a timeframe – I do not buy that that is always the critical barrier.

Further, the issues around executive privilege claims remain unresolved, as Mr Davis has highlighted, and the government have shown no indication of changing their tune on this. I am as frustrated and disappointed about this as anyone, and I share the desire to see change here. The challenge for us currently, short of threatening sanctions like the one proposed, is that we have not got a lot of other options to get the government to follow the rules. It is not a sustainable approach to continue to threaten to expel the Leader of the Government or government members in order to get documents provided, but we do not have many other alternatives if the government continues to treat this Parliament with such contempt. Some integrity and ethics experts have suggested that we stop passing bills in protest if this behaviour continues. Like many others in this place, I am here to get things done, as the Victorian public rightly expects, but these are the sorts of things we are being forced to consider when the government do not do their part and follow the rules of the Parliament. We do not want to end up there – no-one does, I do not think – but the government is not giving us much choice right now.

Of course what we ultimately want to see is these documents produced. There is a lot more at stake here than the documents themselves. The fact that there is not any way for us to force the government to follow the standing orders or that there are not any explicit penalties for failing to do so is really telling. In itself this is rooted in democratic principles. It highlights that for our democratic system to function as it is supposed to it depends on a high degree of mutual cooperation. We might all vehemently disagree on issues of policy or ideology, but for all this to work we have to agree on a set of rules about how we are going to resolve these differences and abide by those rules. Right now in this place that mutual cooperation does not exist, and it is to the detriment of this Parliament and the Victorian public. We do not accept that this is good enough, and it is time the government did better. We are willing to come to the table in the spirit of mutual cooperation. The ball is now in the government's court.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:05): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on the motion brought forward to us today by the melancholic Mr Davis, notice of motion 1028. I am always sad to hear that you are melancholic, Mr Davis. This place is always more entertaining when you are up and vigorous and having a good old frolic with us.

I do wish to go to a few points. This is a serious topic, but the way in which Mr Davis has approached it is anything but serious. This is perhaps one of the longest documents motions this Council has ever had before it – and I would be happy to be corrected – but Mr Davis has set a timeline of two weeks. He has said that Ms Lovell might be swooping in to fix his latest mistake, and we will see what gets tabled by Mr Davis, but this is an extraordinarily extensive laundry list of grievances which he has put forward today. I am just really staggered, Mr Davis, because the Treasurer, the Leader of the Government in the house, has been painfully clear that she is open to having reasonable conversations with you, with members of the crossbench and with all members of this chamber about resolving it. In fact, when it comes to this very issue of varying the scope, I note that the Deputy Leader of the Government in this place has a notice of motion which has been on this notice paper since May of last year, notice of motion 449, about varying the scope of these requests.

Despite that – and I am happy for you to correct me, Mr Davis – I do not think that you have once approached the Leader of the Government in the house to actually discuss this or to discuss a reasonable way forward. You have not done that. You are not interested in doing that work because, despite all the bluster you have put into this chamber today, all you are really interested in is the very last point, point (8) of this motion, and that is getting a cheap political score by trying to suspend the Leader of the Government for a few days. This is despite the fact that the Treasurer has been very

forthcoming in saying that she is prepared to have a reasonable conversation with all members of this house about resolving this. I hope that we will still be able to do that, and I hope that we will be able to do so in a government motion tomorrow. But the proposal put forward today by Mr Davis does not seek to address any of that. All it seeks to do is air the same grievances without having gone to any modicum of effort to actually have a conversation.

There are many things that this chamber is valuable for debating, but as members will know, there are many productive conversations that can be had in offices to get things working and to have those conversations. The Treasurer has repeatedly offered in this chamber – I have heard it repeatedly in this chamber – for those conversations to take place. That has not happened. What we have here today is a motion that is apparently so serious that it warrants suspending a member of this place but not so serious that it warrants giving it a full 90 minutes of debate. I do not know how seriously you are taking this, Mr Davis. Clearly you are not, because you are saying you are now going to adjourn it off. Why are you adjourning it off?

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: He said, ‘To have discussions.’ What a what a wonderful thing, Mr Davis, it could have been if you had done that in the first place. Maybe then you could have used this time with one of your slots –

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I just remind members to go via the Chair.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Acting President; you are quite right. Mr Davis could have used the slot – I do not know how it came to be in his possession anyway – that the Liberals had for debate this week for something that is in the interests of Victorians. Instead he is he is taking up this chamber’s time with something that he could very clearly have had a conversation about in any of the preceding 17 months since notice of that motion was put into this place by Minister Blandthorn. It is all the more staggering that you will not do that. You will come into this place and grandstand, with all your bluff and bluster, but you will not actually have a conversation to resolve it.

I note as well, Mr Davis, that you did make reference to parts of the constitution which refer to House of Commons practice in the United Kingdom in 1856, a part of the constitution that you and I both know well. But as you also know well –

Sonja Terpstra: You’re a nerd, Michael.

Michael GALEA: I will take that interjection, Ms Terpstra, and I will accept that. What you perhaps inadvertently – or not so inadvertently – glossed over is that the standing practices in the House of Commons in 1856, which I have had the benefit of learning as a result of being a member of this chamber, specifically state that Crown privilege is a matter to be determined by the Crown. Crown privilege of course is the former term for what we now refer to as executive privilege. That is the exact same thing that you were referring to, Mr Davis – the constitutional basis. That is why we have this conflict with the standing orders, which are in direct conflict with the constitution of this state. Yet you continue to gloss over that as if there is nothing at all to be seen there. It is a disingenuous argument, which you know all too well.

The simple fact is, when it comes to short-form documents motions – the way in which they are done and looking at variations of scope or anything else to do with them – this is something that is appropriate for the Procedure Committee to look at. In fact that is what we originally said – members of the backbench on this side of this place, and the front bench – when Mr Davis’s initial motion to introduce the short-form documents debate into general business days, on Wednesdays, first came into this place. Members on this side warned of the unforeseen outcomes and said this should go to the Procedure Committee. Mr Davis said, ‘Nothing to worry about, nothing to see here.’

What happened? Suddenly the third general business slot of the day was routinely being cut short because the short-form documents motions were taking up that time. He completely mucked it up. As

a result, he then had to go back and fix it, but his fix was no fix at all because he inadvertently allowed all members of this place to lodge those short-form documents motions. He then had to take even more time – up to 3 hours of this chamber’s time – to fix his previous mistakes because he did not heed the advice to go to the Procedure Committee in the first place, like, I hate to say it, those of us on the backbench that make Ms Crozier so irate warned him about. We warned those opposite that this could lead to unexpected outcomes. And what did it do? It led to unforeseen outcomes. That is exactly why it should have gone to the Procedure Committee in the first place. It should have gone to the Procedure Committee the first time he cocked it up, it should have gone to the Procedure Committee the second time he cocked it up and it should go to the Procedure Committee now.

I am very much looking forward to the debate, which I expect we will be having tomorrow, that is based on the motion that the Leader of the Government in this place put on the notice paper this morning. As I said at the outset, this is actually an important issue and an important, serious discussion that we should be having, but it is not served in any way by the sort of bombastic lunacy that we are seeing from Mr Davis, throwing yet more excrement at the wall in order to try and get some kind of political outcome that suits his current state of mind. That is all this motion today is. Coming from a man who served in a government where more than 3200 FOI requests were completely denied, who himself, as health minister in the previous government, withheld health performance data for months and months and months on end, it is quite rich. You did have a brainwave – because you clearly mucked things up so much that you knew you were going to lose that election – that you then helped to implement this standing order, but once again you failed to account for the constitutional basis of executive privilege in this state. Again you have failed to do so; you have consistently failed to do so.

Much as I admire your valiance, Mr Davis, in finding new and creative ways to throw everything, including the kitchen sink, at this government – I do appreciate, admire and respect your vigour – once again we are not seeing the attention to detail or the accuracy live up to that. This is not even to go into the very real consideration that has been repeatedly raised by the government as to the volume of these requests. It is on a scale that has not been seen in previous parliaments, so it is unreasonable to hold those standards against us, notwithstanding the fact that even with a much lower volume, the government that Mr Davis served in struggled to meet barely half this number of requests.

There is more important work to be done and not enough time for me to go into further detail, but I very much look forward to hopefully a more productive debate tomorrow, and we will see what Mr Davis decides to do this afternoon.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:15): I rise to speak to Mr Davis’s motion 1028, and it is an important motion. I have just been listening to Mr Galea and the interjections from members of the government on the backbench through Mr Davis’s contribution, where he highlighted exactly what members of the opposition and other members on the crossbench are asking the government to provide. These are documents in relation to very important issues, and I want to highlight some of those that certainly I have been interested in and the government has failed to provide. I think it goes to the heart of good government and good governance in relation to what the people expect. They do expect transparency, accountability and responsibility, and they do expect a government to be truthful and to be providing information when they can do so.

Mr Galea made the point that there are pages of this motion from Mr Davis, and that is quite right, because there are just dozens of these documents that have not been provided by the government. I look at one such area I have been requesting. I know that Ms Lovell actually moved this in my name because I unfortunately had to be away in March 2024 around the Albury Wodonga Health clinical services plan and master plan. What I was asking for, or what Ms Lovell did – and she is very interested in this because it is in her region too and she is very familiar with the issues for Albury Wodonga Health – were the documents relating to the clinical service and master planning of Albury Wodonga Health Albury and Wodonga campuses in the redevelopment of the Albury hospital. It related to a number of documents. I make this point because in 2023 the New South Wales government released service planning in the 2021 master plan recommending a greenfield single-site hospital. To go to

Mr Davis's point, New South Wales do have standards that this government does not even come close to. They do release documents under their provisions, whereas this government claims executive privilege or just completely refuses to do so. As I said, we are still waiting for those documents to be released.

There are many motions in here on many issues that members from the crossbench and from the opposition have an interest in on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of the people of Victoria. They should be respected, rather than what we just heard from members of the government in their quite pathetic contributions in relation to the reasons why they do not believe this is a worthy motion for us to be debating today.

One of the things that I have asked for is about the amalgamations of Victoria's health services on 29 May 2024. There were 26 documents that were identified, and one document in full and one document in part were provided. That just shows you the extent of what we are getting here. I note when I looked at that response that it was just 'Executive privilege, executive privilege, executive privilege' claimed over these. That is a very easy excuse for the government to provide to the house, but I do not think it is a valid excuse for the people of Victoria, especially those affected communities, around the documents that I am referring to about the amalgamation of health services in rural and regional areas in particular.

I think we do need to see greater transparency from government. I think this government has been shocking, like the last few governments. We know what happened in COVID. It is all now fact that decisions that we were told were based on health advice actually were not. They were provided by just the Premier and probably one or two close to him. The Victorian public were told a lie. They were told lies time and time and time again – the most shameful period in this state's history. That is why we demand greater transparency and greater accountability, because trust must come back into good government. The trust is broken with the people when the people cannot get or have sight of what the government are planning to do or what they have in many instances demanded on the cost overruns or just the cover-ups that have gone on. We see it time and time again, and there are multiple examples in health that I could speak of. I think it is terribly important that we do have proper processes in place and that we do have a government that is willing to provide the truth and to provide information to the Victorian public through the Parliament, through this very process.

As Mr Davis said, if we need to amend the date of this, that is not a big deal. That is fine. That is up for discussion, and it is absolutely fine to be able to do that so that we can have some action from the government and so that they take notice of what we and the crossbench want to have provided. That is not a problem. The government amend bills all the time – they make mistakes and they have to bring in house amendments. That is nothing when you are looking at a date or changing a particular component of what this motion goes to. But the fact is that the number of documents that have not been provided and the excuses the government have provided I think say an enormous amount about this government. It is a government that is shrouded in secrecy. It is a government that is not transparent. It is a government that is not truthful to the Victorian public. On too many occasions they have not been truthful. If we need to bring back trust and we need to bring people with us in relation to the decisions that government are making, then it is incredibly important to have that degree of transparency and openness.

As I said, there are so many issues, whether it is the payroll tax for general practitioners and other health professionals, who I have been advocating for for information from the State Revenue Office or the Treasurer's office, or indeed all of the other issues, or the planning provisions, an issue that is affecting many, many parts of my community in Southern Metro – and Mr Davis knows this only too well. The energy documents – we have just been discussing energy in a previous motion, but Mr Davis has got that FOI and those briefs, and they actually say that there are concerns about how people will be able to pay these increases in prices. Here you have information, but when we ask for it I think it is up to the government to provide that in a responsible way and to be accountable. But all we are seeing

is deflection and, I have got to say, the most extraordinary degree of arrogance, which is quite disgraceful.

I will end my contribution there. I know that we are adjourning this off, but I hope we do not forget when we come back to this motion about the importance of this and why members should be supporting this motion so that we can get these important documents.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:23): I am just going to make a very brief contribution, but I would first of all like to thank Mr Davis for moving this motion and I would basically commend the very erudite comments from Dr Mansfield on this question. I think she very accurately reflected and provided a perspective on the sheer frustration that is felt by many of us on the crossbench and obviously in the opposition. This is not a laughing matter. This is a contemptuous approach to the Parliament, and it is a contemptuous approach to the public of Victoria. It was noted that Mr Davis's resolution is longer than the response we get from the government on our documents requests. That is at one level really funny, but at another level the opposite of comedy is tragedy, and it is tragic that the contributions we get from the government are so lacking in merit.

It is not just that this is a procedural question. If I could perhaps reflect on one of the documents motions, which struck to public housing – when it was put forward that we wanted documents on public housing, we got nothing. The government claimed executive privilege over the whole lot, and what we were seeking were very basic documents. Not a huge amount – we were looking for things like renovation plans, we were looking for business cases and we were looking for some basic understandings that the government had really seriously looked at this question before they announced that they were going to displace 10,000 public housing residents. The government claimed executive privilege, commercial in confidence, cabinet in confidence and released nothing. I think we might have got one document, which was heavily redacted. But I think where it starts to move from farcical into sinister is that whilst the government claimed privilege over all the documents, when this matter went before the courts, with the action carried by Inner Melbourne Community Legal centre, the government got up and said there were no business cases. So on the one hand they were claiming privilege, that they could not release it, and then when it went to court, they were saying, 'There's actually nothing for us to hand over. We're not going to allow for this discovery. There are no business cases.'

I do not want to get into the realm of potential defamation, but I think it does raise questions that are deeply disturbing about who is being told the truth.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

David ETTERSHANK: I am not selectively quoting. I am talking directly from history and am more than happy for the public to look into this, or for you, Ms Terpstra, to tell us that it is different.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I would ask that Mr Ettershank direct his questions or comments through the Chair, and I would also ask that he stop misleading Parliament and selectively quoting from things that are factually incorrect when he refers to a court decision. When he refers to the court decision, it is incorrect for him to say what he said because the court did uphold the government's position on executive privilege.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): On the first point of order I will just remind members, as I have this afternoon, because we have had it happen several times, to talk through the Chair. The second point of order is more just a point of debate.

David ETTERSHANK: No doubt Ms Terpstra will, if I do not talk to her, hopefully not continue to badger from the sidelines.

We have a situation where there is, it would seem, in government a collective myopia about how serious this matter is, and that really disturbs me. If the government cannot see the seriousness of this matter and how it strikes to accountability in government, I think that is really depressing.

I would like to just talk about process, in conclusion. Mr Davis has been very open and has been very good to work with on this question. Clearly we do share the same frustrations, but we did put to Mr Davis our concern that the clause (5) provision, which gave the government a very short period of time to produce an enormous amount of documents, was too short, and he amended the motion to reflect a longer window. We also indicated to Mr Davis that we felt that the proposed punishment, for want of a better word, in terms of expelling the Leader of the Government from the house, was actually not a very effective form of punishment, because I suspect that the Treasurer would be delighted to have a couple of days off to be able to get stuck into her ministerial functions, and that I suspect within Labor ranks being thrown out of the Legislative Council on a procedural matter like this is probably a badge of honour.

We actually were the people, if I may speak inclusively for Dr Mansfield and myself, that asked Mr Davis to adjourn this off. It is in the context specifically of welcoming this proposal from the government to enter into discussions around appropriate process, and we think that is a step forward. We would be keen to get into that in a positive and open-minded manner, and hopefully we can resolve these issues in, dare I say it, a grown-up manner. On that basis, whilst we commend this motion, we are happy that it is being adjourned off, and we look forward to exploring it on a good-faith basis with the government, recognising that if that is not forthcoming then we will look forward to this matter being brought back on before the house again.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:30): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name. I was just having a look at the current standing orders and also the text provided by Mr Davis in his motion. I note that the beginning of the motion says that the government has, according to Mr Davis, failed to comply with 38 resolutions of the Council requiring the tabling of specified documents in the Legislative Council by particular dates, and it goes on to list a range of documents and the like. I think part of the reason why this is such a disappointing debate in the contributions that have been made so far by those on the opposition benches and certainly on the crossbench is that the levels of frustration that the crossbenchers are expressing are misguided. If you actually take a careful look at what the standing orders say in regard to the production of documents, which are standing orders 10.01, 10.02 and – of relevance to the government – 10.03, whilst the Council can order production of documents, it is not an absolute right. It is actually subject to 10.03, where executive privilege can be claimed. I am not sure, but I think I can guess, why there might be increasing levels of frustration. Perhaps what the crossbench fail to understand, which might actually assist them to take account of this more properly and in a more fulsome way, is that the government can claim executive privilege – whether you like it or not, that exists – and we do.

Let me tell you, the level of frivolity and just lack of understanding of government processes is really, really disappointing from the crossbench. Again there is a lack of willingness from them to actually read anything and try and understand anything, because they are not interested. What this actually tells us is that this is nothing more than a stunt, and this is why it is so disappointing. If they actually cared about what was in the documents and actually cared about the Victorian people, they would not waste finite government resources on this absolutely ridiculous fishing expedition where there are thousands and thousands and thousands of documents that public servants are required to go through to have a look at whether they actually meet the test or not. For example, the process that the government goes through is that we get legal advice. We ask departments, and the government solicitor provides the government with advice about whether executive privilege can be claimed. Again, this is not something we made up. It is in the standing orders. This chamber, the Council, can make an order, but it is subject to that right. Why the crossbench think it is an absolute right and why Mr Davis has couched this as an absolute right speaks volumes about the fact of what a stunt this is, because there has been a release of documents.

