



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 9 September 2025**



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

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

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

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

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

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

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

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

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

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

Emma Kealy

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

Mary-Anne Thomas

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

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Party abbreviations

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

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**Tuesday 9 September 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Motions*

**Victoria Police deaths**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (a) expresses its deepest sorrow and heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, who were tragically killed in the line of duty, alongside another officer who was seriously injured and is still recovering, in Porepukah on 26 August 2025;
- (b) pays tribute to their exceptional courage, dedication and sacrifice; and
- (c) honours their unwavering commitment to serving and protecting their community.

Every morning across our state thousands of Victoria Police families begin their day in much the same way: breakfast at the table, a bit of a conversation, a quick goodbye at the door, maybe even a kiss on the way out. From the outside it looks like any other morning, and in many ways it is. But for police families, there is something else: a quiet awareness of what sits behind every goodbye – that once that door closes the person they love is walking into something unknown. This work carries risk. It means stepping into situations that are unpredictable and sometimes dangerous. It is a responsibility that most Victorians will never have to shoulder, and the people they leave behind – their partners, their children, their families – carry that weight too. They carry too the pride of what their loved one does, and they carry the worry. They will wait, they will check the time, they will keep their phones close. They will breathe in when the shift begins and breathe out when it is over. They will of course hope that the day is uneventful, that the work will be safe, that the one they love will walk back through that door at the end of the shift, and most days that hope is realised. But part of the weight of this work is knowing that sometimes it is not, because every shift carries with it the chance of danger. Every day officers are asked to face what others cannot or will not. To put on that uniform is to accept risk, to step forward when others step back, to choose a life in the service and protection of others. That is the gravity of this work. That is what makes them brave. It is also what makes the loss of the lives of two officers so deeply felt, not only by those closest to them but by Victorians right across the state.

Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson knew that truth better than most. For 38 years Neal served Victoria Police with courage, steadiness and a deep commitment. He began his career at Collingwood working general duties on the streets of Melbourne. Later he became a detective, first with the major fraud squad and then the state crime squad. In 2007 he moved to Wangaratta crime investigation unit, continuing his work investigating serious crimes in the north-east of our state. Over those decades Neal earned recognition for his service: a commendation for courage and restraint, long service medals and the deep respect of his colleagues.

But more than the medals, it was the person that mattered. Neal was an adventurer: he loved the outdoors; he found joy in nature. His childhood was spent in the same bushland around Bendigo that I too grew up in. It is a special place, a place that teaches you resilience, strength and a deep love of the country, and Neal shared that joy freely with those around him. In recent years he found new happiness with his partner Lisa. Together they were looking ahead to the next chapter in their lives, filled with travel, shared projects and the quiet, ordinary moments of building a life together – a well-earned future after a lifetime of service, a chapter that should have been written but never will be, and that is a tragedy. I hold Lisa and her children – her kids are the same age as mine – in my heart for the life they were building together and for the terrible injustice they have faced.

Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart joined Victoria Police in 2018. After graduating from the academy he served at St Kilda police station for three years before joining the public order response team. Vadim brought a spark to every part of his life. He was adventurous, curious and full of warmth. He was fluent in French, Spanish, Flemish and English. He had travelled widely – diving oceans, riding his motorcycle across the state, collecting gin from around the world. Those who knew him speak of his joy, his humour and the way he turned colleagues into friends and friends into family.

At his service last Friday I met one of Vadim's friends, Greg, a neighbour of Vadim's partner. Greg came up and stood beside me to share a simple memory that spoke volumes about the person he was. Every time Vadim came to visit his girlfriend next door, he would pop over to say hello to Greg but also to spend some time with Greg's nine-year-old daughter – always taking a moment, always kind. Greg was just one of so many who gathered last Friday to honour Vadim's warmth, his humour and the way he built connections that lasted – honest, loyal and full of heart. Vadim had just bought his first home. He was laying down roots, building a future. That future has been stolen. Vadim leaves behind his parents Carolina and Alain, his younger brother Sacha, his extended family here in Victoria and so many friends – so many friends. He was only at the beginning of his story, a young man with optimism in his smile, adventure in his spirit and kindness in every action.

Neal and Vadim were at different stages of life – one just a week away from completing a long and decorated career with Victoria Police, the other a young man still in the early years of service. But they were united by courage and by a calling to serve – and now, tragically, by sacrifice. They leave behind families whose grief we cannot begin to measure.

We know the dangers of policing have always been real, but in recent years new pressures have emerged. Officers today not only face the traditional risks of the job but also the weight of rising conspiracy and creeping extremism. They do not put on a uniform to referee global conflicts on suburban streets or to argue with misinformation at a roadside stop. They do this work to protect people, to help people, to keep communities safe. And when that mission is clouded by rage or ideology, that risk grows.

We know that this is not just a challenge for Victoria; it is a national problem, indeed an international one. But this is not who we are. Australia was not built on conspiracy or division. It was built on service, on respect, on hard work and on the idea that we look out for one another and care for one another. Those values are stronger than any fringe ideology – stronger than any conspiracy – and they will outlast this moment. They are values we must defend. It is this responsibility we all share, because every community deserves to feel safe and every police family deserves to have their loved one come home safe. We also have a duty to Neal, to Vadim and to every officer who serves to see justice done, to ensure that those responsible are held to account and to make clear that violence against police will never be met with silence or impunity.

We have seen how this tragedy has shaken our entire state, but I want to acknowledge that its impact has been particularly felt in Porepunkah, a tight-knit, resilient community now carrying the weight of something they should never have to endure. It has shaken their sense of safety, disrupted daily life and cast a long shadow that will take time to pass. Our state will stand with Porepunkah today and tomorrow and for as long as it takes.

Just as that community has rallied around one another, so too has Victoria Police. In the days since this tragedy the Victoria Police community has shown exactly what it means to stand together. Officers from across the state have stepped in, have supported one another and have wrapped their arms around Neal and Vadim's families in the best of the police tradition. They have looked after each other. Let us remember they have also continued to look after us. That includes those still on duty, particularly those in Porepunkah and in the north-east, working long days in difficult conditions while still grieving the loss of one of their own.



To every member of Victoria Police, I say thank you for the work you do, for the risks you take and for the strength you have shown through these incredibly difficult weeks. Nothing can undo the loss or take away this grief. But we can say clearly and with conviction that Neal and Vadim's service will not be forgotten and their sacrifice will not be in vain. We will remember their names, we will honour their lives and we will carry their memory with us as both a blessing and a responsibility.

On behalf of this Parliament, our government and every Victorian: vale, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson; vale, Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:15): Today I join with the Premier in this condolence motion for two of Victoria's finest, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal 'Thommo' Thompson, 26182, and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, 44954, and I acknowledge another officer who was injured here in Victoria, who was out there on the front line. Unfortunately this is not the first time we have done a condolence motion in my time here in Parliament for a Victoria Police officer who has died on duty. But I want to remind the house in this speech, as I did then, of the significance of a police number. It is your membership to a new family for life. Still today, when I meet coppers, the first question I get asked is, 'What's your number?' Today we are sending off two officers, numbers 26182 and 44954, Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart.

Today, as a Parliament, we pause in solemn respect to remember and honour two members who paid the ultimate price in the line of duty. These men of service, men of courage, men of dedication to the safety of our community will never be forgotten. In their sacrifice they remind us of the dangers every police officer accepts each and every day. When they put on the uniform they go out without knowing what is going to happen. In their memory we commit ourselves and recommit ourselves to supporting the men and women of the Victoria Police and the families who stand behind them.

It was an honour for me to attend both funerals, two celebrations of lives, and to stand alongside their families, friends and colleagues as we paid our respects. To see the full honours of Victoria Police bestowed upon these men and to hear the tributes of loved ones was to be reminded of the real people behind the uniform. At both funerals Detective Leading Senior Constable Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart were posthumously awarded the Victoria Police Star, recognising service above and beyond and sacrifice in the course of duty. That honour will stand as a lasting mark of their courage and commitment to Victoria.

Detective Leading Senior Constable Thompson devoted almost four decades of his life to the Victoria Police and to policing. He joined Victoria Police in September 1987, beginning with seven years in general duties, as stated before, in Collingwood. He then gave around a decade of distinguished service as a detective in the major fraud squad and the state crime squad, tackling some of the most complex and challenging cases in our state. From July 2007 Neal was posted to the Wangaratta criminal investigation unit. It was here that he became not only an investigator of skill and determination but also a mentor to guide younger detectives, passing on his deep knowledge and steady judgement. In total Neal Thompson served Victoria Police for 38 years. He was within days of retirement, looking forward to time with family and the next chapter of his life. His loss is a cruel reminder of the risks that never leave our police, no matter how experienced they are.

I spoke to many at the service who worked with Neal, from a squadmate of his all the way through to his current posting with Chris Hill. Chris Hill worked with Neal for many years. He spoke of a guy who was dedicated not only to his job but his team, his family and his community. Neal was more than a copper; he was a great bloke. I spoke to Daz. Daz played football with Thommo in the late 1980s. In one of the photos on social media, Daz – excuse all the nicknames – is with Slick and Gary, Daz's brother, and they spoke of this outgoing, amazing bloke who was friendly but tough. He may have been, as the word is used, a bit gruff, but all the boys in the team up in Bendigo loved him. Before joining the police force football was a huge part of Thommo's life, and he played at the Golden City Football Club, where he was a known left-footer. The one common thing was he had no right.

The stories told at the celebration of Neal's life highlighted a guy who lived life to the fullest. I have to be honest, I would love to hear more about the stories that could not be told at the service, not just the ones that were told there, because I am sure there are plenty. Neal is remembered as a loyal colleague, a calm presence and, above all, a man of integrity. His partner Lisa, herself a serving sergeant, and his wider family now carry a grief beyond words. We extend to them our deepest sympathy, and we recognise the enormous contribution made through the support they gave Neal across his career.

Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart will be remembered with a profound sorrow. Senior Constable de Waart-Hottart was a young man whose policing career, though tragically cut short, was already marked with dedication and promise. Vadim entered the Victoria Police Academy in December of 2018. He began his career at St Kilda police station, where he served for three years. In April 2023 he joined the public order response team, a demanding and vital role to make sure we can keep Victorians safe through protecting public safety in times of greatest need. At the time of his death he was on temporary assignment in Wangaratta, serving side by side with his country colleagues. He was just 34 years old. In those years of service, he demonstrated the very best qualities of a police officer: professionalism, courage and an unwavering support for his community.

We heard from Vadim's family, through his brother Sacha, that they were proud to see him serve here in Victoria. Sacha spoke about his brother as having been his protector, and as they got older Vadim went on to be a protector of the broader community. He was a traveller and lived an amazing life for those 34 years. Many at the service witnessed the photos, the stories and the videos of a life well lived. Sacha mentioned in his speech the happiness his brother Vadim had and shared with everyone. He believes maybe it is possible that we only have so much happiness in our life and Vadim was so happy in his 34 years that he had used it all up early. He spoke bravely about the need to never forget Vadim: every rainbow or ray of sunshine is Vadim remaining still with us. His colleagues described him as a man of warmth and humour who lifted the spirits of those around him, and his sudden loss leaves a hole in the heart of every person he served with. We send our condolences to all his colleagues and his family.

The Porepunkah community has had to endure a lot through this. To Victoria Police – I note Wayne Gatt from the Police Association Victoria is here today – we openly say: no matter where we sit in this place, we will stand with the Victoria Police as they go through this investigation to find the person who committed these crimes. Every time the media ask any person in this place 'What is the cost?' or 'Can you continue to do it?' the answer is yes. There must be a commitment that we continue down the path to find the person who has committed these heinous crimes. That would be in honour of those two that have lost their lives.

This was the first time I have stood in a guard of honour, and the one thing that will stick with me forever from when I stood in that guard of honour was walking out of the police academy chapel and seeing the thousands of faces of police who had lost a brother – young, old, senior ranks, new constables, former members and community members who all shared in the grief.

In mourning Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart we acknowledge the profound debt owed to every member of Victoria Police. These officers did not simply wear a uniform; they embodied the values of duty, courage and sacrifice. On behalf of the opposition, I extend my condolences to their families, their colleagues and all who grieve them. Their names and their service will live on in the story of Victoria Police and the memory of this Parliament.

I would like to read into the chamber today the *Police Ode* in honour of two of Victoria's finest:

As the sun surely sets:  
dawn will see it arise,  
for service, above self,  
demands its own prize.  
You have fought the good fight:

life's race has been run,  
and peace, your reward,  
for eternity begun.  
And we that are left,  
shall never forget,  
rest in peace friend and colleague,  
for the sun has now set.  
We will remember.  
**We will remember.**  
Hasten the dawn.

Thank you for your service, Detective Leading Senior Constable Thompson, 26182, and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, 44954.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:25): Our reflections start in the hauntingly beautiful north-east Victoria on a Tuesday morning, 26 August. Country coppers and a member on secondment from Melbourne, professionals doing police work, were actioning a search warrant. Among a team of 10 officers there were a veteran of 38 years service working up until his retirement day, planned for the Friday week, and an officer with nearly seven years service behind him and a long and promising career still ahead of him. In Porepunkah that morning both officers lost their lives in the service of their state, upholding the right, laying down their lives for an oath they swore, which reads in part:

... that I will see and cause the peace to be kept and preserved, and that I will prevent to the best of my power all offences, and that while I continue to be a police officer I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties legally imposed on me faithfully and according to law.

Serving police officers they will remain for all time. Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, aged 34, and Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson, aged 59, represented the very best of Victoria Police, and they have sadly joined the ranks of 175 former police officers to lose their lives in the line of duty.

It is important to read the service history of Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart into *Hansard* for all time. Registered number 44954 entered the Victoria Police Academy on 10 December 2018, was sworn in as a constable on 15 March 2019 and graduated on 23 August 2019. Vadim was stationed at Maryborough police station as a probationary constable from 25 August 2019 to 25 January 2020, and on 27 January 2020 Vadim moved to St Kilda police station. He was promoted to senior constable on 15 March 2023. Vadim transferred to the public order response team, the PORT, on 10 April 2023. He was attached to the PORT on a temporary assignment to Wangaratta when he was tragically killed while performing policing duties near Porepunkah on 26 August 2025. He was awarded the Victoria Police Star, the National Police Service Medal, the National Medal and the Victoria Police Service Medal.

Last Friday at the Victoria Police Academy chapel Vadim's brother Sacha reflected:

My brother was just this ray of sunshine that he brought to everyone every day ... Since I learned of his passing, it's been raining every day, and today it's beautiful sunshine. Almost no clouds in the sky, which fits my brother's personality.

...

I want you to think of him every time you see a perfect blue ocean, or a perfect blue sky like we have today that mimics the colour of his perfect blue eyes.

I want you to think of him every time you see a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day, or when you see a rainbow.

To Vadim's parents Alain and Carolina, who travelled from Belgium, and brother Sacha, we express our deepest condolences.

Yesterday thousands of mourners, mostly fellow police officers, sadly gathered once again to honour the life and decades of service of Neal Thompson – a fisherman, a hunter and a provider who loved

catching crooks and was good at it too. Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson's service history: Neal John Thompson, registered number 26182, entered the Victoria Police Academy on 14 September 1987. He was sworn in and graduated as a constable on 20 January 1988, and on 6 November 1988 Neal moved to Collingwood police station. He was promoted to senior constable 13 July 1992. Neal commenced at crime command on 11 December 1995, where he moved to a number of detective roles before commencing at Wangaratta criminal investigation unit on 23 July 2007. Neal was awarded the Victoria Police Star, the Victoria Police Service Medal, fifth class, for 35 years service, the National Medal, second class, for 35 years service, the National Police Service Medal and the 35 years service award.

Fellow police officer and friend of 25 years Jason Williams had a message for the blue family, for fellow police members:

Never blame yourself for what happened – we know who to blame ...

Thommo died doing the job he'd devoted his life to.

Here lies one of the most loyal, generous and kind-hearted mates you could ever ask for.

You were like a brother to me, Thommo ...

Life will never be the same without you.

To his partner Lisa, a sergeant at Benalla police station, and her children and their family: the deepest sympathies and grateful thanks of all Victorians are yours. It was generous of you in your grief to sit alongside me, the Premier and the Chief Commissioner of Police to speak of your love, devotion and memories of Neal. I will never forget it. You are brave and inspiring beyond measure, and we thank you for your service to our state.

Our thoughts also go to our injured officer, who despite gunshot wounds and extended hospital care was there to honour Neal Thompson yesterday. We draw strength from your fortitude. We wish you a swift recovery. We thank you for your courage and your devotion to your colleagues and your community.

Lisa read a police poem, *The Final Inspection*. I want to share it with the house:

The policeman stood and faced his God,

Which must always come to pass.

He hoped his shoes were shining.

Just as brightly as his brass.

“Step forward now, policeman.

How shall I deal with you?

Have you always turned the other cheek?

To My church have you been true?”

The policeman squared his shoulders and said,

“No, Lord, I guess I ain't,

Because those of us who carry badges

can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays,

and at times my talk was rough,

and sometimes I've been violent,

Because the streets are awfully tough.

But I never took a penny,

That wasn't mine to keep ...

Though I worked a lot of overtime

When the bills got just too steep.

And I never passed a cry for help,  
Though at times I shook with fear.  
And sometimes, God forgive me,  
I've wept unmanly tears.  
I know I don't deserve a place  
Among the people here.  
They never wanted me around  
Except to calm their fear.  
If you've a place for me here,  
Lord, It needn't be so grand.  
I never expected or had too much,  
But if you don't ... I'll understand."  
There was silence all around the throne  
Where the saints had often trod.  
As the policeman waited quietly,  
For the judgment of his God.  
"Step forward now, policeman,  
You've borne your burdens well.  
Come walk a beat on Heaven's streets,  
You've done your time in hell."

On a personal note, can I acknowledge the dignity, grace and humanity of Vadim's parents, who returned to the Victoria Police chapel yesterday to join mourners for Neal Thompson. To Vadim's colleagues at the public order response team, the PORT: we know you are hurting. You did your duty in trying circumstances Sunday week ago, when neo-Nazis and other thugs brought violence to our city streets. You did your duty with professionalism and honour, and we are deeply proud of you.

To members at Wangaratta police station: to spend time with you Friday a week ago with the chief commissioner and the Premier was a privilege. The members without question went to the aid of 10 of their colleagues pinned down under gunfire, wounded and not knowing what dangers lay ahead. That is courage. Just as we heard many times that Neal Thompson was always first through the door at a search warrant, you did not hesitate to step up and step into the unknown.

I have observed also, when members are lost in the line of duty, it brings back memories for other officers who have endured these tragedies previously – Eastern Freeway and Cochrane's Road, Moorabbin, to name but two. We see you, we are here for you and we thank you for your service. Police Association Victoria secretary Wayne Gatt was alongside chief commissioner Mike Bush in Wangaratta that fateful Tuesday night when he reflected on the fact that police officers around Victoria would keep busy doing their jobs but eventually crash in the quiet and silence of their homes. They will have to deal with the loss of their colleagues, they will hug their loved ones a little tighter – something, sadly, two of our members tonight have missed the opportunity to do forever.

I finish with the words of our chief commissioner Mike Bush, who joined Victoria Police a mere 10 weeks ago:

It's not just the Victoria Police that are hurting at the moment – it's the entire police family.

So often police are the doers; everything often ends at their feet. In operational settings they are the meat in the sandwich, picking sides, maintaining order and the peace. The government, the Parliament and the people of Victoria mourn the loss of our police members. We stand by our members, who keep Victoria safe 24/7. We thank them for their service. We thank their families every day. Vale, Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, and vale, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:34): I rise on behalf of the Nationals and indeed all people from around regional Victoria to pay our respects and extend our condolences to the families, friends

and colleagues of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart. We know that police are critical parts of our communities, and no more so than in regional areas, where they are often the thinnest of thin blue lines, members of our community, members of our social society and absolutely critical parts of particularly smaller communities.