I might say that when we have actually released documents, I do not think I can recollect Mr Davis ever referring to any of those documents in this chamber, and it speaks to the fact that this is nothing more than a stunt and a fishing expedition. In order for the government to claim executive privilege,

we do so based on legal advice. This requires advice from the government solicitor. It requires legal advice from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office to inform us about its decision in terms of claiming executive privilege. What the crossbench and those opposite would be saying is that we should not take legal advice on any of this and in fact that we do not have the right to take legal advice on any of this, where we absolutely do, so what they are doing is besmirching the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, who provide advice to the government. But again the crossbench members, particularly the Greens, and those on the opposition benches do not care about the rights of others, because this is a stunt. It is nothing more than a stunt.

Let me refer back to last year. On 29 May 2024 Minister Blandthorn, on behalf of the leader of this chamber, moved a motion to have this matter referred to the Procedure Committee. There was a motion on the notice paper, and since then there has not been one member who has come to try and talk about that in any serious way, or any knocks on the door to say, 'Yes, okay, let's talk about it.' Our government has consistently said in this chamber that we need to have a discussion around procedure and nobody has taken that up, and the reason is because those opposite do not really care about it; it is a stunt.

I go back to Mr Davis's motion, which talks about 38 documents motions. It is absolutely ridiculous, the volume of documents that would need to be produced. It is just impossible for any government department to actually comply with it. The resources that go into this are voluminous. What those opposite want is for government departments to be tied up for infinite periods of time, wasting finite government resources, rather than getting on with the important job of government. The whole schtick around this is 'Government can't be trusted, government bad.' Well, let me tell you, no-one is actually listening to that, because what they know is that is the worst opposition in history over there. The opposition benches are a joke if this is the only thing that they have got to try and tie up government with and say we are bad because we are not complying with things. We are actually getting legal advice on this and relying on that advice.

Again, it is farcical for those opposite and the crossbench to cry foul on these particular sorts of matters, because government need to consider whether we include documents that would reveal, directly or indirectly, the deliberative processes of cabinet – the high-level confidential, deliberative processes of executive government or otherwise genuinely jeopardise necessary relationships of trust and confidence between a minister and public officials. But those opposite and the crossbench do not really care about that. Why – the crossbenchers have never been in government and never will, but those opposite have not been in government for some time. There are sensitive matters that are absolutely right to be considered and are matters of executive privilege, and we get legal advice on those and we rely on that information. These documents might also reveal information obtained by the executive government. They might reveal confidential legal advice to the executive government. It might jeopardise the public interest on an established basis, it might prejudice national security or public safety, it might prejudice law enforcement investigations or it might materially damage the state's financial or commercial interests, such as ongoing tender processes or changes in taxation policy. It might prejudice intergovernmental and diplomatic relations or prejudice legal proceedings. But again, those opposite do not care about that, and the crossbench have no interest in that either, because this is a stunt.

I could go on, and I know I have got 2 minutes on the clock. I am not going to talk about Mr Davis and the Liberal–National record when they were in government, which was actually appalling. Our government, I note, whenever these documents motions are moved in this chamber, routinely do not oppose them, and where we can provide documents, we do. So the frame of this debate is actually wrong-footed, because the crossbench members need to understand that there is no absolute right; it is a right subject to a qualification, and it is in the standing orders. We have been saying since 29 May last year: if you really want to have a discussion about this, come and knock on the door. We said to you this should have been referred to the Procedure Committee, and you did not want to do it. So now

you are about to adjourn off a motion that you said was very important, but all of a sudden you want to adjourn it off because you realise you do not have the numbers. Let us be real about that.

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Despite the interjections and the rudeness of some on the crossbench down there, which just speaks volumes about the immaturity of some people on the crossbench, all I can say is that the government is entitled to rely on legal advice. It is in the standing orders: it is a right for you to request documents from the government, but it is not an absolute right; it is subject to a qualification which the government can rely on.

I will leave my contribution there. But I hope I have approached this debate in a bit more of an educated way than perhaps did Mr Ettershank, who is entirely the rudest person I have ever had the misfortune of meeting in this place.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:40): Wow. Just wow. I cannot believe the contribution –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, I am just picking up on the language just used by Ms Terpstra in relation to another member. Now, she would know that you are allowed to reflect on a party, but you are not allowed to reflect on an individual and that was outside the standing orders.

David Ettershank: On the point of order, I would appreciate a retraction and an apology, Acting President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I ask Ms Terpstra to withdraw her remarks.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President –

Wendy LOVELL: No, you were asked to withdraw.

Sonja Terpstra: I can raise a point of order, Ms Lovell, thank you. If you would direct your comments through the Chair. I think Mr Ettershank is entitled to ask for a withdrawal but not an apology, so I would like a clarification as to what Mr Ettershank is actually asking for.

David Ettershank: Parliamentary behaviour, Ms Terpstra.

Sonja Terpstra: I withdraw.

Wendy LOVELL: As I was saying, wow – just wow. I have never heard such a contribution in this house. This is a very serious motion. This goes to accountability, transparency and honesty in government. It goes to show just how far this government will go to cover their tracks and to not be accountable to the people of Victoria, when you hear a contribution like the one we heard before.

I am just going to talk about one particular documents motion that was in my name. As Ms Crozier said, she and I attended a forum up in Wodonga, and from that forum a motion was drafted. Ms Crozier was absent due to the death of her father when the motion came forward, and I carried that motion through this house. That motion was carried through this house on 6 March 2024. It was for the production of documents by 27 March 2024. Sometime in April 2024 we received a response from the government saying they had not had enough time. We then heard nothing more. Twelve months later, on 4 March 2025, I raised a constituency question asking about these documents, and we did get a response to that. The response was due on 18 March – of course that date came and went. But we did get a response on 29 April saying that the documentation that I had requested had been published by the New South Wales government and available via the access to information webpage for some time. Well, I have got news for the minister: there is no link. She did not provide any link to that document. There is no way to access it via that website. So this is again misleading the public into thinking that you can get it from a website. You cannot get it from a website. You have to make an appointment with the Legislative Council in New South Wales. You have to actually attend the Parliament yourself. They give you a box of documents. You can only book in for a 3-hour window. You have to take that box of documents, and you have to scan them yourself and email them to

yourself. Bill Tilley's office have had four 3-hour windows to get the documents from the first two tranches that have been released. Another tranche of documents has been released, but they have not had the time to go up and do this because they have to go all the way to Sydney. They have to do all this work themselves. It is not easy.

This government here has some of the same documents as New South Wales, but there would be other documents here, internal documents, minutes et cetera, that we requested which New South Wales do not have, and the minister should release those documents in the interests of accountability, transparency and honesty. But this government want to cover up every step that they make because they know that they are a tired government that have run out of ideas and that are just hanging on by their fingernails to power. It is hanging on for all effort just to maintain power. They do not treat the people of Victoria with respect, and we have just seen that they do not treat the members of this house with respect either.

Due to some negotiations with the crossbench, there has been an amendment that has been drafted that stands in my name. I move:

1. In paragraphs (7), (8) and (9), omit '26 August 2025' and insert '14 October 2025' in its place.

So we are giving the government now plenty of time. There is no excuse of 'There's not enough time; we can't produce these by the end of August this year.' We are now giving the government till October to produce the documents that they have known that they had to produce for a very long time. They will have had people who have already gone through these documents. They will be on file somewhere, and they should release those documents.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:46): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Motions

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:47): I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to motion 1023 in my name. It is an issue that I have raised on many occasions around elective surgery waiting lists and the latest Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI) data, which also includes ambulance response times, dental waitlists and specialist waitlists, and this is essentially what this motion goes to. I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) too many Victorians continue to suffer because of the Allan Labor government's failure to deliver basic health services, as the latest Victorian Agency for Health Information quarterly data released on 7 August 2025 reveals:
 - (a) there are 58,627 Victorians on the waiting list for vital surgery;
 - (b) ambulance response times remain well below the government's own target, with the benchmark of 15 minutes to respond to urgent code 1 cases only met 65.3 per cent of the time;
 - (c) at Box Hill Hospital, only 47 per cent of patients are being transferred to the emergency department within the recommended timeframe;
 - (d) wait times for specialist appointments have increased in the last quarter;
 - (e) wait times for dental appointments have increased in the last quarter; and
- (2) in 2022, Labor promised to deliver 240,000 surgeries a year and when they failed to meet this number, they simply revised it downwards.

I read that in because there are issues around the numbers of Victorians waiting on the waitlist to get their surgery. It might be semiurgent surgery or it might be other surgery that they have been waiting for years, and in today's Auditor-General's report that is exactly what we have found. The Auditor's

report *Planned Surgery in Victoria*, August 2025, shows a whole range of failures by the government. What they were doing is they were looking at two lines of inquiry: did the Department of Health deliver all elements of the COVID catch-up plan, and were the plan's outcomes achieved? In this report, if you read it, page after page it really says that the government did not meet their own targets, they did not meet their own plans – there were problems the whole way through. One of the things that I was particularly concerned about is that:

The department told us that as at May 2025 there were 583 March 2022 long waiter cohort patients waiting for surgery.

So you have got this list. But it also talks about those hospitals that are not included in this because they are not in the elective surgery information system. I want to draw attention to something that I have raised on many occasions. In this Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report it talks about the number of health services that do provide ESIS data but also the dozens of hospitals that do not – that are still not included. I have raised this for years in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC). In 2022–23 I asked about this very issue, and the response was, 'It's coming on in time.' In fact it was a question asked by Mr Danny O'Brien, and the then department secretary's response was:

Part of the planned surgery recovery reform program is to progressively make those non-ESIS lists visible, and so we will add them to ESIS.

That was from the inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes from 24 November. In the PAEC of 2024–25 I asked again about this, and the then department secretary said, 'I think we discussed this last year,' which was true, and again it was said, 'It will be transparent and visible.' Yet again this year in PAEC, Ms Benham asked about this very issue, because Mildura is not included in the waitlist for surgeries. She asked the minister – but made the point that we have asked this time and time again – when this would happen:

Well, we are expected to commence public reporting in the 2025–26 financial year or earlier if possible.

Well, we are here now, but in this Auditor-General's report – not a bit of that. One of the recommendations from the Auditor was that this data be made public, for obvious reasons – we want to know how many people are actually waiting for surgery. It is thousands more than the nearly 59,000 reported by VAHI. But the government know that they have got a problem with this, and so they are not going to release it. The recommendation from VAGO is that the Department of Health:

Work with relevant health services to make sure all public planned surgeries delivered in Victoria are captured in the Elective Surgery Information System ...

What is the government's response? 'The department agrees in principle, blah, blah, blah.'

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, no, it is, because seriously, they say nothing. But the target completion date is 1 July 2028, so they have no intention of releasing that data for those hospitals, those dozens of hospitals. I think there are 34 health services that do not provide data, and some do have elective surgery – hospitals like Mildura, like Bairnsdale. The report says:

Twenty-three health services in Victoria use ESIS, including all major metropolitan health services.

A further 34 public health services deliver planned surgeries but do not use ESIS.

That is why I am saying these waitlists are just rubbery figures. They might be reported, but they are not the true figures, and that is what we have.

I want to also take note that when the latest data was released, when the minister was crowing about the response, there was nothing to crow or boast about, because the ambulance response times are still woefully under target. As I said, transfers in a particular hospital like Box Hill, where there have been significant issues, are woefully under target at just 47 per cent. We have got other areas that are hugely

problematic. Specialist appointment times have blown out. Dental wait times have blown out. All of these areas have an impact on Victorians' health and wellbeing.

There is one particular area that is so misleading. The government says that category 1 surgeries are all done within time – every marker says 100 per cent – and it is just not true. Again, we do not get the true picture. A couple of weeks ago there was a young woman, who I also have spoken with, that received a positive result from a take-home bowel cancer test in October of 2024 – that is October of last year. She had to wait for nine months before getting a colonoscopy. She had abdominal pain, and she was deemed by her GP to be a category 1 patient. A category 1 patient is meant to be seen within 30 days, yet she had to wait nine months, and it was only after the reporter who reported on this story, the journalist I was speaking to about it, phoned the hospital that she got bumped from 12 months to nine months. She was on a waitlist as a category 1 for 12 months, so understandably she is absolutely outraged that the minister has the audacity to say that all category 1 patients are being seen on time.

If you look at the VAHI data, especially around Werribee Mercy, where this was happening, the percentage of urgent category 1 patients treated within the recommended time of 30 days in April–June 2024 was 100 per cent; in July to September 2024 it was 100 per cent; and in October to December 2024 it was 100 per cent. The very timeframe that this woman falls within – well, it is just not true. January to March 2025, 100 per cent; April to June 2025, 100 per cent – these figures need to be accurate, because patients like Sherri are suffering. She was very anxious around that positive test, understandably. If you have a positive test or you have symptoms or your GP deems you to be category 1, you expect to be seen within that 30-day period. So that is why I remain very concerned around the data that is released and what is actually happening in our health services. How is that information being reported? How are they getting it so wrong when category 1 patients like this are told their wait is 12 months but their GP has said, 'Please see this patient urgently. Given her positive bowel screen test and given the abdominal symptoms that she has, she is deemed to be category 1.'

There remain massive issues, and I remain very concerned, given the average overdue wait time for various categories. The category 3 wait time was 342 days – the recommended wait time is 12 months. The average overdue wait time for category 2 patients was 196 days, and the recommended wait time is 90 days. These figures are having a real impact, as I said, on the health and wellbeing of Victorians who are waiting to be seen, and of course we have no idea of those waiting on the hidden waitlist – those people waiting to get in to see a specialist who are then put onto a surgery waitlist. We have no idea of that, and we have no idea of the thousands of Victorians who are in areas like Mildura and Bairnsdale that are not included in this data because they are not captured by ESIS.

As I said at the outset, it has been promised by the government – by the former department secretary and the minister – that they will be reporting this year. The minister said in June of this year:

... we are expected to commence public reporting in the 2025–26 financial year or earlier if possible.

Yet this report says 2028 – that is three years away – and that is why I have enormous concerns around what is happening in our health services and within the department.

I go to point (b) of my motion:

ambulance response times remain well below the Government's own target, with the benchmark of 15 minutes to respond to urgent Code 1 cases only met 65.3 per cent of the time ...

That is so far under the target of 85 per cent. Every second counts in an emergency, and we have seen the tragedy where people are calling for ambulances, ambulances are ramped and cannot do what they need to do, paramedics cannot get to the patients they need to attend to and treat and care for because they are ramped and, sadly, we have seen patients die.

I have to say I was listening to question time today, and I heard the member for Ringwood ask an excellent question of the Minister for Health regarding an issue at Maroondah Hospital where paramedics had said there were just no staff in the system, so paramedics had to go in and actually

treat the patients. The minister said that is under investigation and that Ambulance Victoria is undertaking that investigation. It is now August 2025. How long do these investigations take? This is a government that just kicks the can down the road and covers up the failures the whole time. People are dying because they cannot get the emergency care that they deserve. Somebody who rings 000 not once but twice with a head injury, bleeding, just minutes away from an emergency department dies because an ambulance does not turn up, because the ambulances are ramped at Box Hill. It just demonstrates the complete chaos and the extent of the issues within our health system. They are right throughout the health system.

This government might talk about record investment, but it is actually about how you manage the money and where the money goes – how you actually operate that money, what it is actually doing to make that difference and how you are looking at the system in its entirety. This government separated the ministerial responsibilities for ambulance services and health, and we had two ministers. It was just ridiculous. They do not even understand. They continue to work in silos so that they can continue to fudge what is going on. I mean, they changed that decision, thankfully, because it made no sense, but why did they do it in the first place? Because they play games.

It is actually really devastating to see the shocking state that we are in. I know that there are just so many issues in the system, and that is despite the extraordinary efforts by those that work within the system – the doctors, the nurses, the allied health professionals. That includes the physios, the pharmacists, the OTs – all of those people that work in community health or palliative care. They do an extraordinary job, but they are frustrated by this government's inability to understand what is required to fix these problems. Again, for the minister to pat herself on the back and say, 'This is a good result' – this is not a good result. It is not a good result when wait times for specialist appointments have increased or that waiting times for dental appointments have increased in the last quarter to well over a year. This impacts people's lives. It impacts their ability to go about their everyday lives, whether it is work or their family life or their health and wellbeing, as I said. We must do better.

Finally, in the last few minutes that I have, as VAGO also pointed out, in 2022 Labor promised to deliver 240,000 surgeries, but they could not meet that target, so they revised it down. This is what VAGO said:

The plan's overarching target was to deliver 240,000 planned surgeries per year by June 2024.

That was last year.

This is 40,000 more than the public health system delivered in 2018–19 before the pandemic.

They could never meet those targets, but they made such a big song and dance about it, and when they could not meet it, they just revised it down. So now they are crowing, 'Oh, we've gone over our targets.' But you actually set those targets and failed to deliver on them. It went on:

The plan intended for this target to be ongoing each financial year. However, the government reduced it to 210,000 ...

to align with previous years' activity levels.

They really did overreach, and that was what the Auditor-General found. The overarching target could never be delivered. There were just so many other things that the Auditor-General found. What we found was 'The system's performance is unclear' – that is a particular phrase – or 'They did not fully meet the plan's targets' despite the department increasing the number of planned surgeries to reduce the waiting list. So you have got a lot of words from the department and you have got a lot of words from the minister and the government, but in actual fact these results are a very concerning given the investment of \$1.5 billion with that COVID catch-up plan. That is a lot of money, and really we should be doing a lot better than reducing a waitlist by a couple of thousand people, because we know that they have not even dealt with those 582 people from 2022. They are still there.

I understand that there is much more to do, but I would urge the government to look at this data and be far more transparent than they are and get those 34 public health hospitals with their data. Do not wait for the amalgamations to occur – because that is all the government is doing, waiting for the amalgamations to occur when these health services will be just swallowed up. This is a cynical plan by the government so we never see the full transparency of the waitlist that I have been asking for for years. I say that this government knows that the waitlist for vital planned surgery is way, way above the nearly 58,627 Victorians – it is much bigger than that, and I think that is a massive failure by this government to not understand the needs of Victorians, both this year and in the previous five years.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:06): I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Crozier's motion about the performance of our healthcare system, particularly reflecting on the surgery waitlists. The Allan Labor government is backing our hospitals. It is backing our healthcare workforce. It is making sure that Victorians who need health care get access to it when they need it most. The most recent Victorian budget delivered an extra \$11.1 billion into our healthcare system, including a record \$9.3 billion boost for our hospitals, giving every public hospital the certainty to plan for the future and keep delivering the world-class care that Victorians rely upon. Every public health service in Victoria received a funding increase in the last budget. But to get to the point, the crux of the motion is: where is the money going? What is it delivering in terms of health outcomes? For the second consecutive year, our hardworking healthcare workforce delivered a record number of planned surgeries across the system. Between April and June this year, Victoria delivered a record-breaking 58,264 patients receiving planned surgery, the highest number of planned surgery patients treated in a quarter in Victoria's history, contributing to an annual total of 212,705 planned surgeries, the highest ever 12-month total recorded in Victoria. The highest ever number of planned surgeries in a 12-month period delivered in this state was reported in the last 12 months. They are the facts that need to go on the table in this debate.