The Leader of the Opposition outlined some of the sporting exploits of Neal Thompson. The Premier has outlined both officers' contributions, and thank you to the Minister for Police for reading in the specifics of their service, which is important to be on the record and to be remembered. We know that every day these officers have been out there serving us, just as every one of their colleagues has. It is easy sometimes to hear stories on the news and move on, but a story such as this from two weeks ago I think touched us all. What really got me this morning was opening the *Age* and seeing the photo of Sergeant Lisa Thompson grieving at the service yesterday for her partner, really bringing home that impact on families. As a police officer herself, clearly she is also putting herself at risk every day.

We know that there are children, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters every day who do not know whether their loved one is going to come home from the job they do, and this tragedy has brought that home for all of us and for everyone connected to the force in Victoria. I say 'tragedy', and it is a tragedy, but also I think that word has connotations of an accident, and this was not an accident. This was a heinous act that we all condemn. Again, I endorse the comments that the Premier made in respect to the ideology and the thoughts that are behind this tragic event.

I extend my thoughts and condolences on behalf of the Nationals to those officers who are still there in the bush today searching. I think regularly in the last couple of weeks we have all thought, 'This is not a search for a missing bushwalker; this is not a search for a child that has wandered off or someone who wants to be found, who will rejoice in being found. This is dangerous work.' It could never be more obvious how dangerous this work will be for those officers who are there in the High Country at the moment trying to find the protagonist of this horrible event. We extend our thoughts to them and our best wishes, and we hope that they can bring this sad saga to a safe end and that no more officers will be threatened in the line of work that they are doing. On that, I extend our thoughts also to the third officer who was injured in this horrible event – we wish him a speedy recovery – and to his family and friends as well.

I extend our thoughts to the Police Association Victoria and to Wayne Gatt and his team, who I know mobilised very quickly to support their colleagues in the north-east, and also to the Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush. As the Minister for Police indicated, he has only been in the job 10 weeks. No chief commissioner wants to deal with this sort of news, but they all know that it is a possibility in their role. To be dealing with it so early is very difficult for him, and we extend our thoughts to him as well.

I have a family member who has been in the force; in fact he would have graduated from the academy at about the same time as Neal Thompson. He had the privilege last week of representing Victoria Police at a New Zealand graduation ceremony. As the Minister for Police indicated, this is not just an issue that affects Victoria Police. My family member sent a video to us of the graduates from the New Zealand Police force performing a haka, and as they did so they held photos of Neal and Vadim. We thank the New Zealand force for that measure of solidarity. It was touching and incredibly moving in fact to see that wonderful haka on behalf of the New Zealand force sending love across the Tasman to us here.

I would like to also acknowledge the people of Porepunkah and the wider Ovens Valley. This has been a very difficult time for them, and it continues to be a difficult time for those communities. We stand with you and understand that this is difficult, that it is tense and that this is going to potentially go on for a period of time, and again we hope that it is brought to a conclusion quickly. I pay tribute also to the member for Ovens Valley, who has been supporting his community through this and standing, as a good local member does, with them.

This is a reminder not just of the sacrifice of Neal and Vadim but of the sacrifice that every officer undertakes for us every day in upholding the right. We say vale to Detective Leading Senior Constable Thompson and Senior Constable de Waart-Hottart. We thank them for their service. We grieve with their family, their friends and their colleagues. We thank every police officer every day for what they do for us.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (12:40): I rise with a heavy heart to convey the condolences, sorrow and sympathies on behalf of my community, the people of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, to Victoria Police and the families of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, who tragically lost their lives in the line of duty in Porepunkah on 26 August.

Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart were part of a group of police who attended a Rayner Track property on Tuesday 26 August. The officers were executing a search warrant as part of an investigation by the Wangaratta sexual offences and child abuse investigation team when they were confronted by the alleged offender at around 10:30 am, resulting in the two officers being fatally shot through a heinous act. A third officer was seriously injured after being shot in the lower body and continues to recover while more than 450 Victoria Police members, including from our own community of Merri-bek, remain seconded in undertaking an active investigation, significant search and manhunt for the alleged offender to help bring this tragic matter to a close.

Since this heartbreaking incident, our state has seen an extraordinary outpouring of grief, love and respect for these two remarkable officers, because along with being police members they were of course sons, brothers, partners, friends, mentors and protectors to many. They were two Victoria Police officers who put on the uniform each day, every day, knowing the risks but believing in something bigger than themselves: the safety and wellbeing of all Victorians. Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart represented the very best of all of us, and their bravery will never be forgotten, nor will their memory be defined by this one moment of tragedy. It will be commemorated through their lifetime of service to Victoria Police, their service to our community and their broader appreciation of making the most of life, as we have heard.

Neal Thompson had served Victoria Police for nearly 40 years. The 59-year-old had spent seven years at Collingwood police station. For the next decade, Neal worked as a detective at the major fraud squad and the state crime squad before beginning his most recent post at Wangaratta in the crime investigations unit, CIU, in July 2007. Having recently built a new home, Neal was planning for his imminent retirement with his partner Lisa – also a Victoria Police member – and planning to spend more time with his family, enjoying the great outdoors and enjoying more of his adventuring.

Vadim de Waart-Hottart had been a Victoria Police member for seven years. Vadim began his policing career at the Victoria Police Academy from December 2018. Once graduated from the academy, Vadim joined St Kilda police station, where he was stationed for three years before joining the public order response team as a senior constable in April 2023. The 34-year-old had previously studied in Europe and was fluent in English, French, Spanish and Flemish and enjoyed travelling the world. He had a passion for scuba diving and motorcycling with his friends and colleagues. Senior Constable de Waart-Hottart is survived by his parents Alain and Carolina, who are from Belgium, his younger brother Sacha, residing in Switzerland, and his extended family here in Melbourne. At the time of his passing Vadim was on temporary assignment in Wangaratta.

Each shift they worked, each call they attended right to the very end was a testament to their courage, commitment and selflessness in wanting to keep us all safe. As this Parliament gathers to reflect on their sacrifice, we say to their heartbroken families: we are with you, and we grieve with you. Your sorrow is shared by every Victorian, every Australian and every person who values the quiet heroism of those on the thin blue line who stand between all of us and harm or extremism. Neal and Vadim's names will never be forgotten, their service will never be forgotten, and their sacrifice will never be forgotten. These sentiments have very much been reflected through the moving funerals, the farewells

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and the outpouring of grief that has been displayed over recent days at the Victoria Police Academy but also through our local communities at many of our local police stations, including mine in Brunswick and Fawkner, through many community members leaving flowers, condolence cards and tokens of appreciation. As the Prime Minister stated:

Every time they put on their uniform, police officers put themselves on the line, for us.

...

... we grieve for two lives that should have been filled with future happiness.

We mourn the joyous memories that should have been made and treasured with others.

We stand with the entire police family, who have lost two of their own in the line of duty.

Detective Leading Senior Constable ... Thompson was a hero.

Senior Constable ... De Waart-Hottart was a hero.

They will be honoured – and remembered – as heroes.

...

With honour they served.

As the Premier has said as well:

What has occurred in Porepunkah is shocking and utterly heartbreaking.

...

Policing comes with danger, and every day, our officers meet that danger with such enormous courage and dedication. This tragedy is a painful reminder of that bravery.

Our Government –

and indeed this Parliament –

stands with Victoria Police ...

And we stand with the community of Porepunkah – who are now carrying the weight of this horrific day.

I acknowledge the work and the support being provided through the member for Ovens Valley as well to his community.

As the Minister for Police has said, we offer and extend our deepest thoughts and sympathies to everyone affected by this horrific crime and our utmost gratitude to the emergency services, who are continuing to respond and investigate. As Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush has said:

This is a terribly tragic event for the police family, not just here but across the country ...

It touches every police member and their families. As Police Association Victoria secretary Wayne Gatt has said, both officers wore the Victoria Police uniform ‘with honour’ and ‘represented it with kindness, compassion and a just heart’.

I would like to also pay tribute to the ongoing work of all Victoria Police officers, including those from Merri-bek in my community, who work across Brunswick and Fawkner police stations 24 hours a day, seven days a week to keep our community safe, many of whom have been seconded to support the search operations in north-east Victoria to bring this matter to a close, including Inspector Andrew Markakis, Acting Inspector Rajitha Tillekeratne, Senior Sergeant Emma Lobb and the entire team at division 4, north-west metro.

On behalf of my community I again extend our deepest condolences to Neal and Vadim’s families, loved ones and colleagues in Victoria Police. We hold you in our hearts, we share in your grief and we honour the memory of these two extraordinary officers, who gave their lives in helping to keep all Victorians safe. Vale, Neal Thompson, and vale, Vadim de Waart-Hottart.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:47): Two weeks ago today two members of Victoria Police went to work and did not come back, and today I stand here to pay my condolences on Detective



Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart. We all remember because we were sitting in this chamber just gone two weeks ago when the messages came through. Initially, we did not know what was happening – shootings, more – and we just could not believe that something like this would happen. I think back to five years ago, when a similar occurrence happened with the Eastern Freeway killings, the night when I got a call from the then minister Lisa Neville to say that this had happened and she was heading out, and we lost four of our own – four members. This is a very, very different circumstance, when somebody went out to kill those that were doing nothing other than serving us, serving their community – a murderer, a killer. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, we just cannot stop until we find that individual.

It is difficult for all of us to comprehend what has gone on and what has been left behind. They were two people at very different ends of their lives, although Neal, still with so much more left – 59, about to retire, three days off retirement, young children – lived life like there was literally no tomorrow. If you think about both of them, there were so many similarities. They both loved adventure. Neal loved to hunt, to fish, to shoot – just living life, a guy that enjoyed a joke. Vadim was very similar. He tried everything – diving, riding bikes, motorbikes. You think about someone like Vadim that came from Belgium to make Victoria his home, to join Victoria Police, and then going after only seven years, not able to give the rest of what he would have been able to potentially give not only to policing but to a family that he never had the opportunity to have.

One of the reflections for me – being able to join the Premier, the Minister for Police and the Leader of the Opposition in the honour of attending both of the funerals – was that they were two characters larger than life. Vadim spent three years in one of my local stations in St Kilda, and I heard the memories when I went down on the Friday to talk to many of the members. One of the first things that Sergeant Kim Bramwell said to me was, ‘You know what, St Kilda is a great station. We hardly have any members leave. At the moment we’ve got really, really high turnover, and I’m glad we do because I couldn’t bear to have all the members that had worked with Vadim working now.’ The fact that many members that are there did not know him meant they were able to offer that support to the others. She also shared a number of really good memories about Vadim, and a number of police colleagues did as well.

You would have all seen the painting of Vadim. That is a really interesting story, because the first day that Kim attended the station and started work, she thought, ‘I’m going to clean up the office and clean everything.’ She found these two paintings and she thought, ‘What am I going to do with these? Should I throw them out or should I keep them?’ For whatever reason, she decided to keep them. There were a number of times when she was going to throw these paintings out. She never knew who was in the picture with one of those paintings. It was painted by a young girl experiencing mental health traumas, and she painted these pictures of two police officers. When Vadim passed, the next day the other police officer sent a message to Kim and said, ‘You know what, that picture was of Vadim.’ She kept that picture not knowing who it was of. So that picture now has been passed on to Carolina and Alain to be able to take back with them.

Nigel McGuire White, who was the local area command at the station when Vadim first joined, shared a number of stories in terms of what Vadim was like. He was a joker. He was pretty ambitious, but he was pretty aloof. It was interesting, both Neal and Vadim did not like paperwork. They hated paperwork; they just loved catching crooks. When Nigel went and spoke to Vadim in the watch house, they had a chat and he said, ‘Well, great. What are you looking at doing here?’ and Vadim said, ‘Yeah, I like it here, but I’m looking at potentially the AFP. I’ve got four languages, so I’m looking at potentially some international work.’ Nigel said, ‘Don’t get ahead of yourself, buddy. You know what, the AFP are just the plastic fantastic. We’re here; we do the real work in Victoria Police.’ I think he learned that, and he went on to be part of the public order response team thereafter.

Both of them were absolutely focused on their jobs but also focused on their friends. I think that came through in terms of what we learned from both of the really beautiful services that we got to experience. For Lisa it is very, very difficult for her in the job. As she said, ‘How does one continue when your

life partner was three days away from retirement? How do you carry on?’ But she knows that is what Neal would want her to do. Neal would want us to all remember the good times and the celebrations of life that he had. It is the same with Vadim. Vadim’s brother Sacha said some beautiful things, as did also Alain and Carolina.

Can I just finish by saying, as many have said today, that there is nothing quite like the work of Victoria Police, because Victoria Police go to work every single day to protect us and what we do. They do not know what is behind that door; they do not know what they are going to confront. Sure, most days are great days, but they do it because they love the job and they are focused on what they do – that is what they signed up for. It is really, really tough, what we see. I think in recent years police have had a really tough time, because we have seen what has happened in the job and a lot of people have blamed police in terms of what they have had to do.

What has really been probably the only beautiful thing out of all of this is the beautiful wishes of the public, who have come together and understood what police actually do and the sacrifices they make. Every one of our stations has had flowers and memorials and dedications and beautiful wishes – and probably too many doughnuts and everything; that is what police tell me. They are over all of the food that they are getting, but they are getting such beautiful, beautiful wishes. I think that is important.

Police, as I say, have I think one of the toughest jobs in the world. We have got to back them. For you, Wayne, and for your members, it is tough, and you do it, and we just thank you for what happens. It is horrible to have to thank you at these times. We should be thanking police each and every day for what they do. To Police Legacy, to the Blue Ribbon Foundation, to police veterans – Karl David, who I sat next to, said it is one thing to thank somebody in the job, but a retired cop, who sometimes people do not remember, is also someone who has given service. We have got members here today like the member for Benambra and our member for Berwick and a number of members in here that have served. We thank you for your service and what you have done.

As I finish I just say to the families that are grieving at this particular time: we are with you. We thank you for what you have been able to do to give your members to us to keep us safe. We will not stop until the killer is found. To the people of Porepunkah: hopefully you will be able to get through things in this difficult time. To the member for Ovens Valley: thank you for what you have done as well. Victoria Police: thank you. To Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart: vale to both of you. May your memories be a blessing.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (12:57): On 16 August Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, two police officers with courage beyond measure, made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty when their lives were brutally taken from them. I stand here to express my deepest condolences to their loved ones, colleagues and every police officer touched by this tragedy, and I pay my respects to the third police officer, who was injured and is still recovering. On behalf of the Monbulk community, I would like to send our thoughts and condolences to the community of Porepunkah, so deeply affected by the horror of the events that took place. I know this will leave an indelible mark on them forever.

It is beyond heartbreaking that two dedicated officers working every day to keep our community safe will never return home. Their families and loved ones will never see them, hold them, laugh or cry with them again. There will be no more adventures or shared experiences together. Their futures have been stolen from them. It is profoundly unjust and cruel. For those who experienced or watched any part of the two funerals of these officers, it was impossible to not be deeply moved and share the pain, the grief and loss that their loved ones and friends were feeling. When a life is extinguished so quickly, so brutally and so senselessly, the shock reverberates far and wide and across time, touching many beyond that person’s own circle of family, friends and colleagues.

We all feel a profound sense of injustice that someone’s future can be wrested from them in such an act of violence. For Neal Thompson it was on the cusp of his retirement, just as he was getting ready

to hang up his uniform and spend some well-deserved time enjoying life with his partner Lisa and her children. Vadim de Waart-Hottart's life was taken from him during his prime. He had so many years ahead of him, which he should have been able to enjoy but now never will.

I have kept in touch with a number of police officers across the Dandenongs over the past two weeks, and needless to say, the impact of this tragedy has had a profound impact on each and every one of them. Many have travelled north to assist their fellow officers over the past fortnight. This has hurt them all, and I know I can say unequivocally that the thoughts of everyone in this place are with them.

Senior Sergeant Cass Forbes just returned from working in Wangaratta for the last week and told me that the impact on Neal's partner and stepchildren was devastating to see. She feels so deeply for Vadim's family, who had to travel such a long distance after receiving the tragic news. She said the police service across that area will never be the same and a lot of surviving members present may never return to work again because of what they witnessed. She concluded that as a blue family, police officers will honour Neal and Vadim and be there to support their families forever.

The trauma of an event like this will continue for many years to come, just like the Russell Street bombing, which is nearly approaching its fourth decade. Constable Angela Rose Taylor, the 21-year-old police officer with the brightest future ahead of her, the dux of the police academy and the first female officer killed in the line of duty when she died of her injuries from the bombing, is still grieved so deeply to this day by all who knew and loved her. The death of Neal and Vadim has brought back the memories of Angela's death again. Her nieces, one of whom is my son's fiancée, feel profound sadness that they never had the chance to get to know their beautiful aunty, a victim of a senseless and cruel crime like this. The grief Angela's family feels has transcended time. The grief that Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart's loved ones feel will also undoubtedly be present with them for all their years to come. Since 1989 a memorial run-walk has been held in Angela's name around Albert Park Lake, and it continues to be held in her honour and for all Victoria Police members who have lost their lives serving and protecting our community. I had the chance to join them last year on that walk, and I plan to do so again next year with the family. This time, though, there will tragically be two more officers added to the list of those who have fallen in the line of duty. And when officers die in the course of their work, it serves as a stark reminder to us all that every time they don their uniform and go to work to keep us safe, they risk their safety and lives to do so. That is the definition of 'courage'. And for that we are eternally grateful and forever indebted to them.

Some of the most important interactions that the police do have are the quiet ones. It is the community engagement – speaking with students at schools, walking the streets to chat and connect with locals and be a calm presence and sense of order. Every day that police officers go to work they demonstrate bravery. They deal with some incredibly difficult situations, and that has an impact not just on their physical, spiritual and emotional selves but on their families back at home. So I would like to express my gratitude to the families of all officers, who support them so they can perform their duties – those families who wonder how their loved ones will be when they return or if they will at all, those who are there when their partner or parent returns from work having experienced and seen disturbing or distressing things many of us will never need to encounter, lending them support so they can put that uniform back on again the next day and turn up and serve and protect us all to uphold the right. Thank you to all of them.

To the families and all those who loved Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart, my profoundest, sincerest and deepest condolences on the loss of your beloved men. I hope that the memories of the times you shared, and the joy and the love that Neal and Vadim brought into your lives, will be a balm to soothe your broken hearts over time. You are in our hearts now and forever. May they rest in peace. Vale, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson. Vale, Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (13:04): I rise today with a heavy heart to acknowledge the tragic loss of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-

Hottart, who lost their lives in the line of duty – a sacrifice that words cannot do justice to. To their family and friends and colleagues, on behalf of the Ovens Valley community, I extend my deepest and most heartfelt condolences. Every day when our police members put on their uniform and walk out the door, they have made a pledge to keep us safe, and they honour that pledge.

Neal Thompson, known to many as Thommo, was nearing the end of a remarkable 38-year career. He was preparing to retire last week and was looking forward to a new chapter of travel, fishing trips and time with family and friends. Neal was respected both professionally and personally, generous, good-hearted and always willing to help others. He was a mate, a mentor and a protector in his community, and his absence leaves a void that will be deeply felt. Neal will be particularly missed in the community of Moyhu, where he would often stop in. It was his regular stop-in for a coffee, where he was welcome. He spent much of his spare time in the High Country, so he always went through Moyhu. The community of Moyhu always felt safer when Neal stopped by. Over the years, Neal would stop and have coffee, and his dog Jimmy would consume an egg and bacon roll while Neal enjoyed a coffee in Moyhu.

Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, just 34 years old, was a young man remembered as upbeat, quick-witted and deeply committed to his role in Victoria Police. His brother described him as a superhero, someone who brought light to those around him and lived with joy and courage. Vadim was awarded the Victoria Police Star and other service medals, recognising not only his years of service but the many years he would have given had his life not been cut short. Vadim was on secondment in the Bright region, and some say he was the unluckiest of cops to even be in the Porepunkah area on this fatal day. But on behalf of the Porepunkah community, we thank him. We thank him for his commitment, and we will honour his service. Again to the families of Neal and Vadim: words cannot describe the sorrow we feel. Your brave men put their lives in harm's way, and they paid the ultimate price. In time, we hope our community can welcome you and show you all our hospitality and our beautiful region in the future.

I also want to mention Inspector Ash Mason, who leads the north-east Victoria Police force based in Wangaratta, an officer who puts his people first and works tirelessly to ensure our community is safe. Like all Victorian police, Ash has taken this personally. I want to say in this forum, 'Thank you, Ash, for pushing through the last two weeks and leading your police force while you all carry the heaviest of hearts. Your job is never easy, and it's never done.'

What happened in Porepunkah is unacceptable. As MPs in this place, it is our responsibility to provide the resources needed to see that this never happens again. The service of these two fine men was outstanding. Gentlemen, your shift is done. Rest in peace.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:07): Today we pause in this place to acknowledge and honour the lives of two brave members of Victoria Police who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Last Friday family, friends and colleagues farewelled Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, 44954, at a service that reflected the profound impact he had on those around him. Yesterday families gathered again to honour Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal 'Thommo' Thompson, 26182, a man described by his colleagues as ever reliable, who put his crew first and who was always the first one to step forward with purpose, as he was doing when executing this warrant related to sexual offences and child abuse on 26 August.

These are not just words. In the emergency services, whether you wear blue or yellow or red, you know the people who will run towards danger when others run away. You know the colleagues that never back down until the job is done. They are the glue of a team, the steady hands in chaos and the moral compass when decisions have to be made in a split second. It is very obvious to me that both of these officers embodied that spirit every single day of their service.

Like all other speakers, I have sought to learn about Thommo and Vadim. Thommo was a man who did not wait to be asked, a man who saw a need and filled it, a man whose natural instinct was to

protect others before himself. Vadim too was a dedicated and brave officer, deeply respected by his peers and his community. Together they stood as guardians of our safety. As someone who has worn a uniform and stood shoulder to shoulder with my own platoon, I know the unspoken bond that exists between emergency service workers. When one falls, we all feel it. That ripple of grief moves through every station, every shift and every family dinner table because we all know that next time it could be someone we know – one of our own.

This tragedy has left a third officer seriously injured, and we stand with him as he faces what could be a long and very difficult road to recovery. I want him to know that he is not alone. The entire policing family, obviously, and indeed all Victorians are willing him forward in his recovery every step of the way.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the broader policing family, including the Police Association Victoria and secretary Wayne Gatt. Every police member inevitably will feel the weight of this tragedy. I have spoken to my friends who are current serving officers in the force, and they were comfortable to admit that this has affected them. Yet, despite their grief and despite the effect on them, tomorrow, the next day and the day after that these police officers will pull on the uniform and head back out on our streets. That quiet heroism is extraordinary, and it is something we must never take for granted. That quiet heroism deserves our deepest gratitude. When the sirens fade and the flags rise again, there will be quiet moments of grief in stations across our state – quiet reminders of the incredible price that comes with keeping our community safe.

To the families of Vadim and Thommo: there are no words that can take away your pain; I know that. But please know this: your sons, your partners, your brothers and your colleagues will forever live in the blue fabric of Victoria Police and in the hearts of those they served. Their courage is not a moment in time; it is a legacy that will ripple through generations of officers yet to come. Their courage and dedication are etched into the story of this state. They will not be forgotten.

In their service Vadim and Thommo showed us what true courage looks like. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the action you take in the face of fear. They walked into darkness so that others could live in the light. They stood at the thin line between chaos and safety, between fear and reassurance, and every single day they chose to stand on that line for us. Their lives remind us of an eternal truth – that safety is never free. It is earned every day by the service and sacrifice of those who are willing to lay down their lives for others. This Parliament says thank you – thank you for your bravery, thank you for your commitment, thank you for your passion and thank you for your sacrifice and for showing us the best of humanity. May their families and colleagues find strength in the love of a grateful state, and may we never forget that the price of our safety is paid by heroes like them. Your shift is complete, men. Thank you for your service. Vale, Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart and Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:13): I rise in condolence for Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart. On walking into the chamber today, I looked outside and saw a dark sky, and I made sure to look up because I was struck by the words of Vadim's brother: when we look into the sky, if we see a blue sky, we know he is there. Today it is a dark sky. For two weeks Victorians have held their breath after learning of the terrible, senseless tragedy that occurred two weeks ago – like we remember, as a number of members have said, when we have lost one of the 175 officers who have been lost in service and the 30 who have been murdered. It is a dark sky today because Victorians are holding their breath. It is a dark sky because we know that the alleged murderer is still on the run and has still not been caught. So we as Victorians grieve for the loss of these officers but also for the officer who was injured and for every officer today who is searching in the most dangerous environment on our behalf.

23,000 good Victorians put on a police uniform, and when they do – I am sure we all remember the first time we saw a police officer, looking up, probably as kids when we first saw them – that uniform represents honour, justice, community service and, as Sacha, Vadim's brother, said, heroism and a

sense of invincibility. Every time we sadly lose a member of our emergency services or police, we know that they are not invincible, these good people who put on that uniform and step out to protect each and every one of us as Victorians.

I think what is so difficult at this time, as the Premier rightly said, is that Victoria Police especially are now working at a very, very difficult time – as the member for Caulfield said, at a time when we are seeing a sickness in our social cohesion, and not just a sickness in Victoria, as the Premier said, but one that is here nevertheless. The police are stepping out into the centre of that environment and protecting us from that sickness. I am sure every member of this place has seen over recent weeks that sickness playing out through people using images that would make us all sick, as part of those weekly protests, of the individual involved in this crime. I find it repugnant, and I think that needs to be called out.

This is the most difficult time for Victorians and for the police community, and we should take every opportunity as community representatives to remind Victoria Police and the emergency services more broadly how strongly we support everything that they do, how much they are in our thoughts every day they put on that uniform and how each and every one of them, though they are wearing their uniform of invincibility, are not but are doing that job and doing that work on behalf of all of us. They are humans; they are people – people who hurt, people who love.

The words of both of their families were so incredibly beautiful. Vadim's mother talked about Vadim being a white butterfly that we see when we next see a white butterfly, and Lisa, Neal's partner, talked about the fact that he had taught her to love without fear. These are the truths of these wonderful officers. On behalf of the people of Bayside, I send my sincere condolences to the family and the friends of the officers involved. Vale, Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart, and may their memories be a blessing.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:19): It is an honour to rise today to pay the deepest respects to Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart. There is both collective admiration for their courage, integrity and service and profound sorrow for the tragic circumstances under which their lives were taken on 26 August 2025 in Porepunkah.

Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson, affectionately known as Thommo, was 59 years old. He joined Victoria Police in September 1987 and went on to give 38 years of dedicated service to the people of Victoria. Over nearly four decades he worked across a variety of roles in policing, bringing with him not only professionalism but a deep care for the communities he served. He was known for his courage, his calm presence and his unshakable commitment to keeping others safe. Community members have spoken movingly about his impact. Anita Cook, who first met him when she opened a cafe in Moyhu, said:

You just felt a lot safer knowing he was around ... his strength and courage and bravery was just something you could see in him.

A former teammate at his old soccer club recalled:

He was willing to talk to anybody and treat them equally, he was just a beautiful person.

Neal Thompson was only days away from retirement. He had looked forward to travelling abroad, to exploring the Australian bush he loved so dearly and to spending more precious time with his family at their King Valley home. In true character, he continued to give his all right up until the end. His partner Sergeant Lisa Thompson, also a police officer, shared at his memorial service:

Words cannot convey the depth of sorrow and grief that his loss brings.

...

... he taught me how to love without fear and how to be brave when I'm scared.

Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart was just 34 years old, with a promising career ahead of him. I thank the Minister for Police for detailing his service, which included spending three years at

St Kilda police station, one of the stations that serves my electorate, before being selected in April 2023 for Melbourne's public order response team. His skill, professionalism and leadership earned him this position. He was recently seconded to north-east Victoria, where he had been serving for just one week before this tragedy occurred. Vadim de Waart-Hottart was multilingual, a keen scuba diver and an adventurer who loved to travel. Those who knew him describe a man with a zest for life, devoted to both his family and to his fellow officers. He is survived by his parents Carolina de Waart and Alain Hottart, who travelled from Belgium, and by his younger brother Sacha, who lives in Switzerland. Their immeasurable grief is shared by extended family here in Melbourne and by the entire police community. At the memorial service Sacha described his brother as his superhero:

He was my very own ... Batman.

... when ... I didn't need his protecting anymore, my brother found 23,000 new brothers and sisters in blue to keep protecting.

Such was the esteem in which he was held that the chapel at the Victoria Police Academy could not hold all those who came to farewell him.

Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police Mike Bush described the loss of both officers as a shocking and tragic day for Victoria, and indeed it was for Victoria Police, for the community and, most profoundly, for the families who have lost their loved ones.

This tragedy is a stark and sobering reminder of the sacrifices our police officers make each and every day to protect our community. Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart embodied the very highest values of Victoria Police: courage, integrity, service and humanity. On behalf of this chamber I extend our deepest condolences to their families, friends and colleagues and our enduring gratitude for their service. Their memory and their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (13:24): On behalf of the Greens I want to add our voices to those sending condolences to the families, friends, colleagues and loved ones of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart and also to the other officer injured at the same awful shooting attack in Porepunkah. We also want to send our thoughts to others in the police force, their families and their friends, who are still reeling from these horrific events. Everyone deserves to come home from work safely, and too often our emergency service workers are faced with danger when doing their jobs, which they do on behalf of all of us. We are thinking today too of all the emergency services workers still out there in the north-east in very difficult circumstances looking for the person responsible for these deaths and how difficult it is for them right now, and we thank them for their work.

I also want to send my thoughts personally to the community of Porepunkah, the north-east and the High Country. This is somewhere that holds a very special place in my heart. My own father is buried at Harrierville Cemetery. It is a beautiful, peaceful place; it is a community I know well. I have spoken to people in that community, and I know that they are still deeply shocked by these events. They tell me these events do not define the north-east, just as the extremist views of the individual involved do not represent the views of Victorians. The community of the north-east and the High Country is strong, and it is resilient. It is an incredible part of the world, and I know that as soon as it is safe to do so, Victorians will be back visiting these areas, supporting the community and helping them to recover.

**Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.**

**The SPEAKER:** Members, the house will be suspended until 2 pm as a mark of respect.

**Sitting suspended 1:27 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Members***Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing****Minister for Agriculture****Minister for Transport Infrastructure***Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time this week the Minister for Finance will answer questions for the portfolios of industry and advanced manufacturing, and creative industries. For the purposes of question time today the Minister for Environment will answer questions for the portfolios of agriculture and community sport, the Minister for Equality will answer questions for the portfolio of carers and volunteers, and I will answer questions for the portfolios of transport infrastructure, and public and active transport.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Youth crime**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. In the past year youth crime has risen by 18 per cent. The alleged brutal murders of two children in the western suburbs on the weekend are another tragic example. The grieving father of 15-year-old Dau Akueng said:

This is a basketball player, he's not a criminal.

... I need answers for what killed my son.

Twenty-five men and boys under 25 have been stabbed to death since 2020. Premier, how has it come to this under your government?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): The Leader of the Opposition's question referred to the senseless act of violence on Saturday evening that resulted in the murder of two beautiful young boys, 12 and 15 years old. My thoughts are with the families and the friends and the community who are grieving the loss of two young boys who were, as has been reported, moving around the community, coming home from basketball, living their lives, which were taken away from them as a result of this senseless act of violence.

What was behind this senseless act of violence? Speaking as I did yesterday with community leaders from the South Sudanese communities, we all want answers as to what was behind this senseless act of violence, which is why we fully support the work of Victoria Police in the investigation that is underway and would urge anyone with information that could assist in that investigation to provide that to Victoria Police, because certainly not only do the family need and deserve answers, they deserve justice as well. So we should let Victoria Police continue their investigation and support the work of that investigation. In terms of the support that my government provides to Victoria Police on the broader issue, we continue to give Victoria Police more resources and tools and powers to support their important work.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, this is about how we have got to this stage where 25 men and boys have been killed on the streets here in Victoria and what the government has done. There are 1100 vacancies on rosters, and police stations are shut here in Victoria under your watch.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind members that a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. On the point of order, the Premier was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Indeed I was just going to that very point about the additional resources. Victoria has, as I have said previously, more police per head of population than any other jurisdiction in the



country. We have continued to provide Victoria Police with additional powers – knife search powers. The machete ban, for example, is about giving police more powers.

I want to put to rest the reckless allegation made by the Leader of the Opposition around Victoria Police's budget. That allegation I reject and the chief commissioner rejects. It would do well on all of us in our commitment to supporting the investigation of Victoria Police to not spread falsehoods about the support for Victoria Police. There has been only support for Victoria Police. There has been no reduction in the Victoria Police budget. That is something that the chief commissioner himself has made very clear. It would do well on all of us, at a time when misinformation causes so much hurt and harm, to provide factual information to the community.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Dau Akueng's father said, despite the local stadium where Dau played basketball being just a short walk away, his son could not make it home safely. Why has the government failed so badly that it is unsafe for kids to walk home?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): The grief of a father whose son does not come home from basketball is an unimaginable grief. Again, my sympathies go to the family and the community who are grieving this loss. In terms of the question about what was behind this senseless act of violence, I refer to my previous answer, because it goes to the support of Victoria Police and the investigation that is currently underway.

#### Ministers statements: treaty

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Every family is made stronger when they have control over their lives, their futures and the things that matter most, and Aboriginal families are no different. For too long the decisions that have shaped Aboriginal lives have been made without them, not with them. That is why treaty matters; that is why treaty makes sense. It gives Aboriginal people the opportunity to have a real say over the things that affect them and their lives. It is that simple. It is practical. It is common sense. It is simple, but it is powerful.

Today, for the first time in our nation's history, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 will be introduced into this house of Parliament. What this bill will do is set the ground rules for real, practical change – change that will endure. But I also want to be clear that treaty will not take anything away from anyone. It is about building up, not tearing down. It is about a partnership with the longest continuous culture on earth – a partnership that will improve services, a partnership that will improve outcomes, a partnership that will improve lives. It will ensure that decisions about programs and policies that affect Aboriginal Victorians are shaped by Aboriginal Victorians. That is the simple fact, because this is how we achieve better outcomes for families, for communities and indeed for our entire state.

Generations of advocacy of Indigenous Victorians – indeed Indigenous Australians – have brought us here, and today we honour that work. As we bring this bill to the Parliament for debate, as we hope for its successful passage through the Parliament, Victoria stands ready to sign the first treaty in our nation's history – signed, yes, in the name of every Victorian, signed in the spirit of justice and fairness and signed to make our state stronger, to make our state fairer, to make our state better for every single one of us.

#### Youth crime

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Detective Inspector Graham Banks has stated that Victoria's penalties for violent youth offending 'aren't in balance with what community expectations are or mine'. Does the Premier agree?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): I want to say very clearly that obviously no crime is acceptable, and when it comes to this senseless act of violence that has resulted in the murder of two young people, we all want to see justice in this instance. I also make the –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, this was not about a specific incident. Graham Banks has come out saying that community expectations are not in line with what they should be for violent offences here in Victoria. Does the Premier agree, yes or no?

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Brad Battin:** Relevance.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier has been on her feet for less than 20 seconds. The opposition leader is continuing to use points of order to restate the question, which is out of order, and I ask that you rule him out of order.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. The Premier to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I want to be clear that we support the work of Victoria Police on this side of the house. We support the work, and that is demonstrated by the resourcing we provide Victoria Police and by the additional powers we give Victoria Police but also in the way that we do not undermine the work of Victoria Police, like too much reckless behaviour that we see opposite.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the House! Member for Nepean! The member for Nepean and the Leader of the House will leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Nepean and Leader of the House withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Of course the Leader of the Opposition knows that sentencing is a matter for the courts, and this government, my government, has made it absolutely clear to all decision-makers across the justice system – the courts, the police – that community safety must come first in all of their decisions.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, all sentencing actually starts from the legislation that is put through the Victorian Parliament. The government have a responsibility to ensure that the sentencing is in line with community expectations. If the Premier cannot do that, then that is a major problem for safety here in Victoria.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order. That is not the correct way to make a point of order.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for half an hour, speaking of respect.

**Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.**

**Ben Carroll:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked an opinion about a quote that he gave to the Premier. I question if that is government business, asking the Premier for an opinion.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer a question. The Premier was being relevant. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): Detective Inspector Graham Banks also stated:

The policing position's always been that there needs to be a strong deterrent for this type of behaviour ...

Will the Premier commit to immediately strengthening penalties for violent youth offending to bring them in line with community expectations and to ensure strong deterrents are in place?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): It is important that in answering the question I be very careful, because as I said in my earlier answer, there is a current police investigation underway searching for the perpetrators, people who murdered two young boys.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, this was not about any specific event. The police have come out and said that they need to have the powers and they need to have a strong deterrent for this type of behaviour here in Victoria when we are talking about violent crimes. If the Premier does not want to answer that, that is a decision for her.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The question was clearly framed around comments that were made in regard to the violent murder of two young boys on the weekend, and there are already under our sentencing arrangements the harshest of penalties for people who commit murder. There are already the toughest of penalties for people who commit murder, and that is why we will continue to support Victoria Police in their investigation to bring justice in this case.

#### Ministers statements: treaty

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:16): Today is historic – a day of pride, hope and justice. Our state has negotiated a treaty with First Peoples – a treaty for all Victorians. We needed to do something to close the gap. As a productivity commissioner said, that is treaty. Treaty is how our kids can have the same opportunities and Aboriginal kids can have the same opportunities with their health and with their ability to get a job and engage in education. Treaty is how we close the gap. Treaty is how we work in genuine partnership with First Peoples. And I want to thank the First Peoples' Assembly for getting us here today. Treaty is how we get better outcomes. When we listen to Aboriginal communities, we get kinder and more culturally sensitive outcomes. By working with Gellung Warl, the new entity, we will build on this success. The successful First Peoples' Assembly will expand into delivering the First Peoples' Institute and delivering an infrastructure fund. An independent accountability mechanism will ensure we improve outcomes, and ongoing truth-telling will ensure we learn about our shared history. We are the only Commonwealth country without a treaty, but today that changes.

In the meantime, those opposite refuse to support practical change to close the gap. It is shameful and it is wilful ignorance. Many in this place will choose to stand for truth and justice –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for the minister to expose how unpleasant she is.

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

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** Many in this place will choose to stand for truth and justice –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I took a point of order which you did not rule on.

**The SPEAKER:** I said there was no point of order.

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** but others will stand in the way of it. Those others will be remembered for choosing fear and division over respect and progress.

#### Youth crime

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:19): My question is to the Premier. Detective Inspector Graham Banks recently stated that Victoria's penalties for youth offending 'aren't

in balance with what community expectations are or mine'. Police Commissioner Mike Bush subsequently endorsed him, saying that Banks:

... said what many of us think ... about the penalties which are being handed down in our courts for our worst youth offenders. He has my full support.