We know also that timeliness is being improved. Ms Crozier, in her contribution, sought to cast doubt on the validity of the statistics. I am not going to get into the particular case she raised, because we do not have that information in front of us, but 100 per cent of the category 1 surgeries are being delivered, and for categories 2 and 3, timeliness has improved by five days and 25 days respectively. So the timeliness of cat 2 and cat 3 surgeries is being delivered on. The improvement is underpinned by our *Planned Surgery Reform Blueprint*, which is both embedding change in the system and increasing the long-term capacity and supporting patients. We are investing in surgical equipment across metropolitan and regional health services. We are providing greater support to patients who are waiting for surgery by establishing patient support units, who engage with patients preparing for their surgery to provide non-surgical treatment options and other interventions to optimise their health before, during and after surgery. And we are listening to patients and increasing access to same-day surgeries, which in 2023–24 saved over 10,000 bed days, freeing up public hospital beds for other Victorians requiring different care. We know there is always more to do, and we will continue to back our hardworking healthcare workforce.

I just want to take a moment to reflect on the report that Ms Crozier mentioned, the report from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office released today on planned surgery in Victoria. I know that Ms Crozier quoted some elements of the report, and she left some stuff out. It might have been when she referred to the 'blah, blah, blah' that was included in the response. What VAGO said, and this is a direct quote from VAGO, is:

The plan increased the number of planned surgeries and reduced the backlog caused by the pandemic.

It goes on to say:

In 2023–24 the department delivered 209,925 planned surgeries, compared with the target of 240,000.

So we clearly did not meet that, but:

Around two-thirds of this shortfall was mainly because fewer public surgeries were delivered in private hospitals than expected.

Conveniently this was not gone into by Ms Crozier in her contribution. The report goes on to say that the waiting list was reduced by 35 per cent and that there was an improvement in the number of patients being seen within clinically recommended timeframes.

Obviously, in terms of the delivery, there was a backlog caused by the pandemic. The government put a plan in place to deliver on that, and largely that plan delivered an increase in the number of planned surgeries and reduced the waiting list. I think we should all be proud of the efforts of our healthcare workforce responding to a once-in-a-century event to get the healthcare system back on track and to make sure that those who needed planned surgery support in the aftermath of the pandemic received it, and that is exactly what the VAGO report that was released today showed. What it demonstrates, what the figures that I referred to earlier in the contribution have already demonstrated, is that there are record numbers of Victorians receiving planned surgeries in this state. That is as a result of an investment in our healthcare system and an investment in our healthcare workforce that is unparalleled and unprecedented. It is not just an investment that occurs at one point, it is the result of an investment that is over a decade of Labor investing in our healthcare system and investing in our healthcare workforce. The planned surgery numbers that we have shown today – a record number of planned surgeries delivered in the last quarter and in the last 12 months – show that Labor's investment in our public hospital system and in supporting our nurses and healthcare professionals is delivering the health care that Victorians need. That is undeniable.

I think when we enter into a debate about how our healthcare system is performing, of course there are always ways that we can do better and of course there are always things that we can do to improve patient experience, to improve patient outcomes. I think the big question that people need to reflect on is: is it Labor's track record of investment and record delivery of services that they want or the Liberals' record of cuts? That is the choice that people should be thinking about when they think about their healthcare system: Labor's record of investment, Labor's record of delivery of improvements to our healthcare system, or the Liberals' record of cuts. That is the choice that people have. Our record is very, very clear, and I might leave my contribution there.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:14): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Crime

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:15): I am pleased to move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the steady increase in the number of reported incidents of aggravated burglary and assault in Victoria since 2018, with a significant increase in the past year;
- (b) a lack of clear understanding of what protections are afforded to Victorian home owners when defending their home against criminals;
- (c) Victoria's self-defence laws have not been reviewed since 2013;

(2) calls on the Attorney-General to:

- (a) request that the Victorian Law Reform Commission review the operation and suitability of self-defence laws in Victoria, in particular the application of self-defence laws to protect people in their own homes, including those under the Crimes Act 1958, the Jury Directions Act 2015, the Evidence Act 2008, and the Sentencing Act 1992; and
- (b) consider the approach to self-defence laws in the United Kingdom, including section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (UK).

Firstly, I would just like to point out a few things that this motion does. What we are trying to do here with this motion is call on the Attorney-General to request that the Victorian Law Reform Commission review the operation and suitability of self-defence laws in Victoria, in particular the application of

self-defence laws to protect people in their own homes, including those under the Crimes Act 1958, the Jury Directions Act 2015, the Evidence Act 2008 and the Sentencing Act 1992, and also consider the approach to self-defence laws, including section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, in the United Kingdom.

Why have I chosen to do this today? As we would all know from media reports, many people now in our state, unfortunately, are becoming the victims of home invasions. People come into their house to rob them or cause harm to them and their families, and some of these people are fighting back against the criminals. I am not certain that the current laws protect home owners, protect people, when they fight back against these criminals. In fact I met a man – who was here this morning, actually, at Parliament – when I went out to his house last week: Aaron. He is in my electorate in Clyde. Unfortunately, I think probably all members here have constituents in their electorate that have suffered some form of home invasion. What happened? He lives in a really nice new estate. I was quite impressed by how quiet and beautiful it is, with nice neighbours that all talk to each other. It is the classic Australian dream: a beautiful estate, a nice house, where he lives with his wife and daughter. But one night in August last year, a year ago, he heard a noise. Fortunately, his teenage daughter was not home that night – she was with a friend – but he and his wife were home. His wife called the police, as the Attorney-General suggested that people should do. Yes, they should call the police. But then they have a choice: what do they do next? The police take some time, and the criminals are very quick. Aaron was prepared. He had a baseball bat. He picked up the baseball bat, and he went out and confronted this intruder in his home. The intruder had some possessions of his. The intruder panicked and ran away into the night. I said to Aaron, ‘What do you think would’ve happened if you had actually hit this guy in the head with your baseball bat?’ No-one can actually give me a straight answer of whether that is considered proportionate and reasonable under the law, because the intruder was not armed and Aaron was. Maybe he would have gotten into serious trouble, and that would have been awful. When you speak to people who are victims of home invasions, one thing that you really notice is the trauma that is inflicted on them, because no longer do they feel safe in their own home. In fact Aaron told me that he is moving house. He does not want to live in that house anymore.

Another victim of home invasion was also here at Parliament this morning: Carly. She had a person come into their home and steal their possessions while they were home and again, in a similar scenario, does not feel safe in her home. She and her partner are actually leaving the state. What an awful, awful state of affairs. They were lucky, though, because there have been other cases, and I will give you another case. In Queensland a while ago there was a father with his wife in a home. Many of these cases are families. He heard noises in the night, and he went to check on his infant daughter’s bedroom. There was a man standing in his infant daughter’s bedroom. It turned out that this man was a convicted sex offender, and there was an altercation. I think every father can sympathise with this man. He fought the intruder. What happened was the police arrived – the police were called, again, in this case – and the men were having an altercation. The intruder died – he had a heart attack – and this man was charged with murder. So a man defending his infant daughter in his own home against an intruder was charged with murder. He served time in remand whilst he was awaiting trial. Eventually his case went to trial and he was acquitted, but not because the self-defence was reasonable and proportionate; he was acquitted because a medical expert said that the heart attack was due to the intruder’s methamphetamine addiction. He had a bad heart, and it caused him to have a heart attack.

There was another case which was only brought to my attention through the media this week. A Victorian man was in his home. Two men came to his home not to rob him but to do him harm – to hurt him. There had been some incident over girls or something, but they came around to hurt him. Of course there was an altercation. At some point this man, who had two intruders in his house with the intent to do him harm, picked up a knife from his kitchen, as many people would, in a panic. He said in the court transcript that he did not actually remember doing that. This is common to victims of crime and victims of trauma – they forget things. He picked up a knife, and he stabbed one of the men and killed him. He is currently serving a sentence for murder in a Victorian prison.

I think, and I think that all Victorians think – or most Victorians at least think – that for people in their homes defending themselves against these criminals, the government and the law should have their back when they fight back against crime. It happens too much at the moment that criminals act with impunity and then when people fight back they are worried whether they are going to get in trouble with the law. I do not want them worrying whether they are going to get in trouble with the law. When people fight back against criminals, I think that we should stand with the people fighting back. If a criminal gets hurt by a home owner because they are creeping around in their house at night trying to steal their possessions or cause them harm, well, I do not have much sympathy for them. They have invaded someone's home. I think most people would not have much sympathy for them. Possessions are one thing. If someone steals your possessions, you can claim them on insurance and stuff. But I am a father; I have got three kids. If you have got an intruder in your home – most Victorians I think do not know the law and do not even think about the law. When someone comes into their house and they want to defend their family, they are not thinking about the law, they are thinking about defending their family, and I think that that is all they should be thinking about. It is sad that it happens in the first place.

I have constructed this motion in such a way that it is very minimal. It is not an inquiry that is going to embarrass anyone. It is asking the Victorian Law Reform Commission to review these laws. We know the commission can do this because they did this once back in 2013. I am asking them to do it again because I think that, with the number of home invasions at the moment and the number of people that are suffering this, sooner or later we are going to have a situation where – I think most people in Victoria sympathise with people defending their homes – someone is going to get in trouble with the law. I want to make sure that the law has their back, that the law looks out for them.

I cannot understand why anyone would not want to look at this and make sure that our laws are fit for purpose, because that is our job as members of Parliament, to make sure the laws are fit for purpose. There are a large number of crimes happening at the moment. Sooner or later someone is going to fight back. The courts or the police or whoever might think that they went too far, and they will get into trouble. I want to stop that happening. It is about time that Victorians stopped being scared and we started making the criminals scared.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:24): I thank Mr Limbrick for raising this issue, and I have enjoyed lending my mind to the dilemmas of this issue. The first thing to say is that the government does not support the motion, and my first reaction is to think of the safety of anybody involved in some kind of altercation or home invasion or in a circumstance where they are protecting their own property. I can appreciate that there is an awful dilemma in trying to strike the right balance with people's right to defend their property or people's right to be safe in their home in the context of a crime being underway. I would like to acknowledge the motion, and it is a very interesting space. It is certainly not my space of expertise, and I know that the motto in my family is 'No property is worth your life or serious injury'.

It is important I think to note that our self-defence laws are proportionate and well established, so I thought I would have a look at part (2) of Mr Limbrick's motion, which calls to consider the approach to self-defence laws in the UK, including its Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, of which I have got a little excerpt here. Unless I am missing something, it does not look extremely different to what we have got already. But I was, I must say, as an aside, a bit shocked to note that UK laws have not been automatically rewritten to eradicate the exclusion of women via sexist language. Just as an example:

... the defence will be available to a person if he honestly believed it was necessary to use force and if the degree of force used was not disproportionate in the circumstances as he viewed them.

In Victoria that would mean that law does not apply to me but does apply to men, because we have changed our legislation to eradicate all of that language. But that is certainly an aside. Just in reading

this, looking at the language and then looking at what the current laws are here in Victoria, they do not seem to me to be that much different. Anyway, we will have a look and see what we come up with here.

As I said before, Victorians should always call Victoria Police in an emergency or where there is danger or threat to safety. It is not worth risking your own life and your own personal injury for property. Certainly, as a woman, I was definitely taught to just go, get out of the road: 'Don't be interacting, because you're going to lose out here.' I thought there was some research that showed that if you actively defended your property you were more likely to be injured, but I could not find anything on that, so I am not going to argue that, Mr Limbrick. But I too know someone that I used to work with – it would have been 35 years ago – who defended a home invasion at his place in Preston, actually, and he was injured and died as a result. We were all very shocked. He was just literally walking out the front to defend his place. So it kind of backed up the messaging that my parents told me: do not interact, just stay safe.

The Crimes Act 1958 was updated in 2014 to simplify the law in Victoria, which provides that a person has acted in self-defence if they believe the conduct is necessary to defend themselves and it is a reasonable response in the circumstances as they perceive them. Of course the first segment to that, belief that the conduct is necessary to defend oneself, is based on well-established common law and captures the broad way in which self-defence works. The second limb to that is that the conduct is a reasonable response to the perceived circumstances. You can imagine that could be very well explored in a police interview and certainly well explored if it travels as far as a court case. Also, it must be aligned with other Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales, and fact-based, on the recommendation of the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) in its *Defences to Homicide: Final Report*. These laws are broad and recognise that a person may act in self-defence in a wide range of circumstances, including to protect property, themselves or another person. These laws may well apply in cases involving home invasion or trespass, taking into account the specific circumstances and the proportionality of any response. Noting the basis of Victoria's self-defence laws in longstanding case law, and on the recommendation of the previous VLRC report, further review of these settings is not currently a priority of the government. Police have the training, the equipment, the powers and the support to respond to emergencies and unlawful behaviour.

If we look, in closing, at some of the activities that we have prioritised in recent times around community safety, you only need to have a look at the bail reforms that we have recently put in place. We are cracking down on high-harm repeat offenders by delivering the toughest bail laws in the country, and we have introduced Australia's toughest bail test for serious crimes like home invasion. Since our March bail changes, which ensure community safety is put first in all bail decisions, the remand rate has increased. We said we would overhaul bail laws in two stages. The first reforms passed in March, and they are already delivering results. As at 6 August the youth remand rate was up more than 26 per cent and adult remand was up 27 per cent. Just in closing, we do have the largest police force in the country, backed by our record \$4.5 billion investment.

All Victorians have the right to be safe and feel safe in their homes, in their communities, at their businesses, at university, at school and in their relationships. As with many issues that confront this chamber, there is a dilemma in getting the balance right. I think it appropriate that we regularly explore the pros and cons in any of these kinds of dilemmas for exactly the reasons that Mr Limbrick has raised them, so I do thank him for bringing this forward and asking us to look at it. It is always a challenge to get it fair and just. I will leave my contribution there and look forward to listening to the rest of the debate.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (16:34): I rise today to speak on this motion put forward by Mr Limbrick, and I thank him for being prepared to bring this motion forward for debate, because it is certainly an issue I hear about often as I travel around my electorate and I know he too is confronted with this issue regularly in the south-east and more broadly across Melbourne and Victoria. My Liberal and National colleagues join Mr Limbrick in acknowledging that Victoria is in the middle of a crime crisis and that people are scared, people are terrified, in their own homes. As noted in this motion,

(1) there has been a steady increase in the number of reported incidents of aggravated burglary and assault in Victoria since 2018, with a significant increase in the past year, and (2) there is a lack of clear understanding of what protections are afforded to Victorian home owners when defending their home against criminals.

People are scared – scared for their safety, scared for their family’s safety and scared about the impact that these crimes have on their community’s reputation. People are fearful of the possibility of legal action, both civil and criminal, if they react to an intruder in their own home. This is because the current self-defence law of the Crimes Act 1958 does not fully address individual protections against criminal and civil action, especially when you are looking at the Crimes Act under section 322N, which has the abolition of self-defence at common law. The fact is that section 322K of the Crimes Act leaves self-defence open to the possibility of litigation if one chooses to act against a threat, because the point of proof is subject to a person’s interpretation when it comes to conduct and a person’s response in the circumstances as a person perceives the threat coming towards him or her. Then the person also needs to prove that there is an imminent threat and that the force applied is reasonable and proportionate to the threat. How can the average person out there comprehend all this stuff in a split second? A person has broken into their home with some sort of weapon to commit a criminal act, yet you expect this person, in reacting, to think logically: ‘Am I acting lawfully, proportional to the threat coming towards me?’

This is why this motion is so important. We need to review and make it clearer for the average person out there to be able to understand what their right is in relation to self-defence in their own home when an intruder has broken into their home with a criminal intent to either assault them or steal or damage their property. In other words, perception and interpretation will differ from one person to another in similar circumstances – depending on variables such as a person’s abilities and how they perceive the threat – and on whether the conduct is reasonable and proportionate when it comes to classifying whether an action is self-defence. What this motion is seeking is to establish clarity by reviewing self-defence law in Victoria in order to provide Victorians with some clear borders and boundaries when a person acts against a threat in their own home. For self-defence law to provide a person with some protection, an average person should not have to worry about the conduct he or she applies against a person who breaks into their home intending to commit a criminal offence and readily capable of applying force to cause serious injury to the person.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Trung LUU: It could be possible, Bev; we have seen many cases in those situations. A person should not worry about all those things when determining whether an act is self-defence. A victim should not have to second-guess their actions or conduct against an intruder who breaks into their home. Remember, this is your own home that the person is breaking into. That relates to many things, whether it is home invasion, aggravated burglary or robbery or other serious indictable offences such as the intention to kidnap, abduct or possibly murder. We have seen many cases on the news where there is an abduction, whereabouts unknown, and you find the body somewhere, weeks down the track. This motion is not seeking to rewrite or amend the definition of the point of proof for self-defence. It is merely calling the Attorney-General to ask the Victorian Law Reform Commission to review self-defence law in Victoria when reasonable force is applied in a self-defence situation. As I stated earlier, Victoria is experiencing a crime surge. People are scared for their own personal safety and their family’s safety. There is news headline after news headline of intruders smashing their way into people’s homes, stealing personal belongings and cars, yelling, threatening that they are going to kill the victim while waving a weapon such as a machete, and we have heard that over and over again in recent times on the news.

While scared for their lives, people are also scared of the implication of legal litigation if they act or respond to the home intruder during the home invasion or aggravated burg. The reality is the vast majority of Victorians do not know what reasonable force looks like – simple – nor can they explain that the conduct of force needs to be proportionate to the threat at that time. This motion seeks merely

to review the law and define the course of action that you can take as self-defence while the trespasser is in your home – stealing, threatening to kill you or attack you – to protect you from legal litigation, to make it stronger for the victim. This motion seeks clarity around self-defence law, simple as that, and we view it as a logical proposal.