Can the Premier confirm whether the police commissioner has spoken on her behalf, or is the Premier at odds with the police on this issue?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): No-one speaks for commissioner Mike Bush other than Chief Commissioner Mike Bush, and it says a lot about the reckless behaviour of the Leader of the Opposition that he would think otherwise. However, it is symptomatic of a pattern of behaviour. When Liberals are in government, they undermine the office of the Chief Commissioner of Police. We have seen it time –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I remind the Leader of the Opposition of section 10 of the police act, which those of us on this side of the house will honour and respect. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police speaks for himself, and I respect that. Beyond that, in respecting the work of the men and women of Victoria Police, we give them the resources they need, the support they need and the powers they need. We do not undermine them with this ongoing campaign of misinformation.

**Brad Battin**: On a point of order, Speaker, you have got to be factual in your answers when answering, particularly in relation to the fact that we have 1100 vacancies on rosters, 43 stations that are closed or have reduced hours –

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

**Brad Battin**: and more people dying on the streets with the increase in crime than we have ever seen in the entire history of this state.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER**: I ask you to resume your seat when I ask you to resume your seat, Leader of the Opposition. You are not immune from being removed from the chamber, and I do not want to remove you from the chamber. Respect goes a long way in this chamber. There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: When it comes to supporting the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, I want to read this quote:

He's had an opportunity to come out, I think it's now getting to a stage that it's ... getting too long that the new chief commissioner, you can't just come in and take the pay ...

That is from the Leader of the Opposition. That is the Leader of the Opposition undermining the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. This reckless behaviour should be condemned, and I absolutely condemn it.

**James Newbury** interjected.

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

**Member for Brighton withdrew from chamber.**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:23): Will the Premier commit to immediately strengthening penalties for violent youth offending so that they align with both police and community expectations?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): My commitment is to supporting the work of Victoria Police. My commitment is to taking the advice from Victoria Police, not from someone who, by his own reckless behaviour, is prepared to go and stand next to dead bodies to conduct a press conference.

#### Ministers statements: First Nations cultural tourism

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:24): When we learn more about the history of First Peoples, it helps us all build a shared future of pride and ownership of the cultural heritage of this country. Aboriginal cultural landscapes form the core of Victoria's network of parks and forests. For example, Speaker, in your own electorate the new Larni Yirrip campground, meaning 'the home of the ironbarks', will give people an opportunity not only to enjoy the beautiful forests and the ironbark but to learn about the Dja Dja Wurrung people and country. The storytelling, the design and the cultural elements are infused in the campground itself, so people enjoy camping and enjoy the great outdoors but learn something about the land that we are all lucky to call home. A second example – and there are many – is Budj Bim National Park: 30,000 years of history of eel trapping, smoking the eel and trading the eel with other peoples. This is a national park available to all Victorians and all Australians but also a way to learn more about this wonderful culture that we are lucky to have in this country.

That is why our government's *Experience Victoria 2033* strategic plan for tourism has as one of its five pillars the promotion of more cultural tourism through Aboriginal cultural heritage. We have supported Aboriginal communities through the registered Aboriginal parties with some assistance, including financially through the tourism industry strengthening program, to do more in that regard. In 2023 more than half a million people visited Victoria for cultural experiences. We can do much, much better, and this government is committed to doing better, because when Aboriginal people have a say we all benefit. But if you do not even have regard, respect and consideration for Aboriginal people, you are nowhere near close to the journey of using the opportunity of tourism to positively exploit their cultural heritage.

#### Community safety

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): My question is to the Attorney-General. Recently a 56-year-old woman was carjacked at knifepoint in a school car park in Lara. She was pushed out of her car and left traumatised. Police later arrested two people in Corio in connection with the stolen vehicle, only to find firearms, drugs and stolen goods. One alleged offender was bailed, while the other was already on bail at the time. Attorney, why can't the people of Geelong and Lara feel safe when violent repeat offenders armed with guns are continuously released back into our community?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:27): At the outset, I must reject the premise of that question. In doing so, I want to first acknowledge the victim that the Leader of the Opposition has identified, because I think what is most important in any of these conversations, when we talk about community safety, is recognising victims in these conversations and recognising the families of victims in all of these conversations and in all of the actions that we take. I want to acknowledge that today feels like a heavy day. It is a heavy day because we have just had a very respectful condolence motion for two very strong, proud police officers who were doing their job who did not come home to their families. We also recognise the families of two young boys, victims of senseless killing, who were going about their business, coming home from a basketball game. I do want to remind –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, we were talking about a victim who is a 56-year-old down in the Lara area, and the question was specifically about this and the fact that people cannot feel safe when they see people get bail continuously here in Victoria. Can you please ask the minister to come back to answering that question?

**The SPEAKER:** The Attorney answered the question at the outset by rejecting the premise of the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I remind the Leader of the Opposition that in conversations, in discussions, in questions about community safety it is about putting the victim first. It is about recognising the impact on victims and the impacts on our community, which is why this year we have now passed two new bail bills, making our bail tests, our bail laws, the strongest in the nation. We do that by putting community safety –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister on her feet has to be factual. The reality is that the legislation they have introduced is not even as strong as the bail laws they weakened back in 2023 and 2024. This is why people continue to get bail here in Victoria –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is an assumption in this house that all members on their feet will be factual.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** As I was saying, the bail amendments that we have put through both houses of Parliament, which have both now passed, will see community safety put front and centre in all bail decisions.

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** The Leader of the Opposition asks when.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the Attorney not to respond to interjections. Through the Chair.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** We are already seeing remand numbers up. We are already seeing the impacts of these new bail laws – these tougher bail laws having an impact. We are seeing increases of 26 per cent in the numbers of adult prisoners on remand compared to this time last year and 27 per cent more young offenders on remand compared to this time last year. But what is so important is that we are responding to community concerns. We are making it harder for alleged offenders to get bail, particularly for firearm offences, for arson, for aggravated burglary, for carjacking and for home invasion. We are making tougher bail laws to protect communities.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): Attorney, how many more women need to be threatened, assaulted or carjacked in broad daylight before your government finally acts to fix Victoria's broken bail laws and puts community safety first?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:31): I am not sure where the Leader of the Opposition has been all year, but I will remind the Leader of the Opposition –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, all this year I have been listening to the victims that are piling up here in our state as the crime increases and people continuously get bail under this government's watch.

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

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, you will have to leave the chamber for an hour. I will not tolerate this kind of disrespect to the Chair.

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Make that an hour and a half.

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**Questions interrupted.**

### *Members*

#### **Member for Berwick**

#### *Naming and suspension*

**The SPEAKER** (14:33): Order! I name the Leader of the Opposition for disregarding the authority of the Chair. I ask the minister at the table to move the appropriate motion.

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:33): I move:

That the member for Berwick Brad Battin be suspended from the service of the house for the remainder of the sitting day under standing order 126(2).

#### **Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

**Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.**

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Ministers statements: treaty**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:39): I rise to update the house on how Victoria's first Statewide Treaty will support Victoria, the Education State. We know the Allan Labor government is on the side of families, and that includes First Nations families and their students. As the Premier said, we are part of the world's oldest living continuous culture, and that means we have the world's oldest living continuous intellectual tradition in the state of Victoria. In the Education State that means a great sense of humanity, emotional intelligence and great spirit that we can all learn from. I want to, as the Minister for Education, acknowledge the extraordinary strength and resilience of our First Nations people and their advocacy for a more equitable and just future, including justice in education.

Australia's Aboriginal history and culture within the education system are crucial to building a better understanding while making sure we also grant Indigenous people a respected place in the Victorian and Australian story. Why? Because Aboriginal people are the best decision-makers because they know how policy affects them most. I am proud to be part of a government that is investing

\$156 million in the *Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026* – locally tailored First Nations curriculum resources and provisions of support and professional learning for schools developed alongside our Victorian Aboriginal community.

Why are we doing treaty? Because it is the key to a better understanding for all of us, and as the minister said, we are the only postcolonial Commonwealth nation that has not negotiated any formal treaty with its indigenous people. I am proud to be with the Premier and all ministers here today doing treaty, because we know and we should be proud that we have the world's oldest living continuous culture right here in Victoria, the Education State, and we will make that part of the Education State story.

### Rental reform

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:41): My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Renters in so-called affordable housing in Flemington have been slugged with 17 per cent rent hikes just one year after moving in. Seven years ago the Labor government demolished public housing at this site, replacing it with affordable homes for low-income earners, yet now these rents are higher than private rentals around the corner. Minister, when renters in government-backed affordable housing are being hit with double-digit rent hikes in the first year and say they expect to fight this battle every year because the consortium will always push rents to the maximum, will the minister admit that this is not upholding renters rights?

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:42): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question. That question really should go to the minister for housing in the other place, and I will take that up with the minister for housing. But if I could just talk about what this government is doing to protect renters when it comes to keeping rents low, this government believes that all people, all Victorians –

**Ellen Sandell**: Speaker, on a point of order, this is actually a question for the Minister for Consumer Affairs because it refers to privately run affordable housing, not government public housing. So it is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs.

**Danny Pearson**: On the point of order, Speaker, I believe this matter is a matter for the minister for housing, because Living Communities is the PPP that is delivering this project. It is a mix of affordable housing and social housing, and it is a consequence of that contract which was entered into under the ground lease model, and the minister for housing is the responsible minister.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister who the question has been addressed to has the choice of answering the question in the way he chooses.

**Nick STAIKOS**: This government, as I said, believes that every Victorian deserves a decent standard of living. That is why those of us on this side of the house have voted for 149 rental reforms while this government has been in power, and one of the most recent of them is the introduction of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria. RDRV has revolutionised the way in which we resolve disputes between renters and rental providers in this state, and one of the things that RDRV does is consider rent reviews. As a result of this government's passage of a bill earlier this year, we are expanding the range of factors that can be taken into consideration when conducting a rent review. We are currently going through that process, and I will have more to say about that soon.

But of course we also absolutely want rental properties to be affordable, and the key to affordable housing is to ensure that we increase the supply of housing. That is why this government, through its housing statement, has been doing just that, and I am proud that Victoria approves and completes more homes than New South Wales and more homes than Queensland. When it comes to boosting housing supply, Victoria is leading the nation, and that will be key to ensuring that we have affordable housing and affordable rents.



**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:45): I am grateful to the minister for soldiering on and answering the question. The people living in these homes are low-income renters. In 2022 the government's own review warned that an independent regulator was needed to stop exactly this kind of thing, but no regulator has been appointed in the three subsequent years. Will the minister now accept that much stronger protections, such as a regulator, are required to prevent this from happening in private rentals?

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:45): I thank the member for Brunswick for the supplementary question. In Victoria, as Minister for Consumer Affairs, I am also very fortunate to work with the commissioner for residential tenancies Heather Holst. It is the commissioner's role to provide advice to me and to the government on matters concerning residential tenancies. But I would just repeat: this government on this side of the house has passed 149 rental reforms. Each of those 149 rental reforms is about improving the way of life, the way of living and the standard of living for renters in this state. We make no apology for that, and we are not going to stop there. This year we introduced RDRV. I should also mention next year we are introducing a portable rental bond scheme, and that portable rental bond scheme is a cost-of-living measure for renters, because no longer will renters have to fork out – *(Time expired)*

### Ministers statements: First Nations health care

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:47): I rise to update the house on the importance of putting Aboriginal health and wellbeing in Aboriginal hands. It is unacceptable that any group in our society has a life expectancy gap of more than 10 years, and it is unacceptable that 54 out of every 1000 Aboriginal people are hospitalised for potentially preventable causes, compared to 24 for non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Victorians have the same rights to good health outcomes as any other Victorians, and that is why we are doing things differently here in the Department of Health in Victoria and why we steadfastly support treaty.

The Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum is co-chaired by me and Mick Graham of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. The forum met last week in Ballarat to shape its next set of priorities. It was fantastic that the member for Geelong was there, that the Minister for Health Infrastructure attended and that the Minister for Mental Health in the other place was also there. The partnership forum is already delivering on the priorities set by the Aboriginal community, including a reformed budget process; stronger cultural safety in hospitals; better Aboriginal community controlled health organisation infrastructure, including \$13 million for a new clinic in Cranbourne and \$7.4 million towards the brand new Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-op, which opened on Friday – and you were there, Speaker, you know how wonderful that is; a stronger ACCHO workforce; and urgent care pathways for Aboriginal people, which are making it easier for community to access care at ACCHOs – trusted, respected, culturally safe health care.

We know that all families are better off when they have a say over the services and policies that impact them, and Aboriginal people are no different. Treaty makes sense because it gives Aboriginal people a say in the matters that are most important to them. I proudly support treaty.

### Constituency questions

#### Ringwood electorate

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:49): (1280) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Minister, in the past 12 months how many people in the Ringwood electorate have had to be placed in hotels or motels because no other emergency accommodation was available in the area? Housing providers across the eastern suburbs report that hotels and motels are increasingly used as overflow due to a severe shortage of proper crisis beds. These placements are costly, lack the wraparound supports people in crisis need and often leave vulnerable families, including women and children, unsafe. Without adequate support, people living in unstable housing are caught in a dangerous,

repetitive cycle of homelessness with little chance of escape. This stark reality shows we urgently need greater investment in crisis accommodation. In Ringwood and the surrounding areas homelessness services cannot continue relying on motels but need secure and supported emergency housing.

#### **Bayswater electorate**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:50): (1281) I am very proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which invests locally in community sport, not just in Knox but right across the state of Victoria. My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. When can we expect to see work wrap up and people being able to use the new facilities at Wally Tew Reserve in Ferntree Gully? The new facilities were an election commitment that has been delivered by the Allan Labor government – \$2 million, which I know the member for Monbulk will be extremely excited about. I am very proud as well that Knox council have come on board and also provided funding and are delivering the project on behalf of the state government. This is going to have a huge impact for the broader community but in particular the Ferntree Gully football netball senior division, as well as their juniors, as well as the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club. Thank you so much to everyone in the clubs and in the community who advocated for this and who worked to get this outcome. I look forward to opening it up hopefully in the very near future with the member for Monbulk.

#### **Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:51): (1282) My constituency question is to the Treasurer, and I refer to the 2025 land tax assessment issued on the owners of a family home in McCrae which tragically collapsed in last year's landslide. Despite the dwelling being uninhabitable and literally reduced to rubble, the owners have now been served a \$7800 land tax bill, as though the property remained a functioning residence. This is plainly unreasonable and deeply insensitive given the family has lost not only their home but also their stability and sense of security. My question is: what steps will the government take to ensure that families in such extraordinary and devastating circumstances are not further punished by being forced to pay thousands of dollars in land tax on a home that no longer exists?

#### **Yan Yean electorate**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (14:51): (1283) My question is for the Minister for Children. Yesterday, doorknocking in Doreen, I met a mum of a 10-week-old baby that sleeps for 2-hour naps and 5-hour stretches at night. I have got to tell you, I was jealous, quite frankly. It is not common to have such fantastic sleepers, and so that is why when I am out doorknocking I always carry with me a flyer for our early parenting centre in South Morang, because I know how important it is to have those services available for families who might be having difficulty with kids sleeping or eating et cetera – it is a real lifesaver. I am so pleased that in Wallan we will have the integrated family centre starting construction soon, with many millions invested by this government. So I ask the minister: what services will be available for families in Wallan who are not as lucky as the mum in Doreen?

#### **Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:52): (1284) My question is to the Treasurer in the other place. When can the communities in Porepunkah and Bright expect to see an economic package to support them during this unprecedented period? As tourist towns, Bright and Porepunkah rely almost entirely on the tourist dollar to survive. We are now entering the third week of one of Australia's largest manhunts. For good reason Victoria Police have asked visitors to avoid the area while this manhunt continues, but the banker waits for nobody, the landlord still has her hand out for money and the kids still need to eat. Treasurer, the community is economically on one knee needing urgent assistance. What steps will the government take to support an economic package for Porepunkah and the surrounding region?

**Werribee electorate**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (14:53): (1285) My constituency question is to the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education. What will the construction of new school buildings funded in the 2025–26 state budget mean for students and teachers in the communities that I represent? As a former teacher who has taught in a range of different learning environments – some are quite interesting, and some are more sturdy than others – I know how important it is to have good classrooms and spaces to do the important work of educating our next generation. I took great pleasure in presenting the principals at Manorvale, Riverwalk and Walcom Ngarrwa a hard hat to symbolically mark the start of these works. We have built so many brand new schools around Wyndham. I also welcome the announcement of more modular classrooms for Lollypop Creek, Ngarrri and Riverwalk. As someone who has taught in these modular classrooms, I know they are solid, soundproof and air-conditioned, all things that we love to see in our facilities. So I ask the minister: what will the construction of these new buildings mean for our community?

**Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:54): (1286) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Labor's new high-rise activity centres are set to disproportionately affect my electorate of Caulfield. We have got three activity centres proposed in Caulfield, Elsternwick and Glen Huntly that risk creating further congestion without the proper investment in proper transport upgrades and open space. What is the government going to do in providing parking, green space, schooling and health care to enable the population growth that will come as a result of the high-rise activity that is being proposed by the Allan Labor government?

**Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:55): (1287) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. How does the minister ensure that accessibility is considered when upgrading our public transport system? I know that our government has invested in upgrading bus stops and is working towards ensuring that our public transport network is inclusive and accessible for all Victorians, and the Lara community is excited to see that in this year's state budget our government has funded a Geelong bus review to look at improvements that are required across the community. Recently I hosted Elizabeth, a work experience student from the fabulous Northern Bay secondary college, and Elizabeth raised with me her concerns in relation to hostile architecture and the impacts that this has on accessibility to public transport. Her concerns included the state of benches at bus stops, many of which are too small to sit on properly, causing people to be half sliding off, and she also shared concerns that many are not equipped to deal with the influx of students and senior Victorians who will take up the government's free public transport initiatives. I thank Elizabeth for her time with us recently and for her interest in this important topic.

**Narracan electorate**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (14:56): (1288) My constituency question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask: will you meet with concerned residents regarding renewable energy battery projects in my community? Two projects have been announced: the North Yarragon battery energy storage system and the Darnum BESS. They have caused significant concern to local landowners, and there has been next to no communication regarding the scope of these projects. There are serious concerns relating to setbacks, noise, bushfire overlays, access and grid connections. There are also serious worries about potential impact on groundwater and surrounding farmland. These battery projects have a significant impact on the local communities, and is it essential the minister engage with residents, listen to their concerns and ensure that they are given a voice as a part of this program.

**Preston electorate**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (14:57): (1289) My question is for the Minister for Education, and the question I ask is: how are school productions in Victorian government secondary schools funded?

Last week I had the opportunity to catch Reservoir High's great production of *The Day the Internet Died*, a very topical satire about the impact of social media and smartphone technologies on local communities. I would like to congratulate directors Tegan French and Ashleigh Tucker and the whole cast and crew, and particularly year 12s Indi Quinn and Rick Nevrous, who have been part of every school production every year of their time at the school. I would also like to thank Jodie Purches and Darryl Forbes for hosting a very enthusiastic audience of students from Preston North East Primary, Kingsbury Primary and Reservoir Views Primary and some equally enthusiastic residents from Latrobe Retirement Village. But when you watch school productions at different schools, you do notice that they appear to be funded in different ways. Any information the minister can provide about how our government supports creative productions in our fantastic public schools would be greatly appreciated.

**Bridget Vallance:** Speaker, on a point of order, I have a number of questions that are unanswered and are now overdue, and I would seek that you have the ministers provide responses. Questions on notice unanswered by the Minister for Finance: 2685, 2687, 2688, 2689 and 2690. Further questions on notice overdue by the Minister for Finance: 2691, 2692, 2693, 2694, 2695, 2696, 2697, 2698, 2699, 2700, 2701, 2702 and 2703. Further questions on notice unanswered and overdue by the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 2704, 2705, 2706, 2707 and 2708. A question on notice that is unanswered and overdue by the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC is 2686. Questions on notice overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs are 2644, 2645, 2646, 2647 and 2648. Questions on notice that are overdue and unanswered by the Treasurer are 2421, 2422, 2512, 2678, 2679, 2680, 2681, 2682 and 2683. Overdue by the Minister for Agriculture are questions on notice 2709, 2710, 2711, 2712, 2713 and 2714. There are a number of questions on notice that are overdue by the Attorney-General. They are questions on notice 2607, 2608, 2609 and 2610. A question to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation that is unanswered and overdue is question on notice 2616. A question on notice that is overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Children is 2625. A question on notice that is overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Community Sport –

**Jacinta Allan** interjected.

**Bridget Vallance:** my point of order is not concluded – is 2653. A question unanswered and overdue by the Minister for Corrections is question on notice 2613. A question overdue by the Minister for Creative Industries is 2650. A question overdue by the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts is question on notice 2677. Questions overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Education are questions on notice 2619, 2620, 2621, 2622, 2623 –

**Jacinta Allan** interjected.

**Bridget Vallance:** well, clearly you are not doing yours – and 2624. A question overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Emergency Services is question on notice 2618. Questions overdue by the Minister of Government Services are questions on notice 2626 and 2627. A question overdue by the Minister of Housing and Building is 2673. A question on notice overdue by the Minister for Industrial Relations is 2684. Overdue by the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing is question on notice 2649. A question overdue by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs is question on notice 2664. A question overdue by the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery is question on notice 2617. A question on notice overdue by the Minister for Outdoor Recreation is question 2652. A question overdue by the Minister for Planning is question on notice 2672. A question on notice overdue by the Minister for Police is 2611. Overdue by the Minister for Ports and Freight is question on notice 2675. Questions overdue by the Premier are questions on notice 2657, 2658, 2659, 2660, 2661 and 2662. They are all overdue by the Premier. A question on notice overdue by the Minister for Public and Active Transport is 2671. A question overdue by the Minister for Racing is question on notice 2612. Overdue by the Minister for Regional Development is question on notice 2655. Overdue by the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is question on notice 2674. Overdue by the Minister for Skills and TAFE is question on notice 2656. Overdue by the Minister for Small Business and Employment is question on notice 2654. Overdue by the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop is

question on notice 2676. Overdue by the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events is question on notice 2651. Overdue by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure – there are a number here: questions on notice 2665, 2666, 2667, 2668, 2669 and 2670. Overdue by the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples is question on notice 2663. Question on notice overdue by the Minister for Victims is 2615. Lucky last but no less important for my constituents, overdue by the Minister for Youth Justice, is question on notice 2614. I am happy to make that list available to the clerks.

**The SPEAKER:** Manager of Opposition Business, many of these questions have actually been answered and I am advised that they are in the system.

**Bridget Vallence:** With the greatest of respect, they may be in the system, but they are not answered. We checked the list just prior to this.

**The SPEAKER:** They will be answered by the end of today.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, you just advised the house that those matters have been answered and then said that they have not been publicly answered. Therefore until they are answered on the website, they are not answered. Am I wrong?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Brighton, that is not a point of order. They are on the website. I understand your point of order. I am explaining to you that the answers to those questions, many of the ones that have been raised today, are in the system. They are on the website and will be answered by the end of today.

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, I have an unanswered question to the Premier that was due on 20 March: question 984. The second question to the Premier that remains unanswered and that was due in April is question 1049. Question 1060, again to the Premier – that is the third question to the Premier – remains unanswered and was due in April. A fourth question to the Premier, 1094, was due in May. Question 1120, again to the Premier, was due in June – the fifth question. A sixth question to the Premier, 1214, remains unanswered. I know that you have written to the Premier numerous times, but all of those questions –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! That is all that is required in your point of order. I ask you to hand your list to the Clerk.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have two questions which are outstanding: question 1141, asked on 16 May to the Treasurer, and question 1161, asked on 27 May to the Premier.

**Chris Crewther:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have question 1282, which was asked to the Minister for Health on 27 August and remains outstanding.

**The SPEAKER:** I acknowledge in the gallery senator for Victoria Jana Stewart.

### ***Bills***

#### **Statewide Treaty Bill 2025**

##### ***Introduction and first reading***

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:09): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to establish a First Peoples' representative and deliberative body named Gellung Warl, to amend the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 and the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022, to consequentially amend other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Under standing order 61(3)(b), I advise the house that representatives of the other parties and independents have been provided with a copy of the bill and a briefing in accordance with the standing order. I therefore move:

That this bill be read a second time immediately.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:12): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025:

In accordance with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

**Overview of the Bill**

The objects of the Bill are:

- to give effect to the first Statewide Treaty; and
- to provide foundations for ongoing Statewide Treaty-making between Gellung Warl and the State, including to negotiate further functions and powers of Gellung Warl over time; and
- to advance the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples; and
- to address the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation and ensure the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

The Bill establishes Gellung Warl in the form of a statutory corporation comprising of three arms, being:

- **The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (Assembly)**, which is intended to be a self-determined, democratically elected, enduring institution for the political representation of First Peoples;
- **Nginma Ngainga Wara**, which has the purposes of evaluating and monitoring the actions and performance of State government towards achieving State government outcomes directed to First Peoples, implementing recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and recommending practical and feasible measures to improve outcomes for First Peoples; and
- **Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna**, which has the purposes of facilitating truth-telling about historical events, including any continuing impacts, and ongoing healing and reconciliation, collecting information on the impact of colonisation on First Peoples and Victoria's history, and maintaining an archive of truth-telling information.

The Gellung Warl is an evolution of the current First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria Ltd (**FPAV**), which has been a powerful and influential voice for First Peoples in Victoria. The design and structure of the FPAV was driven by First Peoples, via consultations conducted by an Aboriginal Treaty Working Group and the Treaty Advancement Commissioner in 2016–2018. That work led to Australia's first Treaty legislation – the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018* – enshrining the State's commitment to pursuing Treaty and the establishment of an independent and democratically elected representative body for First People, the FPAV. The FPAV conducted elections in 2019 and 2023 and has been the representative body for First Peoples in Victoria in the conduct of the Statewide Treaty negotiations which commenced in November 2024.

The Bill makes amendments to the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*, the *Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022* and to other Acts. These amendments give effect to matters negotiated during the Statewide Treaty negotiation process, including the conferral of statutory appointment powers upon the Assembly under the *Heritage Act 2017* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. The amendments also provide for the application of governance and integrity legislation to Gellung Warl, including the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Act 2011*, *Financial Management Act 1994*, and *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, and confer additional functions on the Treaty Authority that arise from Statewide Treaty.

**Human rights issues**

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- Right to equality (section 8)
- Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)
- Freedom of expression (section 15)
- Taking part in public life (section 18)
- Cultural rights (section 19)
- Property rights (section 20)
- Fair hearing (section 24)
- Protection against double punishment (section 26)

***Right to equality***

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter relevantly provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

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

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

***Right to privacy and reputation***

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Section 13(b) of the Charter relevantly provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An ‘attack’ on reputation will be lawful if it is permitted by a precise and appropriately circumscribed law.

***Right to freedom of expression***

Section 15(1) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference. The right is concerned with a person’s internal autonomy, and embraces not only the right to hold an opinion, but also the right not to hold any particular opinion.

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, or not to express an opinion or impart information. However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

***Right to take part in public life***

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Section 18(2) further provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to vote and be elected at periodic State and municipal elections that guarantee the free

expression of the will of the electors, and to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

### ***Cultural rights***

Section 19(1) of the Charter provides that all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background must not be denied the right, in community with other persons of that background, to enjoy their culture, declare and practise their religion, and use their language. Section 19(2) of the Charter further provides specific protection for Aboriginal persons, providing that they must not be denied the right, with other members of their community, to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain and use their language, maintain kinship ties, and maintain their distinct spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The rights in section 19 are intended to protect and promote the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of Victorian society. The rights are concerned not only with the preservation of the cultural, religious and linguistic identity of particular cultural groups, but also with their continued development.

Section 19(2) is based on article 27 of the ICCPR and authoritative guidance of the United Nations Human Rights Committee extending the understanding of article 27 as protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. Section 19(2)(d) is also modelled on article 25 of the United Nations Draft Declarations on Indigenous Rights, which later became article 25 of the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Rights.

### ***Right to property***

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

### ***Right to a fair hearing***

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a ‘civil proceeding’ is not limited to judicial decision makers, but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. The right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. However, the entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

### ***Right not to be tried or punished more than once***

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person’s conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

Penalties and sanctions imposed by professional disciplinary bodies do not usually constitute a form of ‘punishment’ for the purposes of this right as they are not considered to be punitive.

### ***The establishment and powers of the arms of Gellung Warl: the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna***

#### ***Establishment and powers of the Assembly***

Part 3 of the Bill establishes the Assembly within Gellung Warl. Clause 16 provides that the Assembly is to be a self-determining and deliberative elected institution for the political representation of First Peoples which remains answerable to First Peoples through its democratic nature and its cultural obligations and responsibilities. Clause 18 sets out the functions of the Assembly, which include representing and making decisions in relation to First Peoples in Victoria, to advocate for their interests, to represent First Peoples in Statewide Treaty negotiations, and to make representations to Parliament, State government, public authorities and State funded service providers in relation to matters that affect First Peoples, as well as engage in capacity building activities in First Peoples’ communities.

Clauses 31–32 of Part 4 of the Bill give the Assembly the power to make substantive rules relating to how First Peoples organisations in Victoria provide certificates evidencing that a person is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. Clause 33 gives the Assembly the power to make internal rules, including its electoral rules.



Part 7 provides for an annual address by the Assembly to a joint sitting of the Legislative Counsel and Legislative Assembly (clause 64) and allows the Assembly to request certain information (clause 69) and give reports to Parliament, with accompanying requirements that relevant Ministers must respond to such reports (clause 74). Clause 66 requires the preparation of a Statement of Treaty compatibility for each Bill introduced into Parliament, which outlines any consultation with and representations made by the Assembly on the Bill and whether the Bill is compatible with the rights and self-determination of First Peoples and addressing the disadvantage experienced by First Peoples.

Part 8 establishes processes to facilitate the making of representations and provision of advice from the Assembly to State government and State-funded service providers. This Part establishes representation meetings between the Assembly and the Cabinet (Division 2), requires hearings and briefings to be held where the Assembly can be informed about and can ask Ministers, Secretaries and the Chief Commissioner of Police questions about the work of their Departments or Victoria Police as relating to First Peoples (Division 3 and Division 5) and allows the Assembly to make submissions to and ask questions of Ministers, authorities and State-funded service providers (Division 4 and Division 7). Division 6 also imposes a requirement on each Secretary and the Chief Commissioner of Police to develop guidelines in consultation with the Assembly.

*Establishment and powers of Nginma Ngainga Wara and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna*

Part 9 establishes Nginma Ngainga Wara and provides that its functions are to evaluate and monitor the performance of State government in achieving outcomes directed to First Peoples and implementing the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, to conduct research and inquiries and to make recommendations to the Assembly to improve outcomes for First Peoples (clause 94). Clause 99 provides that Nginma Ngainga Wara is independent from the Assembly. The powers of Nginma Ngainga Wara include the power to conduct inquiries (Part 9, Division 4).

Part 10 establishes Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna. Clause 121 sets out that its functions are to promote and facilitate ongoing truth-telling, healing and reconciliation, to provide education, conduct research and collect and maintain a historical archive of truth-telling information. Clause 124 provides that Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna is independent from the Assembly.

***Electorate and membership of the Assembly; the capacity to make complaints***

*Transitional arrangements for first election and initial constitution of the Assembly*

Parts 18 and 19 of the Bill make arrangements for transitional elections and the initial constitution of the Assembly. Under those provisions:

- A transitional election will be conducted in accordance with adapted election rules of the FPAV on the basis of the FPAV electoral roll (clauses 192, 194, and 195).
- Under the FPAV election rules a person is only eligible to be registered on the roll if, amongst other things, they are a Victorian Traditional Owner or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who lives in Victoria (rule 12). A person is only eligible to stand as a candidate if, amongst other things, they are an eligible elector and they are a Victorian Traditional Owner (rule 28);
- On 1 May 2026, the Assembly will be constituted by members elected in the transitional election and the 'transitional reserved members' (clause 203). Transitional reserved members are those people who hold office as a reserved member of the FPAV immediately before 1 May 2026 (clause 201). Under the FPAV Constitution, reserved members of the FPAV are appointed by Traditional Owner Groups in accordance with FPAV Appointment Rules which provide, amongst other things, that only a Victorian Traditional Owner may be a reserved member (rule 8).

*Future electorate and membership of Assembly*

Clause 17 of the Bill provides for the ongoing establishment of the Assembly and provides that it consists of general members and reserved members. General members are elected in accordance with electoral rules, while reserved members are appointed by a Traditional Owner group in accordance with procedures developed by that Traditional Owner group in accordance with the electoral rules.

Part 6 of the Bill relates to election and appointment of members to the Assembly.

- The Electoral Officer must establish and maintain the electoral role and conduct an election in accordance with the electoral rules (clauses 55 and 56);
- The electoral rules must include, as a minimum, eligibility requirements which include that a person is either a Traditional Owner or is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who meets specified residency requirements (Schedule 2, item 5.1);
- Each Traditional Owner group is also entitled to appoint a reserved member in accordance with their procedures and the electoral rules (clause 62).

Clause 21(1) of the Bill provides that a person is qualified to be a member of the Assembly if they meet the requirements set out in the internal rules. Internal rules must include qualifications including, amongst other things, that a person is on the electoral roll and is a Traditional Owner (Schedule 1, item 3.1). Clause 21(2) sets out disqualifications to be a member of the Assembly. Disqualifications are considered further below.

*Complaints regarding internal rules and elections*

Clause 44(1) of the Bill provides that First Peoples or First Peoples organisations may dispute the validity of an internal rule or a substantive rule made by the Assembly, under section 103 of the *Supreme Court Act 1986*.

Part 15 of the Bill concerns the ability of First Peoples to make complaints about Gellung Warl's fulfilment of its obligations. Clause 166 provides that a complaint may be made about any matter specified in the internal rules, save for electoral complaints. Subsection 166(3) provides that a complaint may be made by any First Peoples individual or any First Peoples organisation that has an interest in the subject matter of the complaint.

Division 3 of Part 15 of the Bill then relates to electoral complaints, with clause 172 providing that an electoral complaint may be made, in the case of a complaint about enrolment or eligibility for enrolment – the person affected by the decision of the Electoral Officer, and in any other case, an eligible elector, which would be a Traditional Owner.

***Creation of measures specifically for First Peoples***

In the context outlined above, the Bill establishes the following measures only for First Peoples (including Traditional Owners):

- eligibility to be registered on the Gellung Warl electoral roll and be eligible to vote;
- eligibility to stand for election or appointment as a member of the Assembly;
- the ability to dispute the validity of an internal rule or substantive rule;
- the ability to dispute the validity of an election; and
- the ability to make a complaint about Gellung Warl's fulfilment of its obligations.

These measures, exercised and enjoyed by individual First Peoples, enable the measures exercised collectively through the Gellung Warl and its arms to be realised and held to account. Those measures are outlined in detail above.

*Right to equality (section 8) and right to take part in public life (section 18(1) and (2)(b))*

The differential treatment between First Peoples (particularly Traditional Owners) and Victorians who are not First Peoples engages the right to equality and the right to take part in public life under sections 8 and 18 of the Charter respectively. Section 8(3) provides that every person is equal before the law and has the right to equal and effective protection from discrimination. Section 18(1) of the Charter protects the right of every person in Victoria to participate without discrimination in the conduct of public affairs and section 18(2)(b) of the Charter provides that eligible Victorians have the right to have access without discrimination to public office, on general terms of equality.

I consider that the functions and powers conferred on Gellung Warl and the Assembly by the Bill bring it within the realm of 'public affairs' for the purposes of section 18(1) of the Charter. The Bill confers members of the Assembly with functions, powers and duties to be exercised for public purposes. While 'public office' is not defined in the Charter, I have assumed out of an abundance of caution and in order to undertake the broadest possible assessment of Charter compatibility that members of the Assembly may hold public office for the purposes of section 18(2)(b) of the Charter.

Both the rights to equality and to take part in public life hinge on whether the relevant differential treatment constitutes discrimination as it is defined in the EO Act, being unfavourable treatment on the basis of a protected attribute (direct discrimination), or the imposition of a requirement, condition or practice that has the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute (indirect discrimination).

In conferring specific eligibility and entitlements on First Peoples, and in enabling the exercise of collective measures through the Gellung Warl, and in particular the Assembly, the Bill might be considered to limit the rights of Victorians who are not First Peoples. Nevertheless, because the Bill creates new measures, and because the substantive rule-making powers only extend to First Peoples and First Peoples organisations, any limits on rights may be minimal.

I am of the view, however, that any limits on rights resulting from these provisions would not amount to discrimination as they constitute a special measure under section 8(4) of the Charter. This is because their purpose is to support the advancement of First Peoples in order to promote or realise their substantive equality in the enjoyment of all their human rights, by addressing the disadvantage inflicted on them by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation. They constitute a proportionate and justified measure in the

context of the gap between outcomes for First Peoples and other Victorians, including in life expectancy, education, and health that has been caused to by the impacts of colonisation in the past, and which continue today.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that the creation of these measures specifically for First Peoples is not discriminatory and therefore does not limit the right to equality or the right to take part in public life under the Charter.

Reasonable limit under section 7(2) of the Charter

However, if it were accepted that the Bill does in fact limit the rights to equality and participation in the public life of Victorians who are not First Peoples, I consider that these limits would be reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

The Bill establishes *new* means of participation in public life, and does not impose any limits on other *existing* means of participation in the conduct of public affairs. It does not limit the existing right or opportunity of any person to participate in other aspects of public life.

The purpose of Gellung Warl, including the Assembly, and their role in the Treaty process, is to achieve substantive equality of First Peoples, and it is a significant step in re-framing the relationship between First Peoples and the State. The aim of the Treaty process is to improve outcomes for First Peoples and address the disadvantage created by colonisation, while giving effect to the inherent right of First Peoples to self-determination (and providing a mechanism whereby First Peoples can elect their representatives by way of a process chosen and carried out by First Peoples, which is a key way in which the Bill seeks to promote rights). Any limitation on rights is therefore itself protective of rights, because it advances the rights of First Peoples to equality, participation in public life, and cultural rights and the unique right to self-determination of First Peoples under international law, including under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The purpose of the measures which could lead to any limitation is also intended to benefit the rights of every person in Victoria, through reconciliation and better policy design and outcomes. The establishment of Gellung Warl also recognises the unique status of First Peoples.

The establishment of a self-determinative body for First Peoples that represents Traditional Owners and other First Peoples promotes First Peoples' rights and substantive equality. In my view there is no less restrictive alternative available, as allowing Victorians who are not First Peoples to vote in the election for or to become members of the Assembly, or to hold Gellung Warl to account, would undermine its very purpose and function, which is to be a self-determinative, generative body that reflects Aboriginal Lore, Law and Cultural Authority and the responsibilities of Traditional Owners to Country and to all peoples who are on Country.

In my view, any limits on the rights to equality and to take part in public life of Victorians who are not First Peoples are reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

***Differential treatment between Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples***

Further, in the context above, only Traditional Owners, and not other First Peoples who are not Traditional Owners, are eligible to be appointed or elected as reserved or general members of the Assembly.