Many Victorians would never have imagined the wave of aggravated burg and home invasions we are experiencing at the moment and over the years under this Labor government. Mr Limbrick mentioned the law was last reviewed in 2013. This law needed to be strengthened then to combat the aggravated burg that occurred in Victoria. The state was very different 12 years ago when the law was last reviewed, and it was reviewed under the previous coalition government. It is time now for the Labor government to take action and help to protect Victorians and support this motion. The situation Victorians face in the crime surge under this Allan government needs strengthening to combat the 20 or more aggravated burgs occurring in Victoria each and every day that we are experiencing at the moment. On this side we understand and have empathy with Victorians who are fed up with the constant violent stream of aggravated burg and home invasions and the weak response from the current Allan Labor government.

Mr Limbrick rightly pointed out that under the Labor government there has been an increase in the number of reported incidents of aggravated burg and victims sustaining injuries. Here are some statistics which will benefit the house in relation to aggravated burg and criminal incidents: crime across Victoria has increased 90 per cent since Jacinta Allan took over as Premier two years ago, resident aggravated burg has increased 34 per cent since Jacinta Allan became Premier and the rate of aggravated burg has more than doubled since 2016. This comes at a time when the Allan government is cutting almost \$50 million from the Victorian police budget and when Labor is stretching police resources to breaking point. Police have flagged the rise in home invasions by youth offenders, who are responsible for about half of reported aggravated burgs.

With my last minute I just want to emphasise that it is important that we support this motion to show people out there that we are making legislation and we are reviewing our current law to modernise it, to support them and to give them comfort that their actions in their own homes toward protecting themselves, protecting their family and protecting their property are in good faith when in self-defence.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (16:44): I rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's self-defence on premises motion. The Greens will not be supporting this motion today. I will start my contribution, though, where most Victorians are: nobody should feel unsafe in their own home. A small number of people carry out aggravated burglaries, and when it happens, it is terrifying and the impact on victims is profound. We share that concern deeply, and we appreciate the conviction that Mr Limbrick is bringing to this debate.

I will step back and look at the crime statistics. The Australian Bureau of Statistics actually reports that Victoria had a sizeable decrease in overall crime rates last year. Quoting from their report:

There were 61,559 offenders proceeded against by police in Victoria in 2023–24.

As a proportion of the population:

... the overall offender rate in Victoria decreased from 1,111 offenders in 2022–23 to 1,008 offenders per 100,000 persons aged 10 years and over in 2023–24.

Specifically, if we consider the categories of aggravated burglary and assault in terms of the steady increase that the motion refers to since 2018, the official record paints a more complex picture. Victoria's Crime Statistics Agency shows that, yes, overall criminal incidents rose in the 12 months to March 2025, with theft a major driver and family incidents also climbing. In terms of the comparison, though, to 2018, that year in 2018 actually marked historic lows for burglary and break and enter, and it was notably lower than 2016. When we look further at longer term trends over the past two decades, it shows us that this category of offences has been steadily declining since 2004. So on the numbers, we are safer than we were 20 years ago.

Turning to the lack of clarity that the motion speaks to for householders, as has been remarked in the debate so far, Victoria already has clear, modern statutory tests for self-defence. Under section 322K of the Crimes Act 1958 a person is not guilty if they believe that their conduct was necessary in self-defence and their conduct was a reasonable response in the circumstances as they perceived them. In fact the act expressly recognises defending another person and protection of property. And in family violence contexts, section 322M goes further with regard to family violence, acknowledging that a person may reasonably act in self-defence even if the harm is not immediate or if the response exceeds the force used against them, because that is often how family violence manifests in the real world. So these tests are available, they are clear and they are relatively modern.

The Greens' justice platform prioritises investing in prevention and evidence over the theatre of law and order. The Greens support investing in what actually reduces crime: stable housing, youth services, mental health and drug treatment, and community-led justice reinvestment. Preventing crime is more effective than flashy headlines. Victims must be supported, and reducing access to weapons and availability of weapons across our communities is part of what helps keep us safe. The Greens have also long backed reforms that better protect victim-survivors who act in self-defence in family violence situations, one of the very rationales behind Victoria's existing provisions.

I will also note that the Victorian Law Reform Commission is not a limitless resource, and right now it is working on two complex, high-impact projects that I want to highlight: (1) reforms to family violence intervention orders for children and young adults, ensuring continuity of protection when a child turns 18 and strengthening children's participation rights; and (2) the impacts of artificial intelligence in courts and tribunals with real implications for fairness, transparency and privacy across our system. The VLRC does really important work, and we do not want to see a situation where it is overloaded or delays work or where other important topics cannot get the scrutiny that they need because of referrals from this place.

In closing, I just want to say that fear thrives when the public conversation is reduced to slogans. The existing statutory test already maps pretty closely onto common sense: act if you must, and your response must be reasonable in the circumstances as you saw them at the time. If people do not know that or understand that, we should – as we always should – increase funding to legal aid and community legal centres so that it is explained clearly and that information is available to community members should they need it. We should also really consider continuing trauma-informed training for police, prosecutors and the bench to ensure that the law is applied fairly and consistently with regard to people's experience. This approach would be cheaper, faster and safer than the options that are put forward in this motion, so the Greens will not be supporting this referral today.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:49): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's motion. Firstly, I say that we in the government particularly acknowledge the concerns that many in our community have about the impact that particularly burglaries, aggravated burglaries, have on those who experience them. I know that it is a concern for many in the local community that I represent, and I want to at the outset of this speech particularly thank for their efforts organisations like Neighbourhood Watch Bayside, who do a great job in engaging with the local community about their concerns and then advocating to us as elected representatives about the concerns in the local community.

We know that Victorians have been concerned about community safety. That is why the government has acted to introduce a range of changes particularly to our bail laws, to introduce some of the toughest bail laws in the country, to make sure that particularly those who are involved in aggravated burglaries and other serious high-harm offences have new standards applied to bail decisions, and community safety has been made an overarching objective of bail laws. We passed those laws in two tranches. We have also done other things in the community safety space to quickly address the high harms that have been experienced in the community. Things like the work that we have been doing to ban the sale and then ban the possession of things like machetes – the first such machete ban in the country –

I think demonstrate the government's commitment to making sure that we are doing all the things that are necessary in terms of keeping our community safe.

On this matter it is very clear that Mr Limbrick is very genuine and heartfelt in his advocacy, and it is clearly an issue of great importance to him. However, the government is of the view that our self-defence laws are proportionate and well established. I think the overarching message that we have in this debate is – and I was standing with the Attorney-General on the weekend when she took some questions about this at a press conference, and her message was very, very clear: in an emergency, call Victoria Police. Victoria Police is the best place to seek assistance when there is danger or a threat to your safety, and that should be absolutely the first port of call.

The existing law in this space, specifically the provisions of the Crimes Act 1958, which were updated in 2014, governs the act of self-defence. It makes it clear that a person will have acted in self-defence if they believe that the conduct is necessary to defend themselves and it is a reasonable response to the circumstances as they perceive them. I think both of these things are incredibly important and provide a degree of certainty and comfort to those who are facing threats to their safety. The first limb, the belief that the conduct is necessary to defend oneself, is a very well established common-law principle and captures in a broad way how self-defence works. The second limb, that the conduct is a reasonable response to the perceived circumstances, is where Victorian law aligns with other jurisdictions and is in fact itself based on the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission in its *Defences to Homicide: Final Report*. These laws are broad and recognise that a person may act in self-defence in a wide range of circumstances, including to protect property, themselves or another person. Whilst we cannot give any direction as to where a particular law applies in a particular case, these are the laws that would and could apply in cases involving trespass or home invasion and would take into account the specific circumstances and the reasonable response of a person in the circumstances as they perceive them, and they have a distinct proportionality as part of any response.

We do have, in these laws as they currently stand, both the benefit of longstanding case law and the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and therefore further examination of the question is, obviously, at the moment something the government does not believe to be a priority. We are focused, as I said earlier, on making sure that we are updating the laws that are required to keep the community safe. We are investing resources in Victoria Police so that they can continue to do the work that they need to do to help keep Victorians safe. We do understand, as I said at the start of the speech, that there are concerns about community safety in the community. We do listen to the community when they tell us concerns such as this, and the government's response has been tough where it counts and fair where it matters. On top of the bail laws, which we have debated extensively in this place in the last period and where the government has acted strongly and toughly, we have introduced the machete ban; as I said, we are launching our trial of state-run electronic monitoring for youth offenders to ensure compliance with bail conditions and to deter further offending; we are giving police powers to deal with extreme, radical and dangerous participants in public demonstrations; we are bringing in reforms to stamp out racism and discrimination and protect vulnerable groups in our community; and we are continuing to make the biggest investments into our number one crime issue, and that is family and domestic violence.

There was \$1.6 billion of investment in the 2025–26 budget to keep our community safe – record investment that the government is making – and new laws to strengthen the system. That is where our focus has been, because it is the view of the government, based on the evidence that is presented to us from the community and based on the evidence presented to us through an examination of the crime statistics and other matters, that our target must be cracking down on high-harm repeat offenders in the system and making sure that the toughest bail test exists for crimes like home invasion. Since the changes that came through the Parliament and were debated earlier this year, in March, there has been a shift in the number of alleged offenders who are being held on remand. Since March there have been about 26 per cent more alleged offenders on remand in the youth system and about 27 per cent more

in the adult system – evidence that the action that we have been taking is having an effect on the highest harm offenders.

We are investing in police. We have currently the largest police service in the country, with record investments in police. I just want to put on record as part of the debate today the appreciation that I know all members have, particularly here on the government side, that our police do an exceptional job of putting themselves on the line day in, day out, and keeping our community safe. We are making sure that our police have got the capacity, they have got the resources, they have got the training, they have got the equipment and they have got the skills that they need to act as required when our community needs them. Victoria Police are providing this 24-hour, seven-days-a-week police response to all Victorians and doing everything they can. When someone does feel unsafe, when there is a threat to their safety, our overarching message in this debate is that if a member of the community is concerned that there is a threat to their safety in their homes, their first action should be to dial 000, get Victoria Police on the line and get the emergency response from law enforcement first responders. That is the best way to make sure that the emergency support, the police response, is available to them. There is always, unfortunately, danger and harm in the community, and the government, through the measures that I have outlined here and more broadly, are taking the action that we can to keep our community safe.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:59): I am pleased to rise and speak on Mr Limbrick's motion. There is no more natural right than the right to defend your own home and your own family. I think anyone out there who lives in a home would understand instinctively that the right to protect yourself and your loved ones from an intruder, particularly an armed intruder, is the most natural instinct anyone can have, and it is a right and instinct that no-one should genuinely interfere with. It would be utterly wrong to do so. We are told to wait for police; we are told to trust police. But the world has changed. Ten years ago, when these laws were last looked at, we did not have the volume of aggravated burglaries we have now. We certainly did not have the number of aggravated burglaries where weapons such as machetes and other things were used or were threatened to be used and were actually used in practice. It is a manifest increase in the risk to your home and to your family, and the community feel it and know it. They cannot be gaslighted into believing it is otherwise.

We are also told to trust the judiciary, but the common person has every right to be concerned and a bit jaded about trusting the judiciary when those who commit aggravated burglaries are released on bail again and again and again, yet in the same breath we are told to just trust the judiciary and that these laws have precedents and have been used. Well, I do not see how anyone could go before these laws and say, 'I trust the judiciary to measure whether I used reasonable force or not in the middle of the night to protect my family, in the dark perhaps, where I cannot even see what they are doing, how many of them there are, how far they have got into the house or whether they have reached my children's bedrooms.' How do you know? You are meant to trust, but the only person we are not allowed to trust is the person protecting their family. They cannot be trusted, and they must trust everybody else except themselves. We must trust everybody else except the person being attacked. It seems wrongheaded and the wrong way around. There are no boundaries for the perpetrator; the perpetrator has no limits imposed upon them. The only limits we are imposing are on the victim and his or her family. That is where the limits are being imposed.

This is not a discussion about whether there are better methods to reduce crime. There is absolutely nothing mutually exclusive about measures to have youth intervention programs and children's courts and programs where young people can have more productive purposes and outcomes. There is nothing mutually exclusive about having more police officers on the beat and people having clarity about what they are allowed to do when they are protecting themselves in the moment. It says to me that the government are not committed to your safety and they are not committed to the sanctity of your home. When someone enters your home, in that moment tough bail laws are pointless, early intervention is

pointless and a compassionate magistrate is pointless. The police – if you have time to call them, which you do not – are not there. No amount of investment into policing helps you in that moment.

This is a discussion about a specific point in time. The fact that this debate is necessary at all is obviously a self-evident reflection on the failure of the government to keep the community safe. What we should have is clarity, and that clarity should reflect a modern outlook on what is reasonable and appropriate in defending your family from an intruder. It does not mean if they have got a knife, you can use a knife; it does not mean if they have got a machete, you can go down the back shed and get your own machete – it is not that sort of equivalence. It has got to be real contextual equivalence. In the dark of the night, if someone is in your house and you do not know how many of them there are and your children and family could be at risk, you should be able to take all precautions necessary, all actions necessary, to protect life and limb for your family.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (17:04): I rise to make a brief contribution on the motion brought by Mr Limbrick before us today, and I would like to start by acknowledging the very real and very legitimate concerns within the community at the moment in relation to crime and aggravated burglary. In particular, the rates of home invasions occurring while a person is present have considerably increased in the last several years. To have your house broken into is obviously already absolutely awful, but to be at home at the same time is an utterly terrifying and traumatic experience and something that I actually experienced myself a few years ago. Whilst I believe that Mr Limbrick absolutely has the right intentions in the moving of this motion, I cannot support something that shifts the burden of safety from the community onto individuals and certain residents, because proposals like this can send a message to the community that to take the law into your own hands is an acceptable public policy response, and that is a recipe for the escalation of violence in many circumstances and not one of safety, which we are all striving for. We should be careful about reforms that normalise taking violent action in the name of defence.

I would agree with Mr Limbrick's suggestion that there does seem to be a bit of a lack of clarity in regard to the application of Victoria's legal protections for self-defence. Mr Limbrick has raised cases of individuals who, despite being ultimately exonerated, have had to endure lengthy legal processes. However, this does not mean the laws themselves are not clear; it means the application and public understanding of them are. As others have raised in the debate today, the Crimes Act 1958 already provides exemptions for individuals engaging in necessary and reasonable self-defence. Further, it specifically recognises the defence of another person and, importantly for today's debate, the protection of property. There have also been examples raised of people who have chased intruders out of their own homes with weapons, with the question then being: what kind of force would they be legally allowed to use? In those cases the law worked as intended. Violence was neither reasonable nor necessary. If violence was used, I would certainly hope the question of whether it was reasonable or necessary would be asked.

Laws that lower the legal threshold of using force can normalise violent escalation in the home and remove opportunities for de-escalation or nonlethal responses. It is important to note this has the potential to increase lethality in volatile relationships. Defending your home assumes the intruder is always an unknown outsider, but it is important to note in this debate today that in instances of intimate partner violence the attacker often lives in the home. These so-called castle rules were not built for that dynamic, and they can produce legal uncertainty about who the aggressor is and who must be the person retreating. This has the potential for victims having the legal requirement to retreat and being criminalised for actions taken to escape their own abuse.

As with all discussions on crime, I must emphasise that changes like the one proposed today and the so-called tough approach that the government is continuously working towards are short-sighted solutions that ultimately only exacerbate our problems. If we truly want to address crime, we must address its causes at their very roots. As others have mentioned, properly investing in mental health, youth services and housing is ultimately the best way we as a society can work to truly prevent crime.

To conclude, I understand and appreciate Mr Limbrick's concern for community safety, and I share that as well. However, we diverge when it comes to the best way of addressing it. Ultimately the goal should be to reduce violent escalation of crimes in the first place. I implore the government once again to properly address prevention. For these reasons, as stated at the outset, I will not be supporting the motion today, but I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing it to the house.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:09): I rise to speak to Mr Limbrick's motion 1027 in his name, and I want to congratulate him for bringing this motion to the house, because it is an important issue. As he has said in the media, his constituents have raised concerns about home invasions with him. If you just look at the statistics for aggravated burglaries, they have more than doubled since 2016. These are extraordinarily alarming figures, and as we see every day, the police are stretched to be dealing with aggravated burglaries, carjackings or other very serious crimes. Dare I say it, now that we are the protest capital of Australia, the number of hours police are required to be monitoring those 500 protests or whatever we have had over the last couple of years is just a disgrace, actually.

But I want to move back to this motion, because it is asking for a review from the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and it is a sensible move given where we are at. It is just asking for a review. I do not understand why those opposed would have a problem with this. I want to go to part (1)(b) of Mr Limbrick's motion:

a lack of clear understanding of what protections are afforded to Victorian home owners when defending their home against criminals ...

I think this is a really important aspect. We have got personal security guards cruising around streets. We have got councils hiring security guards because there is not enough police resourcing. This goes to the extent of the crime that is in our community and in our suburbs and what is happening in our homes. Can I say I understand this, and I said to Mr Limbrick when I saw him on Sunday after he had been speaking to the press, 'I really do support you in this, because I am one of those victims of an aggravated burglary.' And what protections would I have? A constituent actually gave me a baseball bat following that – dropped it off to my office – and I have that under my bed, but that is a fat lot of use if I am sound asleep and somebody is standing over me. That is what happened to a constituent of mine who woke up while she and her partner were in bed, and she was confronted with a balaclava guy with a machete in hand. She thought she was going to be raped or murdered; it was terrifying for her. Thankfully, that was not my experience, but my experience was that this guy that tried to get into my home got on the roof and tried to get into an upstairs window. He fell off my roof and sat there for 20 minutes or so holding his arm. I do not know if it was broken or not, because he came around and tried to kick my door in. But what would have happened if he had got in? What protections would I have had if I wanted to defend myself? Why should I not be able to protect myself?

We have seen the horrific story just this last week with the son and father out in the western suburbs, both stabbed. That son heard his father, and he came to his aid. They were both very seriously injured and ended up in hospital because somebody had come into their home, into an elderly man's home. This is just so wrong. It is so wrong because it is so frequent. For me it is very personal because it has happened to me, and I have sleepless nights – when I hear something in the night, I go, 'Oh my God, is somebody trying to get into my home?' And that is despite the security I have had to upgrade with new gates and cameras, which the Parliament has not had to pay for – I have had to do that. Well, every Victorian who is feeling like me has had to do the same thing, and this is where Mr Limbrick's motion goes to: we need this review, because at what point does an intruder have a right over that home owner? At what point does somebody like that son who was trying to defend and assist his father have a right to defend his father and his father's home?