*Right to equality (section 8), right to take part in public life (section 18(1) and (2)(b)), and cultural rights (section 19)*

To the extent that the Bill provides for the unique role of Traditional Owners, and restricts membership of or election to the Assembly to Traditional Owners, I have assumed that the equality rights, the right to take part in public life and cultural rights of First Nations people who are not Traditional Owners may also be engaged in order to undertake the broadest possible assessment of Charter compatibility. As discussed above, the limitation of these first two rights turns on discriminatory treatment. The exclusion of First Nations people who are not Traditional Owners from membership of the Assembly may constitute direct discrimination, being unfavourable treatment on the basis of race, where race includes 'descent or ancestry'. In this context, the restriction on membership of the Assembly is unlikely to constitute a special measure, given its purpose is not to promote or advance equality for Traditional Owners as distinct from other First Peoples. Accordingly, if this restriction did constitute direct discrimination, the equality rights and right to take part in public life of First Peoples who are not Traditional Owners may be limited.

In relation to cultural rights, section 19(2) of the Charter provides that Aboriginal persons must not be denied the right to, amongst other things, maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the lands and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs. Given it is intended that Gellung Warl will be both an expression of Aboriginal culture and a political mechanism that will allow for the exercise and enjoyment of cultural rights, access to Gellung Warl and participation in its work, particularly the Assembly, is relevant to cultural rights under the Charter.

For cultural rights to be limited, a First Nations person must be denied the enjoyment of these rights, which international jurisprudence has found must amount to a 'substantial restriction on enjoyment of culture'. Given the structure of Gellung Warl is self-determined and reflects Aboriginal Law, Lore and Cultural Authority (and more broadly that the Treaty process was a process shared by First Peoples and the State, including the model provided for in the Bill of Gellung Warl, including the Assembly), it is strongly arguable that the restriction placed on membership of the Assembly would not amount to a 'substantial restriction' on rights. It could instead be said that it is a measure that reflects and supports the cultural rights of First Peoples through a democratic process determined by First Peoples, and therefore does not constitute a limit on cultural rights under section 19(2) of the Charter.

Reasonable limit under section 7(2) of the Charter

If, however, the equality rights, right to access public life and cultural rights of First Peoples who are not Traditional Owners are in fact limited by the differential treatment of Traditional Owners in the Bill, I am of the view that these limits are justified in the circumstances under section 7(2) of the Charter. The establishment of Gellung Warl, and the Assembly in particular, provides a formal mechanism through which First Peoples in Victoria will be able to exercise their right to self-determination and provides a means by which First Peoples can raise and address issues relevant to Victorian First Peoples with the State. While there are restrictions on the membership of the Assembly, these matters reflect outcomes negotiated with the FPAV, being the representative and deliberative body with authority to negotiate on behalf of First Peoples with the State. The Assembly is nevertheless answerable to First Peoples through its democratic nature and its cultural obligations and responsibilities.

Further, by confining membership to Traditional Owners, the structure of representation in the Assembly reflects Aboriginal Law, Lore and Cultural Authority, thereby furthering the right to self-determination of First Peoples and in turn maintains public confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of Gellung Warl. In this context, I am of the view there is a direct connection between the limit on rights and its purpose and that there is no less restrictive means reasonably available that would maintain the character of a self-determined, culturally appropriate body.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that any limit on the equality rights, the right to take part in public life and the cultural rights of First Nations people who are not Traditional Owners by their restriction from membership and election to the Assembly, is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

***Other qualifications to be a member of the Assembly, the Nginma Ngainga Wara, the Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna and suspension or removal from office***

Clause 21 of the Bill outlines the qualification criteria to be a member of the First Peoples' Assembly. As noted above, a person is qualified to be a member of the Assembly if the person meets the requirements set out in the internal rules, subject to particular disqualifying criteria set out in clause 21(2)–(3). Clauses 100 and 125 of the Bill provide that a person is not eligible for appointment as a Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna member in certain circumstances. The disqualifying criteria set out in these clauses is broadly similar and provide that a person is not qualified to be a member of the Assembly, the Nginma Ngainga Wara or the Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna if the person:

- holds any of the following public offices or is employed in the following positions (and only in relation to the Assembly is not on leave from and not performing the duties of that office or position):
  - member of Parliament of the Commonwealth or any State or Territory;
  - Ministerial officer, Parliamentary officer or an electorate officer employed by a member of the Commonwealth, or any State or Territory Parliament;
  - Councillor of a Council or a member of Council staff from any State or Territory;
  - member of the Treaty Authority or holds a paid position with the Treaty Authority;
  - CEO of Gellung Warl;
  - member of any of the other two bodies;
  - staff member of or holds a paid position with Gellung Warl; or
  - public sector employee of the Commonwealth or any State or Territory;
- is disqualified from managing corporations under Part 2D.6 of the Corporations Act;
- is currently held in prison;
- is subject to an order under the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997*; or

- has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for an indictable offence and is subject to a parole order that includes travel restriction condition.

The Bill provides for the suspension of a member of the Assembly (clause 23), of Nginma Ngainga Wara members (clause 101) and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna members (clause 126) in accordance with the internal rules, which under Schedule 1 of the Bill, must include the grounds and procedures for suspension, and procedures for suspension where an allegation of misconduct or serious misconduct is made. The Bill also provides for the removal of a member of the Assembly (clause 24), of Nginma Ngainga Wara members (clause 102) and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna members (clause 127) in accordance with the internal rules, which under Schedule 1 must include the grounds of removal. Grounds for removal of members of the Assembly must include, relevantly, ceasing to be qualified to be a member (for example, if a member assumes any of the offices or positions above or is sentenced to a term of imprisonment in particular circumstances), being unable to perform the duties of the office or having been found to have engaged in serious misconduct. Grounds for removal of members of Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna must include, relevantly, being found to have engaged in serious misconduct, assuming public office or being employed in a position which would make a person ineligible to be appointed to these bodies, being sentenced to certain terms of imprisonment or being currently held in a prison.

Clauses 232–237 of the Bill amend the *Heritage Act 2017* to enable the Assembly to appoint, remove and temporarily suspend a member of the Heritage Council (being the person referred to in section 10(2)(c) of the *Heritage Act 2017*). These provisions are similar to the existing processes for the suspension and removal of other Heritage Council members under Schedule 1 of the *Heritage Act 2017*.

*Right to access public office (section 18(2)(b))*

The above provisions which disqualify a person from being a member of the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna or allow for their removal from these positions on the basis of holding another position or public office may limit the right under section 18(2)(b).

The right in section 18(2)(b) will only be limited where the Bill gives rise to ‘discrimination’, within the meaning of the EO Act as discussed under the equality right above, being direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of protected attributes, which in this case, would be employment activity and political activity.

If it were accepted that the Bill does in fact limit the section 18 rights of persons in these circumstances, then I nevertheless consider that those limits are justifiable as reasonable limits under section 7(2) of the Charter. The exclusion of certain persons who hold political offices (or politically-related offices) or are employed in the specified positions from being eligible to be a member of one of these bodies is necessary to ensure the independence and proper functioning of these bodies. Additionally, the exclusion serves to avoid potential conflicts of interests and, in relation to members of the Commonwealth and other Parliaments, other potential legal and practical difficulties.

*Right to a fair hearing (section 24)*

The provisions governing suspension or removal from the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara, Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna or the Heritage Council may be relevant to the right to a fair hearing.

The concept of a ‘civil proceeding’ is not limited to judicial decision makers but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests, such as holding professional registration. While recognising the broad scope of section 24(1), the term ‘proceeding’ and ‘party’ suggest that section 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As the administrative decisions at issue here, being a decision to suspend or remove a member of one of these bodies, appear unlikely to involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged.

In any event, if a broad reading of section 24(1) is adopted and it is understood that the fair hearing right is engaged by this Bill, any limitation and its justification will ultimately be determined having regard to the process for suspension or removal set out in the internal rules or adopted by the Assembly in relation to suspension or removal of a Heritage Council member, including whether procedural fairness is afforded to the affected person and any opportunities for review or appeal of the decision. As the Assembly, as part of Gellung Warl, is a public authority for the purposes of the Charter (clause 10(4)), it will be required by section 38 of the Charter to give proper consideration to, and act compatibly with, human rights (including fair hearing rights) in making any suspension or removal decision.

*Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)*

The nexus between criminal convictions and qualification for membership of and removal as a member of the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna could engage the right not to be punished more than once for the same offence under section 26 of the Charter.

In my view, however, these limitations on the qualifications of members or prospective members are unlikely to constitute punishment for the purposes of this right. The mere fact that a law operates to impose a detriment on a person does not make it punitive. Rather, the question of whether the imposition of a detriment is properly characterised as punitive will depend upon a range of factors including the nature of the detriment, the criteria by reference to which that detriment is imposed, and the purpose(s) for which the detriment is imposed.

The nature of the detriment in this instance – that is, removal of the ability for a person to qualify or continue as a member of these bodies – is not typically associated with criminal punishment. No conviction flows from this outcome. Further, the nature of the detriment is unlikely to be considered as non-criminal punishment (that is, punishment on a basis other than breach of the criminal law) because these provisions serve a protective rather than punitive purpose: they ensure the integrity and good governance of the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, and promote public trust and confidence in these bodies and their members. The clause is also of a similar nature and scope to comparable qualification provisions that govern membership of representative bodies. It is limited to matters directly connected to integrity, competency and good governance, and does not extend to circumstances that could be considered arbitrary or punitive, such as disqualification solely on the basis of having low level summary convictions.

Accordingly, as the disqualification and removal from membership to the Assembly, the Nginma Ngainga Wara or the Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna does not amount to punishment, it will not engage the right against double punishment for the purpose of section 26 of the Charter, and is compatible with the Charter.

#### ***Electoral Officer provisions***

Clause 231 of the Bill inserts a new Part ('Part 3 – Electoral Officer') into the *Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022*. New Part 3 governs the appointment of the Electoral Officer by the Treaty Authority (Division 1, Part 3), which potentially engages sections 18 and 26 of the Charter, and also contains provisions authorising the Electoral Officer's access to electoral information in the course of their functions to administer the Gellung Warl electoral roll and conduct elections (Division 2, Part 3), which potentially engages section 13 of the Charter.

#### ***Right to access public office (section 18(2)(b))***

Clause 20(3) of the proposed Part 3 of the *Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022* excludes specific people from appointment to be the Electoral Officer. This includes holding particular public offices or being employed in particular positions, similar to those which disqualify a person from being a member of the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna as outlined above. A person is also not qualified if they are, amongst other things, currently held in a prison or have been sentenced to certain terms of imprisonment. Under clause 20(4) of the proposed Part 3, the office of Electoral Officer will become vacant on grounds including these grounds.

As discussed above, section 18(2)(b) of the Charter provides that eligible Victorians have the right, and are to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to have access, on general terms of equality, to public office. As stated above, I have assumed out of an abundance of caution and in order to undertake the broadest possible assessment of Charter compatibility that the Electoral Officer may hold public office for the purposes of section 18(2)(b) of the Charter.

The right in section 18(2)(b) will only be limited where the Bill gives rise to 'discrimination', within the meaning of the EO Act as discussed under the equality right above, being direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of protected attributes, which in this case, would be employment activity and political activity.

If it were accepted that the Bill does in fact limit the section 18 rights of persons who work in the positions excluded by Part 3 from appointment to be an Electoral Officer, then I nevertheless consider that those limits are justifiable as reasonable limits under section 7(2) of the Charter. The exclusion of certain persons who hold political offices or who are members of First Nations' bodies from appointment as the Electoral Officer is necessary to ensure the integrity of elections and mitigate the risk of bias or perceived bias. Here, any interference with the right to take part of public life is justified insofar as to support the objective of appointing an impartial, apolitical Electoral Officer who can administer fair and democratic electoral processes.

#### ***Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)***

The nexus between criminal convictions and qualification for appointment or the vacation of the office of the Electoral Officer could engage the right not to be punished more than once for the same offence under section 26 of the Charter.

As noted above, the mere fact that a law operates to impose a detriment on a person (in this case, disqualification from appointment or the vacation of this office) does not make it punitive. As with the provisions in relation to qualification for the membership for the Assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara or Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, these proposed provisions pursue non-punitive purposes, including the promotion of integrity and good governance of this office and the protection of public trust and confidence in the Electoral

Officer. Therefore I consider that these provisions do not constitute punishment, so will not engage the right against double punishment for the purpose of section 26 of the Charter.

*Right to privacy (section 13)*

Division 2 of proposed Part 3 authorises the Electoral Officer and persons assisting the Electoral Officer authorised by the Treaty Authority to access electoral information (clause 27, Division 2, Part 3) and the Gellung Warl electoral roll information (clause 28, Division 2, Part 3). The proposed Part also places restrictions on the disclosure of electoral information and Gellung Warl electoral information unless one of the exceptions in clause 29 applies to the Electoral Officer or the person authorised by the Treaty Authority. While the provisions likely interfere with the right to privacy, I consider these interferences to be lawful and not arbitrary.

The information sharing powers are necessary to authorise the Electoral Officer to carry out their functions in administering and conducting elections under the Treaty Authority Act. Section 29 of Part 3 ensures that the sharing of information is only authorised where the receiver is already authorised to access electoral information under Part 3. The prohibition on disclosure without obtaining the requisite authorisation safeguards the right to privacy and supports the integrity of election processes under the *Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022*.

I consider that these provisions strike an appropriate balance between enabling the Electoral Officer to effectively exercise their functions and powers and protecting the right to privacy of persons of voters to whom the information is attributed. In my view, the information sharing powers are proportionate to the purpose of the limitation and therefore, will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy.

***Election campaign donation cap***

Clause 56 of the Bill provides that the Assembly must make electoral rules in accordance with Part 4 and Schedules 1 and 2 and that an election must be conducted in accordance with these rules. Pursuant to Schedule 2, Item 7.1(a), the electoral rules must specify that all election campaign donations are capped at or below the dollar amount specified by the general cap within the meaning of the *Electoral Act 2002* as indexed under section 217Q of that Act.

*Freedom of expression (section 15)*

By restricting the donation amount that can be received by a candidate for an election campaign, this cap may limit the right to freedom of expression of donors under section 15(2) of the Charter. However, I consider that this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to protect public order and the rights of others within the meaning of the internal limitation in section 15(3) of the Charter. The protection of public order is a wide and flexible concept dealing with rights or obligations that facilitate the proper functioning of the rule of law and includes measures for giving effect to peace and good order and public safety. The meaning of protecting the rights of others is similarly broad, not confined to the human rights set out in the Charter and would include restrictions reasonably necessary to protect rights of equal opportunity of political participation.

The purpose of the cap is to prevent corruption and undue influence in the Assembly, which may occur if payments of large sums of money are allowed to be made by way of political donation. Further, the cap also acts to promote equality of opportunity of political participation and may in fact promote freedom of expression by levelling the field of political debate and promoting a more equal dissemination of diverse points of view. Finally, the cap also serves the important purpose of overcoming any perception of corruption or undue influence that may be accompanied by unlimited political donations and so fosters confidence in the integrity of the Assembly. On this basis, I consider the cap on electoral donations required to be included in the electoral rules is reasonably necessary to protect the integrity and proper functioning of the Assembly, as well rights of equal opportunity of political participation in the work of the Assembly.

I consider that Schedule 1, Item 7.1(a) falls within section 15(3) of the Charter and imposes no limitation on the freedom of expression.

***Forfeiture of election donations***

Clause 58(1) of the Bill provides that if a candidate for election to the Assembly accepts an election campaign donation in a way that is contrary to the electoral rules, an amount equal to the donation amount or the value of the donation is payable by the candidate to Gellung Warl. Clause 58(2) also provides that any amount payable under this section may be recovered by the Chief Executive Officer as a debt due to Gellung Warl in any court of competent jurisdiction.

*Right to property (section 20)*

By requiring the payment of the donation amount to Gellung Warl and providing that this amount can be recovered as a debt against the candidate, this clause could be considered to deprive a person of their property rights. However, any such deprivation will be 'in accordance with law' and will therefore not limit the Charter

right to property. The clause clearly sets out the circumstances in which a candidate will be required to pay the donation amount to Gellung Warl, that is where the acceptance of such a donation is contrary to the electoral rules (clause 58(1)), and the potential consequences of non-payment, being that the candidate may be subject to debt recovery proceedings (clause 58(2)). Although the electoral rules are yet to be made by the Assembly pursuant to clause 56(1) the provisions in Schedule 2 expressly provide the minimum content in respect to conduct in elections (Schedule 2, item 1) and electoral expenditure matters (Schedule 2, item 7). For example, anonymous election campaign donations of or above \$1,000 are prohibited (Schedule 2, item 7.1(e)). As such, potential election campaigners can be reasonably expected to know the minimum standards of conduct and expenditure in an election and (when made) the electoral rules ahead of time, and can regulate their conduct accordingly.

Further, any deprivation of property in this context is reasonably necessary to act as a deterrence mechanism to discourage and prevent corruption and undue influence in the Assembly. In turn, compliance with the electoral rules in respect to donations promotes equality of opportunity of political participation and to foster confidence in the integrity of Gellung Warl. In my view, and noting that the property right is not limited, any interference with property rights here is justified so as to support the important objective of ensuring that elections are free, fair and transparent (which is expressly required as a minimum standard of conduct in elections under item 1.1(f) in Schedule 2).

***Transfer of property, rights and liabilities of FPAV to Gellung Warl***

Part 19 of the Bill contains transitional provisions, some of which concern the transition of the FPAV to Gellung Warl. This includes provisions which allow for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from FPAV to Gellung Warl, or otherwise vest property, rights and liabilities in Gellung Warl.

***Right to property***

Clause 210 of the Bill provides that the CEO of FPAV may give the Minister, within the period requested by the Minister, a statement or statements relating to the property, rights and liabilities of the FPAV, and that a statement may allocate to Gellung Warl the property, rights and liabilities of the FPAV. Clause 212 provides that, on the relevant date for an allocation statement, all property and rights of the FPAV that are allocated under that allocation statement vest in Gellung Warl in accordance with the statement, and all liabilities of the FPAV allocated under that allocation statement become liabilities of Gellung Warl in accordance with the statement.

Additionally, clause 213 provides that, on 1 July 2026, all property and rights of FPAV that have not been previously vested or transferred under an allocation statement are vested in Gellung Warl, and all liabilities of the FPAV existing immediately before 1 July 2026, wherever located, become liabilities of Gellung Warl.

Further, where the rights and liabilities of the FPAV under an agreement vest in Gellung Warl then Gellung Warl becomes, on the relevant date for that allocation statement, a party to the agreement in place of the FPAV, and the agreement has effect as if Gellung Warl had always been a party to the agreement (clause 215). This is also the case with instruments, in that clause 216 provides that instruments relating to former FPAV property allocated to Gellung Warl under an allocation statement or vested in Gellung Warl continue to have effect according to their terms on and after the relevant date for that allocation statement as if a reference in the instrument to the FPAV were a reference to Gellung Warl.

The transfer of any of FPAV's property, rights and liabilities to Gellung Warl, including in relation to agreements with third parties, is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the property or liability transferred. However, the transfer of the property or liability from FPAV to Gellung Warl will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest, as they are not being deprived of their interest in the property or liability, but rather, the property or liability is transferred without altering the substantive content of that property right or liability.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the FPAV may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, the Bill may engage this right. However, in my opinion, the Bill does not effect a deprivation of property as it does not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against FPAV. Rather, liability is transferred to Gellung Warl.