That is why I say that this is a very sensible motion that I would hope all members would support – although we have heard that some are not – because this crime crisis is not fiction; it is happening, and it is frightening. For those victims who have experienced very horrific circumstances, I think they

deserve to have this review. They deserve to understand their rights. I am reminded that your home is your castle – people do not have a right to come into your home and for you to have no say on that intruder. The Attorney-General said, ‘What’s proportionate?’ Well, of course you are not going to have massive force, but if you need it – I mean, what was that son meant to do or that woman who was lying in bed with somebody with a machete standing over her in Sackville Street, Kew? It was just horrific for her. I spoke to her, and she really was so terrified. I know how terrified I was, and I had nothing near that experience.

I congratulate Mr Limbrick for this, because I often reflect on: ‘My God, what if that guy had got into my bedroom? What would have happened? You are completely defenceless, you are completely vulnerable, and what do you need to do?’ After the event, I thought, ‘Well, I’ll get a cattle prod.’ As kids, my brother used to run around with a cattle prod and try and prod us. Well, it is an illegal weapon – I could not get a cattle prod.

David Limbrick interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: It is a prohibited weapon, Mr Limbrick, that is right, which I did not know until after this. I thought, ‘Good God, why couldn’t I have a cattle prod to fend off these people?’ It was very kind of the constituent to drop off to my office a baseball bat, which is under my bed, as I said; it is there.

I say again I think this is a sensible motion that needs to be reviewed. There is far too much crime going on in this state. It is just out of control in proportion to the civilised society we should be able to live in. We are living in a lawless state at the moment, with the government having no answers to be dealing with these very serious issues that are impacting people’s health and wellbeing and their livelihoods.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:16): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion brought by Mr Limbrick in regard to our self-defence laws, and I do want to thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this motion. I know it is a well-intentioned motion and it comes from a place of genuine concern, and I know Mr Limbrick has had meetings with constituents coming to him to express genuine concerns over their safety in terms of their homes and I know Mr Limbrick has had a consistent record of advocating for constituents in regard to self-defence, and this is not the first time we have debated something like this in this chamber. Matters around self-defence have been brought into this chamber by Mr Limbrick before, so again I just want to acknowledge Mr Limbrick’s genuine advocacy in this space. But I will say up-front that the government does not support this motion.

I just want to also say that I have listened to Ms Crozier, and I appreciate where she is coming from. It is not nice ever to have someone break into your home. You are feeling threatened, you are feeling unsafe, you are feeling attacked and under siege, and it is natural to want to defend yourself in those circumstances. It would be very terrifying, so absolutely, Ms Crozier, you have my full sympathy and understanding about the predicament you found yourself in – and anybody who has found themselves as a victim of crime my similar sympathies and sentiments go to as well. It is not nice; it is always terrifying.

But where I guess it is a challenge is if you do have some kind of personal device or whatever, however you want to describe it, whether it is a cattle prod or a baseball bat or some other such thing. My concern is if you are in a position where you are using something like that – and I think, Ms Crozier, you were right when you talked about how, if you are asleep and someone is standing, you are not going to have the chance to grab your baseball bat anyway. But if you are fortunate enough to be able to access whatever protective thing it is you have got, whether it is your cattle prod or a baseball bat or whatever it is – some other thing – you have to have some level of confidence that you are going to be able to overpower your attacker and protect yourself. If someone is affected by drugs, with some particular drugs some of these people can have superhuman strength – it is incredible. This is where I speak as a woman: if someone is a big, large, strong man, even though I am pretty physically fit – and

people know my propensity to lift weights – I would still worry about the capacity that I would have to defend myself against the force of an attack, whether it is a knife, a gun that is being pointed at me or whatever. The reality is that oftentimes it has happened that people have had a weapon to protect themselves and it has been turned on them and used against them. So I guess the thing is – and it does go to what Ms Crozier spoke about – that unfortunately, whether we like it or not, there are people in our society who will do bad things, and it does not matter what we do to dissuade them.

But what we do know is early intervention works. Where there is a risk analysis around a person who might have a propensity to do bad things, what the research tells us is that early intervention strategies actually work more than having to deal with it at the pointy end we are talking about today and the examples Ms Crozier talked about. What we really want to be doing is preventing people getting to that point in the first instance. That is where I think the real work can begin, looking at those early intervention strategies: why are people doing break and enters? Why are people doing the crimes they are doing? And there are a range of reasons for that. But I personally do not want to be in a position where I am having to defend myself like that, because I just would not have the confidence that I would be able to maintain it and defend myself properly. They would probably get me in the end.

The thing is, when we talk about defence – I think the second part of Mr Limbrick's motion was about looking at our self-defence laws – I go back to my criminal law days when I was lawyering and learning about this stuff. Some of the laws are complex in this area, but what is pretty consistent is if you are defending yourself and you injure someone or kill someone, the courts have to determine – it is their role to look at all the circumstances – what happened to the person and, if they came into your house and you killed or injured them, whether your conduct was reasonable. There was also another test around proportionality: were your actions proportionate to what happened? It is about the facts and circumstances that happened at the time when you were defending yourself.

The Crimes Act 1958 was updated in 2014, which simplified the law. It provides that a person could use that self-defence defence if they believe the conduct was necessary to defend themselves and it was a reasonable response in the circumstances as they perceived them. So the law has been updated in regard to that, and like I said, the courts will look at the circumstances around the attack and then what your response was to that. The first limb is the belief the conduct was necessary to defend oneself, and that is a well-established common-law principle, and then the second limb is whether it was a reasonable response proportionate to the act. Nobody wants to have to then go through, after the fact – after you have been attacked in your own home, for example – a criminal trial. The whole thing is just distressing. It would be really nice and better if there was an early intervention strategy so you do not get to that point and you do not have to be faced with those sorts of circumstances. I think early intervention strategies are a better approach and a way of trying to head these things off before people become desperate to the point where they are breaking into people's houses or breaking into cars and the like.

I will leave my contribution there. I know Ms Watt wants to say a few words on this. Again, the government will not be supporting this motion.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:23): Thank you very much for the call to speak on this motion moved by Mr Limbrick, which I know he has a deep and abiding passion about. You have been a very vocal leader on this, and I know that the motion before us comes from a place of concern for Victorians, although I will say that the current self-defence laws we have in Australia are fit for purpose and in this state have long been established as proportionate and measured in their approach. The laws are broad and recognise that a person may act in self-defence in a range of circumstances, including to protect property, themselves or another, and this may well apply in cases involving home invasion or trespassing, taking into account the specific circumstances and proportionality of any result. But can I just take a moment to reaffirm that all Victorians should call the police, when they are able to, if there is a danger or threat to their safety, as these behaviours are risky and certainly there can be some unintended harm both to them and to others. Police certainly have the training, equipment, powers and support to respond to emergencies and unlawful behaviour.

Any victim of crime, I will say, is one too many, and that is why we will continue to crack down on offenders with a range of new laws that back the work of Victoria Police. When it comes to justice reform and keeping Victorians safe, it is a Labor government that gets the balance right. On top of this, we have introduced the toughest bail laws in the country. Our dedication to community safety is also why we have introduced the machete ban, and it is why we have launched statewide electronic monitoring for youth offenders to ensure compliance with bail conditions and deter further offending. It is why we are bringing in reforms to stamp out racism, discrimination and hate and protect minorities and vulnerable groups in the community. We have seen that some of the most heinous acts of racial vilification in Australia's history have happened recently and right here, with neo-Nazis staging demonstrations around our city and spreading their hateful messages – messages that actually threaten the safety of people of colour in our community – so I was really pleased to see decisive action against this sort of hate and all the things that we are doing to protect people being targeted by these groups, because Victorians deserve to feel safe in their own state, wherever they are. I will just say and reaffirm that racially motivated crimes committed by these really vile individuals absolutely will not be tolerated in our state. There is more that I could say –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Sheena WATT: Yes, I accept that people have been threatened in their homes, and I am also saying that Nazis have threatened to violently hurt people of colour and that that is unacceptable behaviour. I am not going to hear it from people that are not actually from the group whose own safety is being threatened by these groups. Threats on their life are just as meaningful and just as devastating and tragic in our community.

So what I will say is that there is of course more that we can do and there is more that we should do, but I believe, and I am very happy to say, that the reforms moved by the Allan Labor government in this place and that are yet to come are evidence that this government is not just talking but is taking coordinated and targeted action to build a safer, fairer and more inclusive state. I will not hinder this work by supporting this motion, and I reaffirm that I and this side will not be supporting the motion before us. I thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to other members. I am going to resist the urge to talk about the hate-fuelled demonstrations in our streets only in the very recent past, because I will need a little bit more time than the time afforded to me on the clock.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:28): I thank everyone who contributed to this debate today. I would like to address a couple of points. Firstly, the government talks a lot about vulnerable groups in society. Well, I will tell you about a vulnerable group at the moment, and it is people in their homes. We need to protect this vulnerable group, and there are many people who are suffering because of this. The other excuse brought up by the government was about the Victorian Law Reform Commission and their limited capacity. I accept that all resources are limited, but my understanding is that there are only two active inquiries currently being run by the VLRC, and one of those is in the process of finishing up right now. That is the inquiry into AI in courts. They have closed submissions, and they are writing their final report as we speak.

Another thing that was mentioned, I think by Ms Ermacora, was around it not being worth risking your life for property. Yes, I agree with that. You can claim things on insurance. But you know what is worth risking your life for? Your family. I think that every Victorian agrees with me on that. When you find someone in your home you do not know their intent. You might see them rummaging around trying to steal stuff, but initially you do not understand their intent. But you know that whatever the reason they are there, it is not good. It is not going to help you, and it is not going to help your family. You have to act. People in these situations, as Ms Crozier pointed out, panic. When someone is in your home, you panic, and sometimes you might pick up a knife or whatever it is. I think that Victorian law should make sure that it always has these people's backs. The government was saying it is not a priority to review this law. Well, what I say is that it should be a priority.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (17): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rachel Payne, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (18): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

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

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:37): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.***Statements on tabled papers and petitions*****La Trobe University***Report 2024*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:37): I rise this evening to make a statement on a report. I am pleased to speak on the La Trobe University 2024 annual report and to reflect on the vital role that this institution plays in my community and more broadly across Victoria. La Trobe University is not just an educational landmark in Melbourne's north-east; simply put, it is a place of opportunity, inclusion and innovation. I know this from personal experience, because while I was raising my two young children, which was some time ago, I completed my masters degree in law and conflict resolution by coursework. I had moved interstate with my young family and was navigating the challenges of study, parenting and a new community all at once. It was a challenging but also an exhilarating time. The rapport I received from the La Trobe staff at the university, the flexibility of the programs and its delivery of the curriculum and the encouragement of the community made all those years possible. It was not without its challenges, though.

It is a privilege to represent a region that is home to such a remarkable university. The Allan Labor government's investment in La Trobe University continues to deliver transformative outcomes. The state has helped to establish the Australian Centre for Artificial Intelligence in Medical Innovation. On a slight tangent, a representative recently spoke at the electorate officer conference organised by the Department of Parliamentary Services to help some of our staff better understand AI and the impacts it might have on their roles. The Allan Labor government also has supported the bio-innovation hubs and cutting-edge clinical teaching facilities at Bundoora, Bendigo, Mildura and Albury-Wodonga. This is directly addressing critical shortages in nursing, allied health and psychology. These are all professions that are in much demand in our community.

Our government's renewed commitment to international education will further extend this impact. Through the Yes to International Students Fund, 16 Victorian universities and TAFEs will share up to \$5 million to grow their global reach. La Trobe University will use its funding to connect Chinese students with Victorian startups in an IT and business program in Thailand and to host study tours for students from South-East Asia. These initiatives not only expand Victoria's education presence abroad but also connect our industries to emerging global talent. International education generated \$15.9 billion for Victoria's economy in 2024, and it also supported 64,000 jobs, growth that must be sustained by calling on the federal government to remove caps on international student numbers.

La Trobe continues to lead in equity and inclusion, ranking 10th globally for gender equality in the Times Higher Education university impact rankings. Programs such as the reducing gender-based violence network are improving safety for women in Australia and internationally, whilst the RISE Indigenous pathways program has delivered the largest Indigenous student cohort in the university's history, and that is something to be very proud of.

International students remain central to La Trobe's identity, with students from over 120 countries enriching its campuses. In 2024, 33,500 students participated in career-ready advantage programs, and more than a quarter undertake placements with industry partners including Deloitte, Cisco, Medibank and BioNTech, ensuring graduates are prepared for the jobs of the future.

Accessibility is about more than program delivery; it is also about physical connection. The Suburban Rail Loop will also connect La Trobe University to Melbourne's broader rail network, linking it to key education, employment and health precincts as well as Melbourne Airport. This new orbital rail line will make it easier than ever for students, staff and visitors from across Melbourne and beyond to reach the campus while also creating vibrant precincts and opportunities for housing, jobs and community facilities around the new stations. For my region this is a once-in-a-generation project that will place La Trobe University at the heart of a modern connected city.

The annual report makes clear that La Trobe University is more than a place of learning. It is a driver of social and economic progress in Victoria, a champion of equity and a proud anchor in my community, and I commend the report to the house.

Kongwak Butter Factory

Petition

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:42): I rise today not just to revisit a petition that was tabled here in this place but to give voice to a community that has for far too long been silenced. A small hamlet of 45 people in Kongwak, South Gippsland, locals call 'the valley of peace' is a place where neighbours look out for each other and farmers quietly tend to their land. Although Kongwak are perpetually sidelined and dismissed in the scramble for public resources, they are not complaining.

Were it not for this audacious developer, this overlooked community would more than likely stay out of sight and out of mind, but a \$36 million development changed all of that. The old Kongwak Butter Factory, once a proud symbol of a time when paddock to plate was a rural reality, not merely a TV catchphrase, is at the heart of this proposal. It includes the prospect of 39 cabins, luxury villas, a restaurant and a convention centre approved without community consultation, without VCAT review and without local council oversight. The developer places wastewater treatments on flood plains just 40 metres from the property of Stephen and Lee Storti, owners of the Ferndale organic farm, a place they once planned to stay and die in. This now endangers the farm's organic certification and, they say, their sanity. In fact this proposal will overwhelm this tiny population by 400 per cent, bringing a sewage burden that dwarfs the town's capacity, and it does not stop there. It is an insult to the community's dignity.

The developers initially proposed an entry point through the avenue of honour, a line of trees lovingly planted in honour of soldiers that served that community. After pressure from the RSL the proposal was changed. However, the threat remains as the narrow road needs to be carved wide open to make room for commercial buses. Behind these trees a dam is proposed, blocking a causeway, something farmers themselves are prohibited from doing. This is all in farm-zoned area, yet the developer, with just 36 acres, is permitted to do what others were told would require 100 acres.

This is not only a planning failure, it is a real slap in the face to the community. It is a threat to biosecurity, regional food security and the mental health of an already stressed rural population. The very people this government promised to listen to – regional hardworking families – are being drowned out by developers with high-level connections in a modern-day David and Goliath battle. To

ensure the development's success a former EY director was awarded half a million dollars in taxpayer funds to produce reports to justify this project. To their credit, this tiny town rallied together and petitioned on change.org, garnering over 4000 signatures – only to have them recorded as one single objection. In despair the community came to me. I tabled a petition opposing this development on 27 November last year, with 1165 signatures representing voices far beyond Kongwak. If we truly believed in supporting regional communities, a genuine community consultation would have occurred and people would have been listened to. The artificial lights powering new street lighting, roads and buildings will forever transform this peaceful landscape, disrupting the natural, sunlight-driven circadian rhythms that animals live by and thrive by. The very shape of the land will act as a natural amphitheatre, echoing live music, and late-night guests and partygoers moving between venues and accommodation will disrupt the nature of the place.

I ask all members to consider this: if we silence little communities like this in favour of connected developers, who is next? The people of Kongwak are not anti-development – they support small-scale, respectful proposals – but they are against this development because of its scale and its disproportionate size compared to the town and its character and its destruction of the land and nature around it, the soul of the community. It is time to stop this widespread pattern of decision-making that fast-tracks large development over small farmers and overlooks communities. This is not just a planning dispute; this is a culture that needs to change.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:47): I rise to speak on the Victorian state budget – budget paper 3, 'Service Delivery' – of this year. Specifically I wish to talk about schools funding and all the investments, and indeed I might cross over into budget paper 4 a little bit here as well. In terms of schools funding, this government is continuing to provide under the leadership of Jacinta Allan and Ben Carroll, making Victoria the Education State. We have seen record investment in new schools, we have seen record investment in upgrading our existing schools and we have seen new and innovative ways of teaching, such as phonics, which is already having an impact on our school results.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: Mrs Hermans, you should be applauding the Victorian students for the NAPLAN results that they have achieved this year – not only the best in the nation but the best results in our state's history. That is a huge testament to the effort of Victorian students and the effort of Victorian teachers. Whilst those opposite bicker and whatever they are doing, I for one, and those on this side of the house, applaud our teachers and students today. It is wonderful to have had members of the education union in the Parliament today pressing their case with MPs, and we always welcome that robust and strong feedback.

Indeed we have seen the best NAPLAN results in Victoria's and in Australia's history, but that does not mean that we are resting on our laurels; we are continuing to invest in making Victoria the Education State. There are many, many new primary schools opening across the south-east in the next year currently under construction, including Kulap primary school in Clyde, which will open in term 1 next year; Kala primary school in Cranbourne North, also opening in term 1 next year; and Balambalam primary school in Clyde North, which Mr Tarlamis and I are particularly excited about. In Clyde North we will have a new high school as well, Birranga college. It has been wonderful to go onsite and meet with the fantastic new principal Nick Hamer-Smith and talk to him about what the vision for this new school is going to be.

We had another new high school open in Clyde North just this year, Wulerrp Secondary College, and I mentioned in a members statement this morning the wonderful opportunity to visit Hillcrest Christian College just the other week. From that college, and thanks to some of the roadworks in the area, you

can actually see their enormous gym and shed with a big sign on it saying ‘Wulerrp Secondary College’. On that point as well, it is wonderful to see good independent schools like Hillcrest, Rivercrest Christian College and indeed Clyde Grammar school, which is also in the same area, continue to thrive and continue to expand with significant investment from this government, because this government believes whichever path you choose, you should have the opportunity for a full and good education. Of course that starts at the early stages too. I know Minister Stitt is very passionate about Best Start, Best Life, and that is a significant thing, with free three- and four-year-old kinder providing that opportunity to all Victorians.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: I did, Mrs McArthur. I did say ‘free’. Your grandkids can certainly take advantage of it, just as every Victorian can. I hate to have to explain again the simple concept of how government works to you, Mrs McArthur, but governments on this side of the chamber at least, when we are in government, actually try and do things that benefit Victorians. It is not all just about benefiting your own Liberal mates. But when you are on this side of the house and you have a government that is interested in benefiting all Victorians, that is how you have things like providing free three- and four-year-old kinder to all Victorian families, which is a huge cost-of-living pressure relief as well. We heard Mr Davis going absolutely on and on and on about cost of living this morning. Again, free three-year-old kinder – that is a saving of over \$2000 a year per child. That is huge. That is a really significant investment, and south-east families certainly value it, even if members opposite do not, because once again we see them attacking free three- and four-year-old kinder. What would we see from an alternate Battin Liberal government? Not only would we have that prize goof Mr Davis running things in the upper house, we might also have the abolition of free three- and four-year-old kinder, and what a disgrace that would be.

If we can look at the other end of the spectrum as well, we have free TAFE – Mrs McArthur, you might be interested in that too – providing valuable skills and providing a valuable workforce that our state desperately needs as we continue to grow and as our economic growth continues to outstrip that of the rest of the nation. As we do so, we have got investments in medicinal research and medical research and various other things. I do not have time to go through all of the amazing things that are happening, Mrs McArthur, but you should get on board.

Victorian Auditor-General’s Office

Literacy and Numeracy Achievement Outcomes for Victorian Students

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): I am delighted today to rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) report on literacy and numeracy achievement outcomes for Victorian students. I realise that this report was tabled last year. It is extremely important that we acknowledge the Auditor-General’s comments about education in this state, which, in spite of my opponent across the chamber there and in light of the state budget and NAPLAN itself, is in a state of shambles for many schools. The VAGO report has made a critical assessment of the department’s effectiveness in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Victorian government school students in particular. It highlights a concerning trend of stagnant overall achievement since 2012 and, more critically, a widening achievement gap for Aboriginal students and students experiencing disadvantage. With all the bravado that goes on across the chamber, this report further criticises the department’s current reporting practices, finding that it is not a fair or transparent presentation of students’ skills.

Interestingly, in August last year, the Minister for Education said in a media release:

This year, Victoria’s NAPLAN participation rate was the highest it has been since the first year of testing in 2008.

What a ridiculous statement. With significant increases in migration and obvious population growth in Victoria, it ignores the fact that from 2023 there has been a significant change as well in the

NAPLAN reporting measures. It hides the truth of our education system in this state. If we look at the NAPLAN reporting changes, from 2008 to 2022 results were reported on a 10-band scale. Everybody was familiar with it; we had been using it for years and years and years. But from 2023 onwards, with this government, the transition was to online testing and new proficiency standards. The report format had changed, and results are not directly comparable to pre-2023 reports; results from 2023 onwards will be comparable only to each other. So this reset in reporting highlights the need for the department to establish clear ongoing reporting frameworks for the new proficiency standards.

VAGO made three recommendations to the department, two of which have been accepted, with the last only accepted in principle. They accepted the following: to widen its literacy reporting to include writing as well as reading and that the department's reporting of literacy is too narrow – they actually accepted this; fancy thinking that they could actually take writing out as something that we could test to determine whether our students are actually able to write fluently and correctly – and, secondly, to improve the way they report student outcomes in its performance measures. The issue here is that the department's budget performance measures are not a fair representation of student outcomes. The other concern here is the focus on high achievers. Reporting tends to highlight high-achieving students, focusing on the proportion of students that are scoring in the top two and three NAPLAN bands. This obscures the struggles of those less likely to meet expected levels and those who most need learning support. What would be great with the NAPLAN test is for us to be able to see that data so that teachers and schools can actually implement the things that they need to have changed. As a result they have to do a lot of their own testing. In other countries, like Finland, where they do not even do a lot of testing until students are a lot older, this is putting significant additional pressure on some schools.

There are schools that I know train their students up for NAPLAN, and they focus on it because they know that these results are going to be made public. That is not always the whole point of having a NAPLAN test either, because there are other schools that are having to focus on a number of other things. At this point I would like to throw in there that this state, the state of Victoria, does not have enough select entry schools. In fact if you look at New South Wales, they have something like 24 select entry schools. We only have five, and up until a number of years ago, we only had two, a male and a female select gender school. Absence of reporting on below-expected levels – the department does not publicly report on these, and students who are below the expected level are disadvantaged, and schools and teachers are as well.

I really encourage the government to take another look at NAPLAN and to be a lot more transparent with the results so that we can have better outcomes in our schools.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2024–25

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:57): I rise to speak on the state budget for 2024–25, which raises the budget for train services and public transport in Victoria. Recently the Allan Labor government issued a press release proudly saying that stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade would be completed later this year. The problem is that is more than two years behind schedule, because we were promised that with that upgrade nine train services would be running Monday to Friday to Shepparton by the end of 2023. We were also promised that five weekend services would be running by 2023. So it is hard to see how the government can be bragging about trying to deliver something that is at least two years late. It does say that there is going to be major construction taking place later that year, so it apologises to people that they will be inconvenienced with transfers to buses. But when it goes on to say what it is actually going to deliver, it says extra services will be enabled by the completion of this project, including trains every hour on the Seymour line on weekends and five weekend return services through to Shepparton. The problem with this is the promised nine weekday return services have disappeared off the list of what the government seems to be promising Greater Shepparton. That promise was made by Jacinta Allan herself, that we would have nine weekday return services between Shepparton and Melbourne by the end of 2023. So not only is the infrastructure being

delivered two years late, but it seems to be that the promise to deliver those additional services has also gone by the wayside.

We have traffic lights that were installed in Wyndham Street prior to COVID that still have ‘Not in use’ on them, and the community is absolutely confused by this – this is five years these traffic lights have been sitting there. The government says that they will not get turned on until the actual railway line work is completed, and part of what needs to be completed is the signalling work. I am told that there are only a couple of people in Victoria that do signalling work and that they are so backed up with work that our work could be a long way off. So I would say that is why we are not getting our nine return services: because the signalling work has not been done and still will not be done even when they complete the infrastructure. The government need to actually come clean, and they need to tell the people of Shepparton when they will deliver the nine weekday return services that they promised and when those services will commence. They need to tell us when the five weekend return services will be delivered in full, and they need to tell us when the traffic lights in Wyndham Street will be turned on, because people in the community are not very turned on by those traffic lights, I might say. They want to be turned on by them – they want them to be operating – and they want to see nine services running Monday to Friday and at least five services on the weekend. In fact we could do with more than that.

Talking about weekend services, what we are seeing not only on the weekend but every day is overcrowding of trains on the Seymour, Shepparton and Albury line. The government is not putting enough carriages on the trains. I raised during constituency questions this week an issue that a constituent from Seymour had raised with me, where they caught the 4:36 train home. There were only two carriages on that train at 4:36 on a Sunday. It was the end of the weekend, with people coming home from the footy and people coming home from shopping in Melbourne, and there were at least 20 people in both those carriages that did not have a seat – that were forced to either stand all the way to Seymour or sit on the floor. We are hearing this on a regular basis about the Albury line. It is a very long way to Wodonga and Albury, and people are being forced to stand or to sit on the floor. We are also hearing it about the Shepparton line trains. This government is not delivering the services that the people of regional Victoria deserve. The government actually needs to invest more in regional rail services and less in the suburban rail line and ensure that people in regional areas have access to quality service.

Michael Galea: On a point of order, President, can I just get Ms Lovell to clarify that she is advocating for less services in metropolitan Melbourne?

The PRESIDENT: No. Statements on reports used to be so peaceful and boring. It used to be a beautiful half an hour.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:03): I rise to speak on the government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee’s inquiry into local government funding and services, tabled on 19 June this year. After considering 114 written submissions, evidence from eight days of public hearings conducted across Victoria and months of additional research and analysis, 48 recommendations were made by the committee through this inquiry. Key areas of suggested reform include addressing the deteriorating financial sustainability of local government, improving access to grant programs and reducing the burden on councils established through crafty cost shifting. Yet only 10 recommendations have been supported in full by the Allan Labor government, in many cases only because they tenuously attest that the issues raised are addressed by their existing policies. Victorians know better than to accept this government’s claim at face value, especially when it is so easy to read between the lines of the pithy comments provided. They see that even if some recommendations have been flagged as supported in full or in principle, this government has no intention of taking meaningful action to improve conditions for councils or ratepayers. The dismissal of the findings of this report is

consistent with the government's lacklustre attitude towards the rigorous work produced by our parliamentary committees, an attitude which is not only denying Victorians well-researched policy but hurting them at the hip pocket too.

With parliamentary investigatory committees costing the taxpayer \$5.7 million for 2023–24, one would hope that the government might take on board the advice which they spend so much to obtain. This is not to mention the time, effort and expertise voluntarily provided by stakeholders during the submissions and hearings process, which has also been ungraciously disregarded. This clear rejection of the legitimacy of the needs and claims of local governments and the many Victorians who rely on the services they provide has taken place despite the committee explicitly stating that 'there is significant scope for the Victorian government to improve its consultation and engagement', particularly to better manage egregious cost shifts.

It seems obvious to me that implementing the recommendations established via an inquiry which considered contributions from well over half of Victoria's rural and metropolitan councils and a range of relevant advocacy and support bodies would mark the first step toward improving such engagement and ultimately the operation of local government in this state. However, this government's inadequate response clearly demonstrates that it would rather turn a blind eye to the mounting problems plaguing this vital sector than face up to the issues it has created and accomplish positive change. So I urge the government to reconsider their position of not supporting the recommendations of the local government inquiry, which I was pleased to be a member of, and all the time that was given by fabulous stakeholders and volunteers across this state, let alone the superb professional advice that was given by others in the sector. Please review your objection to the recommendations and get on board to support local government.

Petitions

Honorary justices

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:07): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

I would like to bring the Parliament's attention to a petition by the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices about the critical role of justices of the peace in Victoria. Victoria has a chronic shortage of justices of the peace, or JPs, as we affectionately know them. There are less than 4000 registered JPs in Victoria, and it is estimated that fewer than 2000 are actively performing and witnessing certification services. This is compared to 80,000 in Queensland and over 70,000 in New South Wales.

While paperwork is not the most fascinating of topics, it is also true that it is critical to navigating legal, government, insurance and other systems. When it matters, it really matters. Many people need these documents witnessed during times of acute stress. This might include an insurance claim after your house has been broken into, power of attorney when someone is sick, wills and other matters at the death of a loved one, divorce paperwork or trying to reclaim your security after identity theft.

At the moment JPs can be found in some police stations and law courts. However, some vulnerable people do not feel comfortable in these environments, especially in times of distress, and it is also common for people to be turned away due to the workload pressures. Victorians turn to authorised witnesses such as general practitioners, school principals, accountants or pharmacists to perform these volunteer duties. Many of these professionals are time-poor and not at all trained to identify fraudulent documents. Some refuse outright to witness documents, and others charge exorbitant fees. At some pharmacies you can pay anywhere between \$5 and \$10 per page for witnessing services.

The last thing anyone wants to be doing when they are distressed is finding documents and then having to get them witnessed. If they then make their way to the police station or see the pharmacist and get turned away or cannot afford it, their distress is unnecessarily compounded. It really is not good

enough. Dean Beck JP, who is here in the gallery today with us, is the director of the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices, and he provided a recent example where he assisted a client in his mid-30s who had tragically lost his partner to suicide. The client needed 235 documents certified as true copies for the deceased's superannuation provider. In his time of grief this client was turned away by the local police station and a pharmacy due to their workload. Dean spent 2½ hours with this client. If he had gone to a fee-for-service provider, this could have cost him up to a thousand dollars. I want to thank Dean and I want to thank Rodney Lavin, who is the president of the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices, for their advocacy in this space.

In fact I raised this issue on ABC radio yesterday afternoon, and the talkback lines actually lit up, predominantly with community members who had put their hands up and expressed interest in becoming JPs some months, if not years, ago and have heard nothing since. When we are experiencing a justice of the peace shortage, surely if people are putting their hands up to be contributing their services they should be accepted. This is hard to reconcile. We have community members willing and able to become JPs, ready to do the training, but there is no call back when they express interest. What is going on? Victoria has a population of almost 7 million people. It is clear that 2000 active JPs are simply not enough. Successive governments have neglected to recruit sufficient JPs despite a growing demand for third-party witnessing and document certification. Every Victorian deserves access to these essential services, and they should be provided for free. Our very own institutions require Victorian citizens to provide witnessed documents, yet some are unable to access these services in a timely or affordable manner. I support the petition by the Victorian association of honorary justices, which has been signed by 5739 Victorian citizens and which calls upon the Attorney-General, the Honourable Sonya Kilkenny MP, to recruit 5000 new JPs in Victoria by 2027.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:13): I rise to speak on the petition which has been put before the house today, and I acknowledge my colleague in the south-east Ms Rachel Payne for raising what is an important subject. I acknowledge the input of everyone who contributed to this petition, and at the outset I want to acknowledge the very important role that justices of the peace play right across our community. The examples which Ms Payne highlighted really do reflect that so well. It is an important subject, and it is an important thing that when people do need access to these services they are able to receive them. I acknowledge the challenges that were identified by Ms Payne in her contribution, noting of course that members of the public can come to MPs as well for document signing from time to time. In fact we actually do have in this chamber, as well as an MP, a justice of the peace, Mr Tarlamis, one of my other colleagues from the south-east region, who for a long time, as I understand – before, during and in between his service as an MP – has served as a justice of the peace, and he has often spoken with me about the value of that work too.

I do note as well that last year the Department of Justice and Community Safety, DJCS, completed an extensive recruitment campaign for new justices of the peace, with 800 new JPs being appointed as a result. All of these JPs are now able to provide those services across their local communities, which does, I can update the house, bring the total number of JPs in the state to 3714. We would obviously love for that to continue to grow, which is why I am so pleased to talk about this petition today. We know that they offer services in person or remotely, and many also choose to operate out of document-signing stations, which do provide the community with that reliable fixed point of access to these services. There are 129 such stations across Victoria, and they are scattered in locations ranging from police stations to libraries to community centres and the like as well.

These services of JPs are also supplemented by a significant number of authorised witnesses, which include some that I touched on before but also legal practitioners, medical practitioners, police officers, nurses, accountants, teachers, pharmacists, public servants and indeed MPs. Many of these automatically become authorised witnesses because of their, or in this case our, profession. I do note that a full list of those professions of people who can be authorised witnesses or who do become authorised witnesses can be found on the department's website. The website is justice.vic.gov.au/statdecs.

Recruitment campaigns for justices of the peace are targeted towards LGAs with some of the greatest identified need, considering those existing JP numbers and also the population growth for the area. Once an LGA is identified there is a public recruitment campaign, and successful candidates undertake probity assessments and training and are then considered for appointment by the Governor in Council. The department also, as I understand, regularly engages with JPs to understand the particular demand for services. Any further recruitment is then based on that demand, and any particular focus of that campaign is based on the demand.

With particular interest, or self-interest, in my own region, I was curious to look at the results of last year's campaign specifically as they pertain to the City of Casey, a very significant LGA in my region and also Victoria's largest municipality by population. Just this year as a result of that ongoing work there have been 68 new justices of the peace appointed in Casey so far, bringing that number up to 190. I am sure members will agree that that almost 50 per cent increase is a very significant increase there and certainly sets the groundwork for some more work I hope to see continue in Casey and in the rest of the south-east in time to come.

There are also significant amounts of funding provided in this year's state budget for a number of other measures which do have some correlation, including additional funding for honorary justices as well as the statewide rollout of a remote hearing pilot for bail justices and a number of other initiatives. But with the focus on justices of the peace specifically today, I affirm that I welcome the chance to talk about this petition.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:18): Victoria's honorary justice system is on the edge of collapse and requires immediate action. Victoria needs 5000 new JPs now, and we are nowhere close to that number. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge some people in the gallery, through you, President. We have got Rodney Lavin, who is the president of – this is a mouthful – the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices, up here and a lot of his volunteer colleagues, who do amazing work in the community.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if we actually do that. We do not acknowledge people in the gallery, but you can mention them in your speech without pointing and all that.

Renee HEATH: Sorry, I gestured.

The PRESIDENT: It is not just you, Dr Heath. In recent times everyone has gone open slather.

Renee HEATH: My apologies for being out of order.

The burden of our ageing justice of the peace volunteer workforce is unbearable, and the consequences are far reaching. Successive Labor governments have systematically ignored urgent calls to recruit new JPs even as the need and the population grow. Mr Galea spoke before about the growing number of justices of the peace in Victoria, but it is actually untrue. They stopped recruiting two years ago, and for the past two budgets there has not been a single cent given towards recruiting new JPs. Many Victorian JPs have been volunteering for decades, and undue pressure placed on them is both unethical and unfair. The time for renewal is now. Our JPs are dying off, and they are not being replaced. This treasured, trusted, respected and independent pillar of our legal system has been entirely neglected.

The work JPs do takes pressure off systems that are already under strain, and I am going to talk about two things very quickly in the time that I have. The first one it obviously impacts on is the police force and their ability to respond to the needs of the community. To put all of this into perspective, in Victoria there is a crime committed every 50 seconds, so that means every 50 seconds a police officer has to respond to something in real time – not work on crime prevention, but be there, then and there, every 50 seconds. We have spoken about how Melbourne has become the protest capital. Something like 22,000 police shifts have been diverted in the last two years to protests in the city.

The other system that it impacts is the healthcare system. As we know, there are registered authorisers that can authorise documents. Before I was in here I was in health care, and I was one. I remember

that in between patients sometimes I would come out and there would be a stack of documents. I remember the first time I did it I did not even know how to do it. We quickly googled ‘What do you write?’ and saw it was ‘This is a true and authorised copy’, or whatever it was, and signed it. We did not know what we were doing. Health care and pharmacy are affected by this bill. In this chamber just last year we actually expanded the capacity for pharmacists to not just dispense medication but diagnose UTIs and skin conditions and then prescribe the medications that are needed that are prescription only, and also the pill. The reason we had to do this is because, particularly in regional areas, it is almost impossible to get in to see a doctor.

These systems are under pressure, and it is JPs that are taking the pressure off this system. Without immediate action this profession will soon collapse, leaving an already stretched police force and healthcare system to bear the brunt of that burden.