Finally, even if the Bill could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation would be 'in accordance with law' and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In particular, the Part 19 clauses of the Bill dealing with the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the FPAV to the Authority, as outlined above, are drafted in clear and precise terms, and are sufficiently accessible.

Accordingly, I consider that the transfer of FPAV's property, rights and liabilities to the Gellung Warl is compatible with the property rights in section 20 of the Charter.



***Information sharing and confidentiality provisions***

Part 11 of the Bill contains the information sharing powers of the arms of Gellung Warl. The clauses prescribe the circumstances in which disclosure of restricted information (defined as information that is marked as confidential by the entity or the entity advises is confidential), confidential information (defined as information specified in the internal rules to be confidential) and culturally sensitive or culturally secret information is permitted between the arms of Gellung Warl and between Gellung Warl and external entities.

The sharing of restricted information between the arms of Gellung Warl requires the consent of the entity that is providing the information (clause 131–133). For culturally sensitive or culturally secret information, the information is to be given in accordance with the internal rules (clause 134). Clause 135 of the Bill requires that an entity must not consent to disclosure of restricted information if it would otherwise be prohibited by the Bill or any other Act.

The sharing of culturally sensitive or culturally secret information from Gellung Warl to external entities is not authorised unless the disclosure is made with consent given in accordance with the internal rules (clause 136). The internal rules must include requirements for persons or groups to whom the information is attributed to consent to disclosure or publication of restricted information that is culturally sensitive or culturally secret information (Schedule 1, item 8). Any disclosure of culturally sensitive or culturally secret information to external entities must be accompanied by a copy of the guidelines for handling culturally sensitive or culturally secret information made by the Assembly (clause 137).

The sharing of restricted information or confidential information to external entities is prohibited, unless the disclosure is for a permitted purpose (i.e. in the course of legal proceedings or pursuant to an order of the court or a tribunal; to a law enforcement agency or an integrity agency; or it is permitted, required or authorised under the Bill or any other Act) (clause 138–139).

Clause 140 of the Bill clarifies that nothing in the Bill requires or authorises disclosure to Gellung Warl of information (including personal information and health information) that is protected by confidentiality or privilege, or not otherwise authorised or permitted by any other Act or law.

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

Part 11 of the Bill authorises the sharing of restricted information, confidential information and culturally sensitive or culturally secret information in prescribed circumstances. The clauses likely interfere with the right to privacy, however, I consider these interferences to be lawful and not arbitrary.

While Part 11 generally prohibits the disclosure of information without obtaining the appropriate consent, clauses 136(2) and 139 permit disclosure to certain organisations for permitted purposes, such as courts and tribunals and law enforcement or integrity agencies. The exceptions are confined to circumstances where there are legitimate public interest reasons to disclose information, in addition to ensuring compliance with other Victorian laws. I consider that the public interest in certain organisations obtaining relevant information substantially outweighs the public interest in protecting the right to privacy.

Absent any exception, Part 11 of the Bill ensures that the sharing of information is only authorised where consent has been given by the entity providing the information, and for culturally sensitive or culturally secret information, where consent has been given in accordance with the internal rules. The internal rules must include certain minimum requirements, which include a process whereby persons or groups who provide information to the entities can nominate whether the information is culturally sensitive or culturally secrets (Schedule 1, item 8). Any information which has been marked as restricted, confidential or culturally sensitive or culturally secret will then be subject to the disclosure requirements in Part 11 of the Bill. The prohibition on disclosure without obtaining the requisite consent safeguards the right to privacy and supports Indigenous Data Sovereignty and First Peoples' self-determination over the collection, use and disclosure of their information. I consider that these clauses strike an appropriate balance between enabling Gellung Warl and its arms to effectively exercise their functions and powers and protecting the right to privacy of persons or groups to whom the information is attributed. In my view, the information sharing powers are proportionate to the purpose of the limitation and therefore, will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy.

***Inquiries and research***

The Nginma Ngainga Wara's functions include the power to conduct inquiries and to conduct research (clause 94). Clause 106 of the Bill provides that the Nginma Ngainga Wara may conduct an inquiry in any manner it considers fit, including receiving submissions from any person or body and inviting any person or body to appear or otherwise participate in the inquiry. Clause 107 authorises the Nginma Ngainga Wara to request a Minister or an agency head or an agency to give the Nginma Ngainga Wara any information or any document that Nginma Ngainga Wara is reasonably satisfied is relevant to the subject matter of the inquiry. Clause 109 requires the Nginma Ngainga Wara to give a report of the inquiry to the Assembly.

The Nginma Ngainga Wara may, on its own initiative or in response to a referral from the Assembly, conduct research on any matter listed at clause 111(1) of the Bill. The Nginma Ngainga Wara may, on its own initiative or at the request of the Assembly, give a report of its research activities or its ongoing evaluation and monitoring activities to the Assembly (clauses 110 and 112).

The Nginma Ngainga Wara may, in accordance with clause 113 of the Bill, refer a matter, including a matter relating to an individual, to a person or body specified in Schedule 4 (e.g. Chief Commissioner of Police; Commission for Children and Young People).

Clause 114 provides that the Nginma Ngainga Wara and an agency may make an agreement that permits the agency to give de-identified data to the Nginma Ngainga Wara for the purposes of conducting monitoring and evaluation, research or an inquiry.

The Nginma Ngainga Wara must not publish a report of an inquiry, a monitoring report or a research report or give it to any person other than the Assembly (clause 115). The Assembly may publish any report of an inquiry, monitoring report or research report, but must not publish it if the Nginma Ngainga Wara has notified the Assembly it is not to be published (clause 116(1) and (2)). The Assembly must not publish any restricted Nginma Ngainga Wara information or culturally sensitive or culturally secret information without obtaining the requisite consent of the person, group or entity who provided the information (clause 116(3) and (4)).

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

The inquiries and research functions of the Nginma Ngainga Wara may involve the collection, use and disclosure of personal, health and sensitive information of persons or groups participating in the inquiries or research. While these clauses may interfere with the right to privacy, I do not consider these interferences to be unlawful or arbitrary.

The gathering of information is necessary to allow Nginma Ngainga Wara to reach meaningful findings in its inquiries and research, and to assist Nginma Ngainga Wara to operate as an effective First Nations-led accountability body. I consider any interference occasioned by these clauses is not arbitrary given that the scope of the inquiries and research powers are appropriately prescribed and proportionate to the legitimate aims of the Bill. For instance, the clauses do not authorise Nginma Ngainga Wara to compel a person or group to participate in an inquiry or to contribute to research. If persons or groups decide to participate in an inquiry or contribute to research, the person or group to whom the information is attributed can elect to classify the information as culturally sensitive or culturally secret in accordance with the internal rules. The disclosure of any culturally sensitive or culturally secret information or restricted information which has been marked as confidential must comply with the information sharing framework in Part 11 of the Bill.

Nginma Ngainga Wara is also prohibited from disclosing an inquiry, research or evaluation and monitoring report to any person other than the Assembly, and inquiry reports are exempt from the FOI Act (clause 141). The Assembly is not subject to any publication requirement, but if it decides to publish a report, it must comply with the publication requirements at clause 116 of the Bill, including obtaining the consent of the person, group or entity who provided the information if the information is restricted or culturally sensitive or culturally secret information. These powers go no further than is necessary to enable Nginma Ngainga Wara to exercise its functions.

In relation to de-identified data agreements, I consider that the procedural safeguards provided for in the Bill ensure compatibility with the right to privacy. The requirement that the data is de-identified ensures that the data no longer relates to an identifiable individual or an individual who can be reasonably identified. The de-identified data agreement must also specify the type of de-identified data to be provided and specify the purpose for which the de-identified data is to be provided.

Accordingly, I consider these clauses strike an appropriate balance between protecting the privacy of persons or groups who contribute to inquiries or research and ensuring that Nginma Ngainga Wara has sufficient information to perform its functions. In my view, the powers relating to the collection, use and disclosure of information are proportionate to the purpose of the limitation and therefore will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy. The Nginma Ngainga Wara's referral powers may require the divulging of information to other persons or bodies that would otherwise be private in nature. The referral of individual complaints or matters that the Nginma Ngainga Wara becomes aware of as it performs its functions is important to ensure matters are dealt with by other oversight and integrity bodies that have the requisite functions and powers for investigation. As discussed, the Nginma Ngainga Wara is not authorised to compel the disclosure of information from persons or groups who may be the subject of matters referred under clause 113 of the Bill. Further, the other oversight and integrity bodies listed at Schedule 4 must handle matters in accordance with their own governing legislation, thus attracting additional procedural safeguards to protect the privacy of persons or groups to whom information may be attributed. As such, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference.

***Truth-telling information***

Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna's functions include receiving and collecting truth-telling information about historical events, holding an archive of truth-telling information and publishing material contained in the archive (clause 121(b) and (c)).

Clause 128 of the Bill provides that Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna may collect and hold personal information in accordance with the internal rules. Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna may publish information in accordance with the internal rules, but Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna must not publish any restricted or culturally sensitive or culturally secret information without obtaining consent in accordance with the Bill and the internal rules, or publish any information that is not otherwise permitted to be published under any other Act (clause 129).

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

The clauses may interfere with the privacy rights of the person or group to whom the information is attributed, however, I consider any interference is not unlawful or arbitrary.

The clauses of the Bill are necessary to enable Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna to perform its functions. Without the ability to collect, archive and publish information, Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna will not be able to facilitate truth-telling about historical events, including any continuing impacts, and ongoing health and reconciliation. Any interference with the right to privacy will be prescribed by law, and Part 11 of the Bill otherwise prohibits the disclosure of restricted information which has been marked as confidential or culturally sensitive or culturally secret information without obtaining consent in accordance with the Bill and the internal rules. Therefore, as any interference with privacy will be authorised under legislation and is subject to appropriate safeguards, I consider the clauses are proportionate to the purpose of the limitation and do not amount to an unlawful or arbitrary interference with privacy.

***Disclosure of information to the Treaty Authority by IBAC or Ombudsman***

Clause 264 of the Bill amends the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 (IBAC Act)* to authorise the disclosure or provision of information by the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) to the Treaty Authority. Clause 278 of the Bill similarly amends the *Ombudsman Act 1973 (Ombudsman Act)* to provide for the disclosure of information by the Ombudsman to the Treaty Authority.

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

The amendments to the IBAC Act and the Ombudsman Act may involve the disclosure of personal, health and sensitive information gathered for the purposes of an IBAC or Ombudsman investigation. While the sharing of this information may interfere with the right to privacy, I consider these interferences to be lawful and not arbitrary.

The gathering of information is necessary for the Treaty Authority to exercise its duties and functions effectively. The relevant provisions of the IBAC Act and the Ombudsman Act limit the sharing of information to circumstances where the IBAC and the Ombudsman are satisfied that the information is relevant to the performance of the duties and functions of the Treaty Authority. For instance, the IBAC or the Ombudsman may share information with the Treaty Authority if satisfied that the information is relevant to the Treaty Authority's handling of an electoral complaint made under Part 15 of the Bill. The sharing of information is subject to further limitations, including that information must not be disclosed to the Treaty Authority if the information would likely lead to the identification of a person who made an assessable disclosure under the IBAC Act or the Ombudsman Act. Given the procedural safeguards on the sharing of information, I consider that the powers go no further than is necessary to enable the Treaty Authority to exercise its functions, and therefore any interference with the right to privacy is lawful and not arbitrary.

***Amendment of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012***

Clauses 287 and 258 of the Bill amend the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 (PID Act)* to provide for the making of public interest disclosures relating to Gellung Warl, an Assembly member, a Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna member, a Nginma Ngainga Wara member or a Gellung Warl staff member.

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

The amendments to the PID Act may require the divulging of information about persons or groups that would otherwise be private in nature, thus engaging the right to privacy. However, any impacts on the right to privacy are not arbitrary or unlawful and can be balanced against the need to ensure the transparent and accountable operation of Gellung Warl, the integrity of Gellung Warl's decision-making and the prevention of the misuse of public positions. The role of public bodies and public officers are roles to which special duties and responsibilities attach, and in this regard there is a reduced expectation of privacy with regards to this type of information. Further, disclosures under the PID Act are subject to certain safeguards to ensure the proper assessment and, where necessary, investigation of disclosures. To the extent that disclosure about Gellung

Warl, a member, or a staff member will interfere with privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary, and will therefore be compatible with the right to privacy.

***Changes to the freedom of information regime***

Clause 242 of the Bill amends the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act)* to provide that Gellung Warl is subject to the FOI Act and that the Chairperson of the Assembly must fulfil the same responsibilities as a responsible Minister of an agency.

Clause 243 of the Bill amends the FOI Act to require that Gellung Warl publish information about its structure, functions and the types of documents it holds in accordance with section 7 of the FOI Act. Clause 245 of the Bill exempts Gellung Warl from the operation of section 11 of the FOI Act, which requires agencies to publicly list the documents that it holds.

The Bill introduces new exemptions from the FOI Act for the following documents:

- restricted Nginma Ngainga Wara information (clause 141);
- a report of an Nginma Ngainga Wara inquiry under Division 4 of Part 9 of the Bill (clause 141);
- documents containing Treaty negotiations information (clause 250; new section 32A of the FOI Act);
- documents containing culturally sensitive information or culturally secret information (clause 250; new section 32B of the FOI Act);
- documents containing Assembly consensus meeting information (clause 250; new section 32C of the FOI Act); and
- documents, or copies or drafts of, or containing extracts from, that are relevant to representation meetings under Division 2 of Part 8 of the Bill and which clause 79 of the Bill designates as subject to Cabinet confidentiality (other than a document by which a decision of the Cabinet was officially published) (clause 249; new section 28(4) of the FOI Act).

***Freedom of expression (section 15)***

These exemptions restrict access to documents which may otherwise be accessible to the public through the freedom of information scheme and so may limit the right to freedom of expression under section 15(2) of the Charter. However, I consider that this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to protect public order and the rights of others, including restrictions reasonably necessary to protect right to privacy, reputation and cultural rights, within the meaning of the internal limitation in section 15(3) of the Charter.

One of the functions of Nginma Ngainga Wara is to conduct inquiries. The purpose of exempting a report of an inquiry under Division 4 of Part 9 of the Bill is to protect the integrity of the inquiry process, and to protect the privacy of those who provide information to the inquiry. The exemption ensures that inquiries can operate effectively and without the danger that sensitive information will be publicly released. I consider that the restriction on section 15(2) is tailored to this purpose and reasonably necessary to encourage frank disclosure and meaningful findings by Nginma Ngainga Wara, ultimately protecting public order and the right to privacy.

The purpose of the exclusion of documents relating to Treaty negotiations, representation meetings and consensus meetings is to ensure frank and candid disclosures during participation in negotiations and meetings. The exemptions also protect the principle of collective decision-making and responsibility by ensuring that State representatives and members of Gellung Warl and its arms can freely discuss and debate matters without fear of premature disclosure. The exemptions for consensus meeting and representation meeting documents cease to apply to a document brought into existence after 1 July 2026 when a period of 10 years has elapsed since the last day of the year in which the document came into existence (clauses 249 and 250). The exemptions do not apply to consensus meeting and representation meeting documents that contain purely statistical, technical or scientific material unless disclosure of the document would involve disclosure of any deliberation or decision of the Cabinet or content or subject of any meeting (clauses 249 and 250). The exemptions go no further than is necessary to uphold the deliberative processes of Gellung Warl and its arms. I consider that the clauses strike an appropriate balance between protecting the right to freedom of expression through the freedom of information scheme while ensuring that Gellung Warl and its arms can exercise their powers and functions effectively.

Clause 4 of the Bill defines ‘culturally sensitive or culturally secret information’ as information that the individual or group providing it advises is culturally sensitive or culturally secret information, or alternatively, information that is determined to be culturally sensitive or culturally secret information in accordance with the internal rules. The purpose of excluding these documents from possible disclosure is to protect the privacy and cultural rights of individuals and groups who provide culturally sensitive or culturally secret information to Gellung Warl and its arms. I consider this exemption reasonably necessary to ensure that persons are not

discouraged from candidly providing information and disclosing all possible documents, thereby protecting the right to privacy and cultural rights.

For these reasons, I consider the amendments to the FOI Act fall within section 15(3) of the Charter and impose no limitation on the freedom of expression.

***Amendments to the Public Records Act 1973***

Clause 293 of the Bill amends the *Public Records Act 1973* (**PR Act**) to introduce a new exemption for records required to be transferred from Gellung Warl to the Public Record Office that the Assembly Chairperson is of the opinion contain matters of such a private or personal nature that they should not be open for public inspection. Clause 263 of the Bill amends the PR Act to provide that the Assembly Chairperson may declare that the records shall not be available for public inspection for a period of not more than 30 years after the date of their transfer to the Public Record Office.

Clause 297 of the Bill amends the PR Act to exempt a record that is beneficially owned by Gellung Warl from the operation of section 16 of the PR Act. Section 16 of the PR Act authorises the Minister to declare that a record is a prescribed record for the purposes of the PR Act if satisfied that:

- it would be a public record but for the fact that it is beneficially owned by a person or body other than the Crown or a public office;
- it is of historic significance to Victoria; and
- should be preserved by the State.

***Freedom of expression (section 15)***

The amendments to the PR Act may restrict access to documents which may otherwise be accessible to the public, thereby limiting the right to freedom of expression under section 15(2) of the Charter. However, I consider any restriction to be lawful and reasonably necessary to protect the rights of others within the meaning of the internal limitation in section 15(3) of the Charter.

The purpose of excluding records that, in the opinion of the Assembly Chairperson, contain matters of such a private or personal nature that they should not be open for public inspection is to protect the privacy and reputation of those who provide information to Gellung Warl. The scope of the exemption mirrors the already existing exemption at section 9 of the PR Act for records required to be transferred from other public offices to the Public Record Office. I consider the exemption introduced by the Bill to be reasonably necessary to protect the rights to privacy and reputation of those who disclose information to Gellung Warl in the performance of its functions.

The purpose of the exemption of a record that is beneficially owned by Gellung Warl from the operation of section 16 of the PR Act is to support Indigenous Data Sovereignty and First Peoples' self-determination over culturally sensitive or culturally secret information. I consider the exemption to be reasonably necessary to promote this purpose, thus protecting the right to privacy and the cultural rights of persons and groups who disclose information to Gellung Warl.

I consider the amendments to the PR Act fall within section 15(3) of the Charter and impose no limitation on the freedom of expression.

**The Hon. Jacinta Allan**  
**Premier of Victoria**

***Second reading***

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:12): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

***Acknowledgement and overview***

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which this Parliament stands, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nations.

I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to all traditional owners and First Peoples across Victoria and their elders.

I acknowledge the First Peoples who are with us today in this Parliament and who are watching this sitting from elsewhere.

I acknowledge the generations of advocacy by First Peoples which has led to this moment.

First Peoples have an unbroken relationship to the lands and waters we now call Victoria.

They have practised their laws, customs and languages, and they have nurtured country through their spiritual, material and economic connections to land, water and resources.

This place holds the oldest living cultures on earth – a fact that we uphold with pride through treaty.

I also want to acknowledge and pay respects to the members and co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and to all of the past members and co-chairs and to their elders.

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the independent, elected representative body for First Peoples in Victoria and carries the collective strength of First Peoples communities as an expression of their inherent right to self-determination.

Since 2019, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria has partnered with us on our journey towards treaty.

I want to thank the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for the trust they have shown in undertaking this journey with us towards the first treaty in Australia's history.

I also want to acknowledge the Treaty Authority and its members for their role in ensuring a fair negotiations process and supporting the parties to reach this historic outcome.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, Australia's first formal truth-telling commission.