In the last minute I just want to cover off a brief history of the last 150 years of JPs in Victoria. In 1901 Victoria had a population of 1.5 million, and there were 3500 JPs. Skip forward to now and there is a population of 7 million and there are 3500 JPs. To put that into perspective, in New South Wales per 100,000 people there are 893 JPs. In Victoria that number is just 50. I just want to stop by commending Rachel and commending this motion to the house. I hope it is something that this government takes seriously and acts on straightaway.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:23): I thank Dr Heath for her impassioned support of the petition. In this digital age you would think that there would be little need to sign paper documents, but there are still 580 different legal documents that require signatures, all of which must be witnessed by a legal official. That is why we need justices of the peace. Victoria has a scarcity of JPs, as we have heard, and they seem to be basically an endangered species, much like moderates in the Liberal Party. Victoria has just 3500 JPs, while there are more than 70,000 in both New South Wales and Queensland.

Maybe this is because Victoria allows about 20 professions to witness statutory declarations. A range of health and planning professionals can verify a signing. The list of admissible professions includes patent attorneys and chiropractors. Used-car salesmen are not on the list, but optometrists are – although I do not want to make a spectacle of them. I do not know how the government settled on these professionals, but they are deemed trustworthy. Still, they are not justices of the peace. These professionals are not properly trained to recognise fraudulent documents, and many do not want the extra work. As we have heard, some professionals such as pharmacists even charge for the service, and quite handsomely. This is not ideal. Surely we want the justice system to be low cost and accessible. Justices of the peace never charge. They are volunteers, and they are trained to recognise counterfeit documents. They are an integral part of the justice system, and we simply need more of them.

Often people need documents witnessed at the most difficult times of their lives, as we heard from Ms Payne. An affidavit is needed when you are divorcing, and death certificates must be certified if you have lost a spouse and are sorting out their estate. If you are the victim of a scam and your identity is stolen, you will need a raft of documents witnessed to re-establish your identity. And we all know that ID theft is on the rise.

Have you ever tried to find a justice of the peace in Victoria? You can go to a list published online by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and you get names, phone numbers and emails, and then the run-around really begins. Many people start volunteering as JPs after retiring from paid work, so they are unfortunately an ageing community – and I say that with no disrespect. The Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices estimates that about a third of the JPs on the department’s list are no longer active, and the active JPs are not always available on short notice. Too often you end up ringing people who have stopped volunteering as JPs and are even in aged care or hospitals. In Sunshine there are 27 JPs listed; in Footscray, 42; and in Werribee, 53. But how many are still active? Who knows. Your next option is to visit a police station or library in the hope there is a JP available in-house. So

we are asking people at the most vulnerable times of their lives, people often experiencing loss, to hawk their financial documents around town in the hope of finding one of these rare justices of the peace.

Approximately 350 JPs, or 10 per cent of the total, stop volunteering every year, and the Department of Justice and Community Safety is failing to replace them. New JPs – often older, retired individuals – are asked to complete a 10-week online training course, which we are told is lengthy and complicated. Additionally, the security vetting of JPs is reportedly very arduous. We call on the minister to commit to recruiting more justices of the peace in Victoria to support people who need this vital service. It would be beneficial if the justice department worked with the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices to streamline the training and security clearances of new JPs. I commend the petition to the government.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:27): Victorians desperately need the government to open up training opportunities to increase the number of justices of the peace in Victoria. For over 115 years Victorians have been served by thousands of JPs. They have served the community with dedication and integrity, offering free witnessing and document certification, yet successive Labor governments have ignored urgent pleas to immediately recruit and train a substantial new generation of JPs now and on a regular, ongoing basis.

Volunteer JPs may soon come to an end as numbers plummet to near extinction, according to the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices, the RVAHJ. With only 3715 JPs registered in Victoria, the actual number of active JPs is unclear because many are ageing out, retired or have passed away. By shameful contrast, Queensland boasts 80,000 and New South Wales has 75,000 registered JPs. Meanwhile, in Victoria, serving a state of 7 million residents, the RVAHJ estimates that fewer than 2000 JPs remain active.

In recent years and with a rising population there has been a huge rise in the demand for third-party witnessing and document certification, but under this Labor government the last two state budgets allocated zero funds for JP recruitment – zero. We need immediate action because this trusted keystone of our legal system faces extinction as authorised witnesses from our police, school principals and healthcare professionals, like pharmacists, GPs and the like, are already under even greater stress. In these sectors they are often finding they do not have time and are charging increasing amounts or completely refusing to sign documents for members of the public.

Rodney Lavin JP, president of the RVAHJ, who is with us today in this chamber, has said that many JPs have volunteered for decades and that it is both unjust and unethical to place such undue pressure on the dwindling few. Simply put, JPs are dying and not being replaced. In response to the crisis, the petition we debate today gathered 5739 signatures in just five weeks. The petition calls on Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny MP to urgently recruit 5000 new JPs by 2027, with a sustained commitment to recruit 500 annually thereafter. The government's cost-cutting experiment, expanding the pool of those deemed authorised witnesses, has been a clear failure. This move has severely compromised the integrity of our legal framework. Untrained and unaccountable, these professionals are often pulled from other vital work in the community and often charge arbitrary fees for their services, with pharmacists asking up to \$12 per signature. Even local Australia Post offices charge \$3.50 per page to certify document copies.

Many police stations have discontinued the practice of witnessing or certifying documents due to increased demands on their resources and workloads. Recently, a client sought the services of a JP via the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Find a Justice of the Peace website. Two phone numbers were not answered. The third said that they were not available. The client then went to her local pharmacy and was told she would be charged \$5 per page for certifying copies of her 20-page document. Unable to afford this, she went to a police station, only to be told that they were unable to help her as they were too busy. Exasperated and frustrated, she finally phoned the RVAHJ, who put her in touch with a JP close to her work. This is a prime example of how inefficient the current situation is and how we desperately need to recruit more justices of the peace. I understand how this person

feels, as I have personally had to drive around to get signatures for passport name changes and after the death of a family member.

It is important to note that the RVAHJ regularly receives calls from members of the public who are expressing interest in becoming a JP. This week alone, they said, they received over six individual calls of interest. People are keen and willing to volunteer their time, but they cannot get a clear answer as to when more JPs will be trained and sworn in. Some documents are extremely time consuming and require more time than busy professionals in health and other professions are able to provide. Every Victorian deserves access to the essential services offered by a justice of the peace. Achieving this transformation requires immediate investment in training new JPs. I commend this petition to the house.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:31): I rise to contribute to this debate as well. Many people have outlined the dire shortage of justices of the peace in Victoria. I think every member of Parliament would understand that there is a dire shortage, because we all have people coming into our offices asking us if we are justices of the peace and if we can sign their documents, and we are forever trying to help them to locate a justice of the peace. But when you go to the website on how to become a justice of the peace, what do you find? Even though we have such a dire shortage in Victoria, we find this statement from the department or the minister under the heading ‘Ongoing recruitment of honorary justices’:

We are currently **not** recruiting justices of the peace or bail justices. Recruitment updates will be posted here and on our careers page when available.

This is a ridiculous situation when we do have a shortage. The government must start to recruit more justices of the peace.

I recently had a member of our multicultural community in Shepparton come into my office inquiring about becoming a justice of the peace. In Shepparton we have – as everyone knows, we are the poster child for multiculturalism – nearly every nationality that lives in Australia living in our city. Many of them are new settlers, and many of really are not skilled in English and they are not skilled particularly in our justice system and how to navigate their way through. So it is important that we recruit justices of the peace that can speak to them in their own language and explain to them fully what they need to do and what those forms that they are signing actually mean.

I would encourage the government to immediately open up a recruitment process for justices of the peace and to have a real focus on recruiting people with skills in languages other than English so that they can deal with many of our new settlers in Greater Shepparton and make those people feel very safe and secure in what they are signing because it can be fully explained to them in their own language.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:34): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Croydon train station

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): (1823) My adjournment matter this evening is for the minister for transport in the other place. For many years now the Victorian government has remained committed to the removal of level crossings across the state. This is to improve the safety for motorists, pedestrians and passengers on public transport as well as to alleviate the traffic congestion not only in the present but for years to come. Croydon train station has been one of the many across the state that has benefited from these changes. Delivered in August of 2024,

Croydon station not only had its congested level crossing, which was at Coolstore Road, removed, but the Coolstore Road roundabout was removed and a new transport hub was also constructed. With the completion of works at Croydon station, the Lilydale line became the first train line in Melbourne to be free of level crossings, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide insight into what future steps may be taken to maintain this new infrastructure in coming years, not only in Croydon but across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Eastern Victoria Region roads

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:35): (1824) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, I recently received correspondence from the mayor of Cardinia Shire Council in relation to four dangerous intersections along the Princes Highway between Nar Nar Goon and Longwarry. These impacted Tynong Road, Garfield Road, Hope Street and Abeckett Road. Despite speed limit reductions implemented in 2021 there have been four fatalities and 56 serious injuries since 2012, along with numerous other accidents resulting in minor injuries. Community members along with the council and the Tynong Progress Association are urgently calling for \$25 million in funding from the government to conduct a comprehensive business case for safety upgrades along these intersections. Minister, given the safety risk and significant traffic volume and the projected population growth in this area, the action that I seek is for you to commit to providing the necessary funding to upgrade these intersections.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:37): (1825) My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is that the government publicly commit to fully implementing all 100 recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission's final report. The Yoorrook Justice Commission was established to investigate the systemic injustices inflicted on First Peoples in Victoria past and present, and its final report lays bare the truth of dispossession, discrimination and ongoing harm and sets out a practical, clear and urgent road map to justice. These are not abstract principles. The commission's recommendations span justice, child protection, housing, education and cultural rights. They call for immediate structural change – the kind of change that goes beyond symbolism and delivers on the promise of treaty.

One of the key recommendations of the report is to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, no exceptions; this is supported by decades of evidence and by countless Aboriginal leaders. While Victoria did raise the age last year, which means that 10- and 11-year-old children are no longer locked up in this state, the state continues to detain 12- and 13-year-old kids, disproportionately Aboriginal children, in harmful youth prison environments. Another recommendation urges the government to transfer decision-making power and resourcing to Aboriginal community controlled organisations across child protection and family services. For too long Aboriginal children have been removed from family and culture at shocking rates, a modern continuation of the stolen generation. The report also calls for guaranteed funding to secure land back for traditional owners, to protect cultural heritage and to expand secure, self-determined housing and health care for Aboriginal people.

We cannot cherry-pick justice. Treaty must be built on truth, and truth must be followed by action. It is not enough to say that we are listening; the government must act on what is said. Premier Allan has said the government will carefully consider the recommendations, but consideration is not justice. Aboriginal leaders have done the work. The commission has laid the path. Now we must follow. The action I seek is that the Premier commit to fully implementing all 100 recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission final report in partnership with First Peoples and with urgency. Justice delayed is justice denied, and Aboriginal people in Victoria have already waited far too long.

Southern Metropolitan Region community sport

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:39): (1826) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place. Recently I joined the Victorian Amateur Football

Association, or VAFA, to celebrate 100 years of amateur football. Together with more than 500 of my fellow enthusiasts and supporters of Victorian amateur football, I was reminded of how important community sport is to my community of Southern Metro. These sorts of events are about the sport, but they are just as much about the people behind the sport. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with more information about what the Allan Labor government is doing to support community sport in the Southern Metropolitan Region, particularly as it relates to amateur football.

East Warburton bus services

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:40): (1827) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding the need for additional bus services in East Warburton. I received correspondence from a local resident. He has noticed that many do not tap on when they catch the bus. On a recent trip he counted 26 people who did not tap on. His son also uses the bus to get to training and is concerned that in East Warburton there are only four buses per day. The bus driver was asked why there were not more services to East Warburton, and he said the data says it is not needed because people are not tapping on and inspectors only come once a year. I note one of Infrastructure Victoria's priorities in their 30-year plan is to run more bus and coach services in regional Victoria. The action I seek is for the minister to review this matter and ensure that there are enough bus services in East Warburton to meet the increased demand.

West Footscray transport infrastructure

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:41): (1828) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, although if this is wrong, I would hope that the minister would be so kind as to forward it to the relevant counterpart. Level crossing removals and the flow-on effects of connecting communities have largely benefited the northern and eastern suburbs, and the west deserves some love too. The most recent edition of the *Westsider* includes a love letter from SoWeFo to NoWeFo, or south-west Footscray to north-west Footscray. In this charming letter SoWeFo says:

We're practically strangers, separated by train tracks, traffic, and a whole lot of urban planning oversights. But from down here in SoWeFo, I've been watching you from afar – your library, RecWest, your dining spots, your beautifully evolving, quirky charm of Barkly Street – and I can't help but wonder ... what if?

I cannot help but wonder the same thing. I have previously raised the issue of the dearth of crossings along the 5-kilometre wall of rail in West Footscray. There is but a single overpass linking Sunshine Road to Cross Street at West Footscray station and then a long barrier of train tracks until you get to the dismal Ashley Street underpass, which has no footpath or bike path, is poorly lit, only allows one lane of traffic each way and regularly floods when it rains.

The residents of West Footscray are calling on the government to develop a plan for a safe accessible pedestrian bridge over the rail yards, linking Roberts Street in the south to Barkly Village in the north. This is a very sensible notion, given that Tottenham and West Footscray have been incorporated into an activity centre and are slated for hundreds of new homes in the coming years. A bridge over the rail yards will connect the two sides of West Footscray. Apart from allowing residents in the south to access Barkly Village, the library and RecWest, it will allow residents in the north to access the sporting and recreational facilities at Hansen Reserve, not to mention improving safety for pedestrians, particularly children walking to school. So on behalf of my star-crossed constituents in West Footscray, the action I seek is for the minister to ensure that the program of works for the Sunshine superhub delivers more pedestrian and cycling bridges where they are needed in West Footscray.

Casey City Council

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:43): (1829) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is that she acts on the Casey Residents and Ratepayers Association's written requests to her in correspondence dated 24 June 2025. It has been said before, and I will say it again: justice delayed is justice denied. It has been nearly two years since IBAC released its report into Operation Sandon, which was conducted over half a decade. It detailed findings regarding allegations

of serious, corrupt conduct in relation to planning and property development decisions at Casey council. But if you look at IBAC's website today, you will find that there is no report available, there are no documents and there is no further information.

Not a single charge has been laid by the Office of Public Prosecutions against any of the individuals investigated by IBAC, despite the volume and severity of the allegations made against them. Sandon sullied the reputations of many individuals, who deserve to know whether they will be charged or not. It led to Casey's late former mayor Amanda Stapleton, someone who was loved and respected by her city, tragically taking her own life, having received little to no support from IBAC. It was used as an excuse by Labor-appointed administrators to issue a protocol in May last year that handed more powers to council staff and limits the involvement of innocent, democratically elected councillors in planning matters. It saw the community lose trust in their elected officials at the time, and now they are losing confidence in Victoria's integrity and oversight bodies.

Late last month the Casey Residents and Ratepayers Association, led by Brian Oates and Anthony Tassone, wrote to the state's Attorney-General expressing their concern that the Office of Public Prosecutions' lack of visible progress undermines the integrity of our justice system. I join them in calling for the following sensible actions: (1) seek an urgent briefing from the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the status of any matters arising from Operation Sandon, (2) inform the public, to the extent permissible, of whether referrals from IBAC are being actively pursued and (3) provide an update on the implementation of the government's response to the IBAC recommendations to ensure transparency and prioritisation of public confidence in government integrity. These are not beyond the remit of the Attorney, and I plead with her to do the right thing by Victorians, who look to her to uphold law and order in this state.

WorkCover

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:46): (1830) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action I seek is that the WorkCover system be significantly reformed to stop harming the injured workers that it is supposed to support. Today I have been asked to share Katrina's story at her request. Katrina has dedicated her life to nursing, caring for others with compassion and resilience. But when she was physically injured on duty, the system that should have protected her became an unforgiving predator. Since February 2024 her income has been cut off, and despite urgent medical needs, critical treatment has been denied without explanation. In January 2024 Katrina's GP provided clear evidence of a worsening medical condition, yet the agent refused to acknowledge this or approve appropriate care. Katrina's repeated efforts to have her treatment needs met and her claim fairly assessed have been met with bureaucratic delays and cold indifference, a systemic failure that amounts to active abandonment. Katrina took her case to the Workplace Injury Commission, but instead of a timely resolution, the WIC has been slow to act. For over 15 months her claim has been in limbo. The Workplace Injury Commission recently indicated the matter will go to a medical panel, yet this should have occurred a year ago. The ongoing debate and the delays have caused Katrina further distress and uncertainty.

This story highlights a catastrophic lack of systems in place to support injured workers. While the nursing workforce is crying out for more staff and more support, what have we done to a nurse like Katrina? The right support and early interventions would have kept her at work, preserving her income, her dignity and her wellbeing. Instead the system has failed her. It has pushed her into financial hardship and emotional isolation. Katrina was not just left behind; she was deliberately broken down. Her injury, sustained while caring for others, should have been met with respect and genuine support. The treatment she has had to endure has resulted in further psychological injury. Her experience is a call to action. We must restore humanity, fairness and effective care in workers compensation, ensuring injured workers receive the respect and the support that they deserve.

Beaconsfield level crossing removal

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:48): (1831) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place, and it concerns the recent successful completion of Victoria's 85th level crossing removal, that being at Station Street in Beaconsfield. The sound of ringing bells is no longer to be heard in Beaconsfield following the completion of not just the Station Street level crossing, of course, but the removal of the Brunt Road level crossing just a year earlier. With Station Street now gone and the fantastic new McKenna Drive zooming over that train line, avoiding the heritage railway house following a very successful community campaign, we are going to see an ability to run many more services on the Pakenham line into the Metro Tunnel in fact as a result of this. It is a terrific new bit of infrastructure for the community and, as the south side of that Berwick area grows, putting more pressure on the local area, a very timely investment indeed.

I know that Mr McGowan and I will be very excited to take that new 928 bus extension over the McKenna Drive bridge on a little outing, which we are going to arrange quite soon. We are going to stop at some of the best cafes in the south-east. We might pop into Primary or One Fine Day or even up to Pakenham, and we are going to have the benefit of the new McKenna Drive bridge, that great new piece of local road and active transport infrastructure taking people over the rail line safely, avoiding the very, very low height of the existing underpass that is frankly flood-prone and in a bit of a bad shape. This is a great piece of infrastructure for the local community. It has been an absolute privilege to work with many locals in the Beaconsfield area to make sure that this project has been as responsive to their concerns as possible. It is really important that when we are undertaking these projects we are listening to and working with the community. I really value the input of whether it is the Beaconsfield Progress Association, residents such as Fran or Leanne or many others who have been very much involved in working to get the best outcome and advocating for their community.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: When we go out, Mr McGowan, we will take that bus. We will see the wonderful public toilets there at central Beaconsfield. You can even see them in Berwick and Pakenham as well, and even around Cardinia Road. There are lots of opportunities should you need to go, Mr McGowan, but we will have a great day out together.

The action I seek from the minister is an update on how the McKenna Drive level crossing removal in Beaconsfield is supporting constituents in Beaconsfield and the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Parentline

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:51): (1832) Very timely. Thank you for that. Well, it is another day in this place, and I am not going to let any day in this place go without mentioning something that is very important to my heart and very important to every minister and every member here who happens to be a parent. But even if you are not a parent, you need to care about Parentline regardless. I spoke yesterday about this, and it is no surprise that I am speaking about it yet again today. This is for Minister Blandthorn in her capacity both as Minister for Children and minister for child protection.

At a time in this state when we have a crisis in child care – and I do not need to go into that, because it is self-evident to everyone here what I am talking about – Parentline is the only service in this state that provides a critical service to parents when they need it most. For any children from zero to 18, it is there from 8 am to midnight every day of the week. What this government is proposing to do, sadly – and I hope the minister intervenes, and I call on the minister to reverse this decision – is close it on 31 October. It is a program that costs just \$1.3 million – that is it. It is equivalent to the interest per hour we are paying on our debt. That is what it is equivalent to: 1 hour's worth of interest, \$1.3 million.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: ‘What does it do?’ I hear you ask, Mrs McArthur. This is what it does. It provides one full-time team leader and 15 part-time dedicated, expert counsellors. They are people like psychologists, teachers and social workers, and it is their job to answer those calls. ‘How many calls do they get?’ I heard you say; they get 17,800 calls a year, and this government’s response to that is to shut it down. This is not the first time. Minister Carbines in the other place had a proposal in 2022 to shut it down, then the portfolios changed and Minister Brooks stepped in. Minister Brooks wisely and correctly did a review, and Minister Brooks saved it at that time, so credit to him – credit where it is due in the other place. But here we are again, three years down the line, and unfortunately we are in a crisis situation.

I had the great fortune today of meeting with Magda. Magda is an industrial officer of the CPSU. That is a union, for those opposite who are not familiar with unions these days. They have lost so much contact with the working people it does not matter. The CPSU are interested in workers rights. Magda was very clear to me, and she is an expert not only in child protection but also in parental help. All of those other services that this government are saying can step in, not only are they not being consulted but they do not provide these services. The maternal and child health line does not. That is for zero- to five-year-olds. Kids Helpline, which is based in Brisbane and does not receive a cent of funding from this government, does not help because it is all about kids. The Raising Children Network is online and does not speak to anyone who does not speak English, so that is not a great start.

It gets better. Headspace have a five-week waiting list, so that is no good to us. The Orange Door is 9 to 5, Monday to Friday; that is completely useless. It gets better. Safe Steps is even better because, guess what, they only deal with women, so any men who are parents are struck out, and any parents who are men and men are completely struck out. Sooner or later this government will realise they have to step in yet again and save Parentline.

Queen Street, Avenel, road safety

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:54): (1833) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to initiate a safety audit with the view of lowering the speed limit on Queen Street, Avenel. During the winter break I had the pleasure of meeting with members of the Avenel Active rail and pedestrian safety working group to discuss their concerns with Queen Street, Avenel. The members I met with spoke of concerns about vehicles travelling at 60 kilometres per hour through the township, where residents must cross from the new housing estates to get to facilities such as the post office and the primary school. The Avenel train station is also situated on Queen Street. Travellers need to cross the busy street to reach shops and homes. Members of the group reported to me that the road is frequently used by many cars, trucks, buses and cyclists, including children travelling to and from school. The current speed limit is simply too high for such a narrow road with many different types of road users. With that in mind, the action I seek is for the minister to initiate a safety audit with the view of lowering the speed limit on Queen Street, Avenel.

Vocational education and training

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:55): (1834) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education Ben Carroll in the other place. Victoria is backing our outstanding teachers and has led the nation in VET growth for four years running. Last year over 30 per cent of senior students chose vocational pathways. Can the minister outline the growth in VET enrolment in VCE in Victoria over the last four years?

Community safety

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:56): (1835) My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs but is also of great interest to the Premier, and it concerns harmony in our community. It concerns the decisions made by other governments and the impact on Victoria. What I am particularly interested in is a clear statement from the Victorian government, and not a

statement welcoming the move to laud Hamas and recognise a Palestinian state. This has direct impacts on my electorate, in particular in Southern Metropolitan, with the very challenging situation of many in the Victorian Jewish community. I am terribly worried about the decision that has been made by the Prime Minister, and I want to just quote from an article in the *Age* today:

Listed terror group Hamas has applauded the Albanese government's decision to recognise Palestine, arguing the move by Australia and other Western governments has vindicated its shock October 7 attacks on Israel and commitment to armed resistance.

Rejecting Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's claim that Hamas would be "totally opposed" to the move to recognise Palestine as part of a global effort to progress a two-state solution, one of the militant organisation's top officials praised the government for showing "political courage" ...

I am not sure that I would want Hamas praising me, but it seems they are praising the Prime Minister Mr Albanese, and I think this is of great concern.

Albanese has rejected that argument, telling Channel Seven's *Sunrise* on Tuesday: "Hamas will be totally opposed to this decision.

But when it came down to it, this is Mr Yousef, one of the key officials in Hamas:

Asked whether Hamas believed its commitment to violence had encouraged countries like Australia to recognise Palestine ... Yousef said: "Yes, we believe that the escalation of armed resistance, including the operations carried out on October 7, has significantly contributed to highlighting the suffering of the Palestinian people and the injustice they face."

"Resistance has proven to be an effective means ...

What we are seeing here is a wild decision by the Australian government to recognise Palestine, a very unfortunate decision that will have serious repercussions inside Victoria and inside Australia. The Jewish community are being repeatedly targeted. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs, as we heard repeatedly, would not condemn attacks on the Jewish community and has been very slow on that. But now, with Albo and the federal government recognising Palestine, there are going to be a surge of problems with this, and I think it is very unfortunate. I think the federal government should not have made this recognition, and the state government should in no way support it. I know the Premier has been out supporting it, but she should not have been, and it will not assist community harmony. I think it is outrageous that Hamas has been lauded, and I think it is outrageous that the Prime Minister is now in the position where he is being lauded by Hamas. He has been ticked by Hamas. It is shocking.

Duck hunting

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:00): (1836) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and the action that I seek is for the minister to urgently intervene to stop the Game Management Authority from unfairly and disproportionately targeting licensed duck rescuers, including halting the suspension of rescuers licences, the unlawful seizure of their property and the issuing of banning notices for non-offences. In the past two years the GMA has taken to issuing banning notices to remove rescuers from Victoria's wetlands. Banning notices do not carry the burden of cost and proof, so this loophole is being abused by GMA officers against highly trained licensed wildlife rescuers. One of them, Helen Round, a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action-registered wildlife carer, was assaulted by GMA officers. She was arrested without caution and without being informed of her rights. Her arms were forced behind her back, she was unlawfully handcuffed, her GoPro SD card was seized without any legal basis and she was threatened with destruction of her property. Let me be clear: Helen was not on the wetlands protesting. She was there under the authority of her legal licence and was compliant with the conditions of the Wildlife Act 1975. This was not an isolated incident. Other rescuers have had their cameras unlawfully seized and have been disproportionately manhandled as their licences were suspended on the spot, often for tenuous technicalities such as carrying nets to find wounded birds who are still mobile. This is a targeted, punitive and deeply concerning misapplication of the law by the Game Management Authority.

I raised these concerns in Parliament in April, calling for a full review of the GMA's compliance conduct. Recently Helen received a letter from GMA CEO Graeme Ford, who cancelled her licence for three years based on the observations of officers who did not act on the day and on unsubstantiated claims from shooters, a punishment grossly disproportionate to the alleged offence and suspiciously similar to a previous vexatious case the GMA pursued against her. Yet that case collapsed, with Helen awarded \$30,000 in legal costs – costs that the GMA still has not paid her. Meanwhile the GMA continues to receive \$11 million per year in public funding. They are not impartial and aim to protect shooters. The public expects an impartial and fair regulator, and this unpopular blood sport and the GMA are clearly failing. If this government insists on ignoring its own inquiry and the will of the Victorian people, then at the very least the minister must ensure that licensed rescuers can enter wetlands legally and safely to rescue wildlife maimed and injured by this government's duck-shooting fraternity.

Diwali and Annakut

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (19:03): (1837) My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I would like to acknowledge an event that truly embodies the spirit of multicultural Victoria. Next month a special Diwali and Annakut exhibition will be coming to Parliament House, graciously hosted by BAPS alongside a broad coalition of Indian community organisations. This event offers a unique opportunity to bring the vibrant spirit of those cherished celebrations into the very heart of our state's democracy. Having had the privilege to attend numerous BAPS events, I am continually inspired by the incredible warmth, energy and deep-rooted cultural pride that shines through. The vibrancy, colour and joy that the Indian community bring to our society are truly remarkable. These celebrations transcend festivals. They are powerful expressions of enduring values and heritage that strengthen and enrich our state.

This exhibition will be a vibrant showcase of the Indian community's rich traditions and enduring contributions. It will serve as an important platform to educate so many of us about the cultural and spiritual significance of Diwali and Annakut, fostering greater understanding and inclusion. Equally, it is a moment to recognise and thank the countless volunteers and community leaders who dedicate their time and energy year-round to enriching the cultural fabric of our state.

I must say that the spirit of renewal, hope and community resonates deeply throughout Victoria, particularly in the Northern Metropolitan Region, where our communities are just so diverse. The Indian community is a vital part of what makes Victoria such a vibrant and prosperous place to live. They are innovators, leaders and hardworking families who contribute to the enrichment of our economy, culture and society in countless ways, and celebrations like Diwali remind us all of the diversity that strengthens our state and the values that we all share. The action I seek tonight is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to join me in celebrating Diwali this year.

Maiden Gully Road–Calder Highway, Maiden Gully

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:05): (1838) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to fund and prioritise the upgrade and signalisation of the intersection of Maiden Gully Road and the Calder Highway. In May this year, ahead of the 2025–26 state budget, I called on the government to include funding for two vital intersection upgrades in Bendigo: the Howard Street–Midland Highway intersection and the Maiden Gully Road–Calder Highway intersection. Shamefully the Allan Labor government refused funding for both. It really is astonishing that these two essential road projects, one in the Premier's own seat and one in the Speaker's seat, have gone unfunded by Labor governments for years, even though they are top priorities for the Greater Bendigo City Council.

I have spoken several times in this place about the Howard Street intersection, and in tonight's adjournment I want to highlight the increasing need for action on the Maiden Gully Road intersection. As housing developments boom in West Bendigo and the Maiden Gully area, traffic is rapidly increasing, producing dangerous driving behaviour where residential streets join the Calder Highway,

and there have been numerous crashes along that section of road. There is a serious risk of fatal collisions at these intersections, and addressing this risk must be a top priority for the Victorian government as traffic is about to increase even more. Growing enrolments at the nearby Marist College and Maiden Gully Primary School will continue to increase traffic density, and in 2023 VCAT approved a large retail centre with a supermarket on Carolyn Way, directly opposite the intersection of Maiden Gully Road and the Calder Highway. A local community association was recently told that the centre is on track to open in mid-2026, which makes the road project even more urgent.

It is essential that the intersection is upgraded and signalised as soon as possible, before increased traffic from the supermarket overwhelms the local road network. The City of Greater Bendigo officers say that there have been several attempts to make developers foot the bill for the traffic lights, but the situation is complicated because there are multiple companies working on several small projects, none of which is large enough to cover the bill and recover the costs later. Council officers believe that a coordinated approach between local and state governments is required and report that the Department of Transport and Planning has a preferred alignment for this project and is costing a state budget bid. Signalisation of the intersection is critical for safe traffic flow through the growing residential area, and it is also essential to unlocking further housing developments that are waiting for infrastructure upgrades before they can proceed. Regional Cities Victoria estimated the cost at \$7 million, and this is a project that the Victorian government should be prioritising.

Cannabis law reform

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:08): (1839) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I seek is a response to the final report of the inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023 before the deadline. The final report was tabled on 18 March 2025, giving the Victorian government until 18 September 2025 to respond, a date that is fast approaching. We secured this inquiry late last year in response to the Victorian government's commitment to ongoing discussions with us, experts and the community on regulating cannabis.

Our bill to regulate cannabis would allow adult personal possession of small quantities of cannabis and adults to grow up to six plants of cannabis at home. It would also allow consumption of cannabis not in a public place and for the gifting of small quantities of cannabis. The committee conducting this inquiry spoke with stakeholders and listened to expert advice to understand best practice for regulating cannabis in Victoria. They also reviewed the ACT's positive experience decriminalising cannabis across health, legal and social indicators.

The final report made several recommendations. First and foremost, it recommended that the Victorian government draw on the experience of the ACT in successfully decriminalising the cultivation and possession of small quantities of cannabis and consider adopting an approach in line with our bill. The report also found that cannabis use should be treated as a health issue instead of a criminal one. These findings echo the sentiments of the Victorian government that:

... health-led policies towards drug use yield positive social and economic outcomes, and that law enforcement alone does not address the issue.

Once and for all we must stop the criminalisation of cannabis consumers. We need to reduce harm, reduce stigma and reduce costs. The government now has in their hands an expert-reviewed model for regulating cannabis in Victoria, overwhelming public support and a brilliant case study of success in the ACT. There has never been a better time for change – if not now, then when? Given the government's recent work-from-home announcement that may or may not be constitutional, maybe we can get that same ambition with cannabis – tax it and go for a full legalised market. So I ask: will the minister respond to the final report of the inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023 before the 18 September 2025 deadline?

Mornington Peninsula bus services

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (19:10): (1840) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to update the house on the new cross-peninsula bus service. Last month I joined the member for Hastings in the other place Paul Mercurio to visit one of the bus stops of the proposed route and discuss the benefits of the new service. The new bus, which has been given operational funding in this year's state budget, will connect Mornington and Hastings via Tyabb Road, following consultation last year on a proposed route. The bus will link parts of Mornington Peninsula which previously had no public transport access to each other, making the peninsula more accessible.

Rossdale Golf Club

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:11): (1841) My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is advice from the minister that the potential redevelopment of Rossdale Golf Club, in Aspendale, which has generated significant concerns from local residents and the City of Kingston, will not go ahead. Local residents and local councillors are disappointed to learn that the proposed rezoning process for Rossdale golf course is proceeding without the involvement of Kingston City Council as the planning authority. While Rossdale Golf Club was forced to submit a proposal directly to the Minister for Planning via the priority projects committee due to funding concerns, it is concerning that the original government position to support Kingston City Council's role as the planning authority has not been upheld. Questions arise about the government's actions: why has the government referred this proposal to the Priority Projects Standing Advisory Committee, thereby limiting the input of local residents and the council? And how will the minister guarantee that the community's voice is genuinely heard and respected throughout this process?

Concerns from local residents are that they do not believe rezoning is necessary, and the club does not currently have a confirmed alternative location for its golf course. It believes that there are viable options to ensure its future in Aspendale. The key concerns raised by the members of Save Rossdale and the broader community include a lack of community mandate, as only around 400 members voted for this direction over seven years ago under circumstances vastly different from today. Since 2018 and post the COVID pandemic lockdowns in Melbourne golf has experienced significant growth. Rossdale membership is growing and now enjoys its strongest membership in decades, and this golf course also supports and provides public participation. There appears to have been minimal engagement by Rossdale with Kingston City Council and the PGA throughout this process. Kingston councillors say Rossdale's development is not essential for it to meet state government housing targets, and despite the current board's position, many believe Rossdale can remain a viable golf course in Aspendale with a different strategic approach.

I met with some of the residents last week. Rezoning would result in a loss of irreplaceable green space, with profound consequences for local flora, fauna and even urban cooling. The environmental studies, supported by the minister's office and the council for Kingston, remain incomplete. One wonders how the minister will ensure the protection of the internationally significant Edithvale–Seaford Wetlands and prevent adverse impacts on the local environment, including flooding and the loss of green space and native habitat, and the enjoyment this place provides to residents in the public. There is a real risk that premature decisions could negatively affect these internationally significant wetlands and the lifestyle of Victorians. Does the planning minister know what specific measures will be put in place to manage the increased traffic and congestion?

Community safety

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (19:14): (1842) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to commit to implementing the remaining recommendations of the 2022 inquiry into extremism in Victoria. Neo-Nazis have no place, but yet again white supremacist, far-right extremist groups are openly organising and gathering in our streets, spewing racist poison, spreading fear and threatening our communities. Seeing a rally of

100 Nazi scum walking down the streets of Melbourne over the weekend utterly disgusted me, as it should disgust everyone in this house. But it is not surprising when you look at the history of this country, from the beginning of colonisation to the White Australia policy, to current anti-immigrant, anti-Indigenous rhetoric spouted in the mainstream, to the complete lack of meaningful action from governments in tackling far-right radicalisation in our communities. This is the result.

We and the broader community stand firmly alongside our black and brown, immigrant and refugee, First Nations, Jewish and Muslim communities: you belong here, you are welcome here and we have your back. But, Premier, it is time your government stepped in to stamp out these fascist, extremist groups before their stunts turn into something worse. The 2022 Greens-led inquiry into extremism laid out a clear path forward with 12 recommendations, including taking real counter-extremism measures with genuine funding for early intervention programs and support workers; expanded anti-racism education, particularly for young men prone to radicalisation; and cracking down on these far-right organisations advocating for violence, division and blatant white supremacy. Yet three years later your government has yet to implement all of the recommendations. All the while the fascists grow emboldened. They are now organising a public rally, the so-called March for Australia, on 31 August, the end of this month – an explicitly anti-immigrant hate parade planned to whip up fear and prejudice. Premier, the time to act is now. Implement the remaining recommendations immediately.

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (19:16): There were 20 adjournment matters raised in the house this evening. All 20 will be referred to the relevant ministers.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:17 pm.