I am proud to be the first Premier in Australia's history to sit before a truth-telling inquiry.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission undertook the complex task of bringing together stories from across Victoria to form the findings and recommendations in the *Truth Be Told* report – laying bare the effects of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria.

First Peoples have long experienced and told us of this truth, but for many Victorians *Truth Be Told* is the first time they have heard the true story of colonisation and its impact.

*Truth Be Told* makes clear that the gap between outcomes for First Peoples and other Victorians in life expectancy, in education, in health and in all other areas has been caused by the impacts of colonisation which continue today.

Finally, I thank the Victorian people for coming with us on this journey.

Treaty is in your name, too, and it benefits us all.

At its heart is a practical purpose and a simple principle: all families are better off when they have responsibility over their lives, their future and the things that affect them.

Aboriginal families are no different.

Treaty makes sense because it gives Aboriginal people a say in how their services are run.

Our first treaty sets clear rules to achieve real, practical change over time.

Treaty doesn't take anything away from anyone.

It's about improving people's lives and giving everyone a better future.

We all are united in wanting that better future – one that is just, fair and equitable for all Victorians, including First Peoples, one where the gap between First Peoples and other Victorians has been closed.

Achieving this involves change, and we achieve this change together through treaty.

In standing together to support this treaty today we commit to listening to and learning from First Peoples – affirming the inherent right of First Peoples to self-determination and upholding their ability to make decisions for their people, communities and country.

We commit to upholding the promises we have made and closing the gap between First Peoples and other Victorians.

Treaty makes the changes necessary so that the state hears from First Peoples on matters that affect them.

Treaty will support a new future where First Peoples design and deliver practical solutions to improve outcomes by doing what works for their communities.

Treaty is a new beginning – resetting the relationship between First Peoples and the state to create a better future together for generations to come.

### ***Path to treaty***

In Victoria, the state has been on the path to truth and treaty for nearly a decade.

Over this time, we have laid strong foundations.

We have passed the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 and the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022, which provide the foundations of the Victorian treaty process, underpinning how treaty is negotiated.

Alongside the assembly, we have agreed the treaty negotiation framework, which sets out the rules for both statewide and traditional owner treaty negotiations.

We have established the Treaty Authority to act as the independent umpire overseeing negotiations.

The Treaty Authority is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the treaty process for all Victorians and that parties follow the rules set out in the treaty negotiation framework.

Since the opening of Statewide Treaty negotiations in November last year, the assembly and the state have been engaged in negotiations on the content and form of the first Statewide Treaty and the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025.

Negotiations have focused on how treaty can provide practical solutions, improve the way that First Peoples interact with the state and empower First Peoples communities through upholding their inherent right to self-determination.

The Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 is a landmark piece of legislation in this country, but not this world.

Other comparable nations, such as Canada, New Zealand and the United States, all have a treaty of some kind with their indigenous peoples.

Despite generations of advocacy from First Peoples and the wider Australian population, Australia has remained an outlier.

Today, I am proud to introduce to Parliament the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025.

In passing this historic bill we will lead Australia, take a step closer to righting the wrongs of the past and building a better future for all Victorians.

### ***Establishment of Gellung Warl***

The assembly has brought First Peoples and traditional owner groups in Victoria together.

The bill builds on the proven success of the assembly, evolving the assembly into Gellung Warl – an ongoing representative body for First Peoples – to continue the work of the assembly to date.

Gellung Warl comes from the Gunaikurnai language.

Gellung Warl will have governance, oversight and decision-making powers in relation to First Peoples' matters.

In its new form it will interact more closely with Victoria's existing parliamentary and democratic structures and will take on greater powers and responsibilities.

Gellung Warl will provide advice and information to the Victorian Parliament and Victorian government, make specific decisions in relation to First Peoples' matters and ensure the government is held accountable for its commitments to First Peoples.

It will also support Victoria's continuing journey towards understanding its past by supporting ongoing truth and healing within the Victorian community.

The bill establishes Gellung Warl to have separate offices to serve these advisory and determinative, accountability and truth-telling functions.

Those offices, as well as other terms in the bill, have been given names in the languages of First Peoples.

Use of First Nations language is a practical way we can show respect.

Gellung Warl will lead the renewed relationship with the state created by treaty.

Working with the state, it will use its functions and powers to action Statewide Treaty reforms – the practical outcomes set out in the Statewide Treaty.

Gellung Warl will support the strengthening of Victoria's curriculum – helping to build resources for students from foundation to year 10 to teach our children about the shared history of our state, as recorded by the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Gellung Warl will propose names for national and state parks, and waterways and waterfalls on state land, increasing the use of traditional place names and First Nations languages.

Gellung Warl will also take on responsibility for outcomes which currently sit with the state.

It will operate a First Peoples' Infrastructure Fund to ensure that Aboriginal community controlled organisations have the infrastructure they need to provide crucial services for First Peoples communities.

It will also lead Victoria in the celebration of First Peoples excellence, delivering the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll, the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service, the Ricci Marks Awards and funding the Victorian NAIDOC Week events.

Gellung Warl will be established as a statutory corporation and sit within the architecture of our existing democratic structures.

The bill aims to build a collaborative and solutions-focused relationship between the state and Gellung Warl.

Gellung Warl will not have coercive powers or powers to veto policy or legislation.

The bill obliges both the state and Gellung Warl to act in good faith towards each other in relation to the discharge of Gellung Warl's powers and functions.

The bill aims to facilitate a renewed relationship, focused on the shared goal of achieving better outcomes.



***First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria***

Gellung Warl will have a chamber of democratically elected representatives, mirroring the assembly's existing structure.

Acknowledging the successes of the assembly, and to provide continuity between the existing assembly structure and the entity created by this bill, these elected and appointed representatives will continue to be known as the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

The assembly will be the main decision-making and operative arm of Gellung Warl and will make rules about how Gellung Warl operates.

The bill provides minimum content to be included in those rules.

This unique structure provides community with certainty about the good governance of Gellung Warl while allowing Gellung Warl to determine its own practices and meet cultural obligations.

The assembly will be able to provide advice and information to the government, putting First Peoples' views and concerns directly to the members of Parliament.

It will provide a yearly address to a joint sitting of Parliament about matters that affect First Peoples.

Additionally, the assembly will be able to inform Parliament about how new legislation may affect First Peoples.

The bill provides for the assembly to be given notice of new legislation on its introduction to Parliament and requires the member presenting the bill to table a statement which sets out whether the assembly's views have been sought on that legislation.

This statement will also set out whether the bill is compatible with certain objects of Statewide Treaty, advancing self-determination, addressing historical wrongs, and the equal enjoyment of human rights.

The assembly will also be able to make written submissions to Parliament and may be requested to address Parliament on matters affecting First Peoples.

The findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission highlighted how, in the past, Parliament actively disempowered and silenced First Peoples.

There has been no structure in place to allow Parliament to hear directly from First Peoples about how decisions it made might impact First Peoples communities.

This has led to a lack of understanding, often producing harmful and ineffective laws and policies.

Ensuring that the members of Parliament hear directly from First Peoples' elected representatives is one of the ways we can reset the relationship between the state and First Peoples, ensure the mistakes of the past are not repeated, and support the Parliament make informed decisions which are in the best interests of all Victorians, including First Peoples.

Treaty will strengthen and streamline how the executive government engages with First Peoples, ensuring more efficient and effective consultation.

The bill provides for the assembly to give information to the executive government and empowers the assembly to meet with senior members of the government, as well as with cabinet.

The assembly will be able to ask questions of ministers and certain state-funded entities to allow it to develop a full picture of the effectiveness of services and policies.

These powers, and the requirement they be exercised in good faith, aim to build a collaborative and solutions-focused relationship between the Victorian government and the assembly.

Failure to engage with requests made by the assembly will not result in any penalties for individuals, entities or organisations.

The state will be held accountable for the effects and outcomes of its policymaking and legislation on First Peoples at a yearly engagement hearing, held at the request of the assembly, which will consider how the decisions and practices of the state are affecting First Peoples.

The bill creates a duty for Victorian government departments and Victoria Police to create guidelines including about how they will consult with the assembly on laws and policies that are specifically directed at First Peoples.

It also requires the minister to consult the assembly prior to appointing an administrator under the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970.

While these advisory powers are the first of their kind in Victoria, they have been modelled on existing best practice examples from elsewhere in Australia, namely the ACT and South Australia, and internationally, from treaty jurisdictions such as New Zealand and Canada.

These models show how hearing directly from First Peoples leads to better outcomes.

The assembly's engagement with the state in this way seeks to address the government's historical failure to listen to First Peoples' perspectives.

Legislating advisory powers for the assembly also directly responds to key recommendations from the Productivity Commission in its *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap* in January 2024, calling for governments to share power with First Peoples and relinquish control over decisions that affect First Peoples.

Providing the assembly with advisory powers is a practical way to give effect to the self-determination of First Peoples and to ensure that laws passed by this Parliament are better informed and more effective in achieving their objectives as they relate to First Peoples and avoid repeating the wrongs of the past.

The bill empowers the assembly to make rules, guidelines and standards about issues that directly affect First Peoples.

The assembly will be able to make rules establishing processes for how certification should be given by First Peoples organisations that a person is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's community.

Rules made by the assembly will only apply by operation of the bill to First Peoples and First Peoples organisations in Victoria, although other organisations may choose to adopt them.

It will also be able to make non-binding guidelines about the sharing and trading between First Peoples of water entitlements held by First Peoples or First Peoples' organisations, as well as best practice cultural safety guidelines.

Guidelines made by the assembly will be non-binding, optional, and must not be contrary to existing state or Commonwealth legislation.

The bill also gives the assembly the power to make appointments of First Peoples to the Aboriginal Heritage Council and the Heritage Council of Victoria.

These decision-making powers will provide certainty and clarity for First Peoples.

Rules and guidelines will be about matters which affect First Peoples and about which the state holds neither the necessary expertise nor authority to effectively make.

Appointments made by the assembly will be to roles reserved by legislation for First Peoples.

Treaty recognises that it is not appropriate for the state to make these decisions and that it is more efficient and effective to have First Peoples making these decisions for their communities.

These rule-, guideline- and decision-making powers exemplify what self-determination looks like in the treaty era – building on First Peoples knowledge and leadership to improve outcomes on matters that affect First Peoples and their communities.

### ***Nginma Ngainga Wara***

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap identifies accountability as key to achieving better outcomes for First Peoples to ensure the substantive equality of First Peoples and the equal enjoyment by First Peoples of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The bill creates Nginma Ngainga Wara as an accountability mechanism within the structure of the Gellung Warl.

Nginma Ngainga Wara comes from the Wadi Wadi language.

The Nginma Ngainga Wara's role will be to ensure accountability for the state's commitments to First Peoples.

Led by members appointed by the assembly, Nginma Ngainga Wara will conduct inquiries to evaluate and monitor how effective the state government is in achieving better outcomes for First Peoples.

It will not have coercive powers and will be subject to the mutual obligation to act in good faith in any engagement with the state.

Based on the findings of its inquiries, it will provide concrete solutions and recommendations to improve outcomes.

Collaboration in good faith by the state and the assembly to facilitate inquiries by Nginma Ngainga Wara will support progress and improve outcomes.

Its work will allow both community and government to better assess how effective existing government policy and programs are and help us to build more efficient solutions together.

Nginma Ngainga Wara will acquit the state's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to create an independent accountability mechanism to provide concrete solutions and recommendations to improve outcomes for First Peoples.

It will monitor government programs and actions in relation to First Peoples, and implementation of Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations, by conducting inquiries.

It will also conduct its inquiries independent of both the assembly and the truth-telling arm of Gellung Warl and will not be subject to the direction or control of a minister.

Its processes will be self-determined and led by its members.

Nginma Ngainga Wara will present its findings to the assembly, who will then be able to make use of its representation powers and functions to provide this information to the state with the aim of delivering improved and enduring outcomes for First Peoples.

The requirement that this accountability mechanism established in legislation provide practical and implementable solutions means that the state will have a clearer path to implement the necessary changes and close the gap between First Peoples in Victoria and the broader Victorian community.

### ***Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna***

Through this bill and treaty, we commit to continuing to seek a better understanding of the truth of our shared history.

Victoria took the first step towards understanding when we established the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, an office to lead truth-telling and healing established by this bill, is the next step in that journey.

Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna comes from the Wamba Wamba / Wemba Wemba language.

It will be led by three members, appointed by the assembly, who are broadly reflective of the diversity of the experiences and views of First Peoples and other Victorians.

Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna will lead ongoing truth-telling, healing and reconciliation across Victorian towns and regions, promoting our understanding of local history and place.

It will collect stories about the period before 14 May 2021, the commencement of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

The bill empowers Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna to collect these stories while ensuring that those who share their stories remain largely in control of their information and how it is used.

The office will ensure that confidential information shared with it will not be published without the consent of the person or community who provided that information.

Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna will retain an archive of the truth-telling information it receives and, with the permission of those who have shared their stories, will use the information it collects to support the education of the broader public about our shared history and the impacts of colonisation.

Establishing the office in this way means that First Peoples retain control of culturally sensitive or culturally secret information held by Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, promoting Indigenous data sovereignty.

Through Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, First Peoples in Victoria will have control, access and possession of the information that they have provided to the office, which is about their traditional owner groups, knowledge systems, customs, resources, or territories.

### ***Oversight and accountability***

Negotiations have identified the importance of Gellung Warl being subject to sufficient oversight to maintain the trust in Gellung Warl that we have seen in the assembly.

It is important that this oversight is culturally safe and does not undermine Gellung Warl's independence from the state or its ability to be self-determining.

One way the bill creates this oversight is by amending the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act to create a new role of electoral officer within the Treaty Authority to oversee and run the assembly's elections.

Electoral processes will be independent of Gellung Warl but will be run and overseen by a culturally safe entity and in a manner that respects and is guided by the cultural rights of First Peoples.

Gellung Warl will also be subject to oversight by the same state integrity agencies that usually apply to Victorian government entities, including the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, Victoria Auditor-General's Office and the Ombudsman.

This oversight will affirm public confidence in Gellung Warl and its management of its resources and its internal practices.

In addition, the existing strong community accountability demonstrated by the assembly will remain.

Gellung Warl must demonstrate community answerability and will have a community governance and answerability framework, an engagement charter and a vision that sets out how this will be achieved.

Gellung Warl will be democratically and publicly accountable and answerable to community in the performance of its functions, powers and duties.

This framework builds on the successes of the assembly and is informed by established models of deliberative democracy and community engagement, such as local governments.

Gellung Warl will continue to have public reporting obligations, clear election processes, a participatory governance structure and cultural oversight from elders.

***Closing remarks***

This landmark bill is the next step in Victoria's journey towards treaty.

Gellung Warl will provide an ongoing representative body for First Peoples which is free from the interference of the state, self-determined and grounded in the lore, law and cultural authority of traditional owners and First Peoples.

It is a product of Victoria's unique treaty model and an outcome of fair negotiations with the current First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

Subject to the passage of this bill through Parliament, the state and the current First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria will formalise the first Statewide Treaty.

This will mark a significant shift in the relationship between the Victorian government and First Peoples – a pathway to change what isn't working and give First Peoples a say on the legislation and policies that impact their lives.

This bill together with the first Statewide Treaty form the foundation of the new relationship under treaty.

This relationship is premised on the realisation of First Peoples' unique and inherent right to self-determination.

The bill also enacts special measures for the advancement of First Peoples in order to ensure true, substantive equality for First Peoples in the enjoyment and exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In these ways, the bill reflects and gives effect to the rights and principles enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This nation-leading bill, and the treaty process as a whole, shows what we can achieve when we listen to First Peoples and work together for better outcomes.

It honours and affirms the special connection which First Peoples have to country, this place now known as Victoria, which we all call home.

It reckons with the wrongs of the past and sets a new course, guided by truth, to a better future.

Treaty will be a source of pride for all Victorians – representative of a proudly diverse and multicultural state which values its history and all of its people.

Because this is not about taking anything away from anyone – it is about practical changes to do things better, together.

I am proud to support this next step in treaty. I am proud that, together, we are improving people's lives and giving everyone a better future.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:39): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Tuesday 23 September.**

*Business of the house*

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

**The SPEAKER** (15:40): General business, notices of motion 26, 27 and 71 to 73 and order of the day 10, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Petitions*

**Greater Bendigo mining exploration licence**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) presented a petition bearing 314 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the mining exploration application licence EL008505 by Falcon Gold Resources Pty Ltd over the locality of 2km east of Strathfieldsaye, 5km west of Axedale, 8km southeast of Bendigo, including Emu Creek and Longlea including small portions of Wellsford Forest an area of 94 square kilometres of semi-rural communities and environments of high flora and fauna value.

The granting of a mining exploration licence and potential mining operations will have social and environmental consequences for the thriving rural residential communities within the licence boundaries. The activity of mining exploration will impact the social and environmental values the community holds for the area and has potential to impact the threatened and endangered species of the Wellsford forest and nature and conservation reserves within the boundary of the EL008505. The semi-rural community of Strathfieldsaye is an expanding growth corridor in an environment of high flora and fauna value.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly ban any mining exploration or the placement of a mine within EL008505.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

*Committees*

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 12*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:42): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 12 of 2025, on the following act and bills, together with appendices:

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 – house amendments

National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025

Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025

Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Act 2025.

**Ordered to be published.**

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Audit Act 1994* – Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for the year ended 30 June 2025

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*:

Orders under s 17B granting licences over:

Alexandra Gardens Reserve

Princes Park Reserve

Orders under s 17D granting leases over:

Batman Park

Old Springfield Cheese Factory Reserve

*Gambling Regulation Act 2003* – Direction of the Minister for Casino, Gambling and Liquor Regulation under s 3.8A.13A

*Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 72 (*Gazette G35, 28 August 2025*)

*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Greater Shepparton – C246

Macedon Ranges – C161

Port Phillip – C229

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC268, VC283

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Adoption Act 1984* – SR 84

*Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Act 2024* – SR 86

*Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987* – SR 87

*Gambling Regulation Act 2003* – SR 81

*Road Safety Act 1986* – SR 83

*Spent Convictions Act 2021* – SR 78

*Supreme Court Act 1986* – SRs 84, 85

*Surveillance Devices Act 1999* – SR 79

*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* – SR 82

*Youth Justice Act 2024* – SR 80

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 31, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87

Documents under s 16B in relation to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – Direction of the Minister for Casino, Gambling and Liquor Regulation under s 3.8A.13A

**PROCLAMATION** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

*Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2025* – Divisions 2, 4 and 5 of Part 2 – 9 September 2025 (*Gazette S455, 26 August 2025*).

**Bills****Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025***Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (15:44): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

**National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025***Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (15:44): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 with amendments.

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

**Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025****Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025***Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (15:44): I inform the house that on 2 September 2025 the Governor gave royal assent to the Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025 and the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025.

**Motions****Motions by leave**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (15:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the Labor government for failing to act on the Ombudsman's working with children check reforms from three years ago, leaving Victorian children at risk. During National Child Protection Week, this neglect demonstrates a systemic failure of duty to safeguard Victoria's most vulnerable.

**Leave refused.**

**Jess WILSON**: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for axing Parentline, leaving Victoria the only state in Australia without a dedicated parent helpline. This cruel cut to a vital service, driven solely by Labor's financial mismanagement, abandons families that rely on a trusted service to keep children safe and supported.

**Leave refused.**

**Business of the house****Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:45): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following items be considered and completed by 5 pm on 11 September 2025:

Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Budget papers – motion

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

It has been quite a day already, and I just want to take a moment to reflect on the historic first and second reading of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 and look forward to Parliament resuming after this break, when we will debate that bill. I know that members on this side of the house will be up on their feet ready to talk about the importance of truth, justice and self-determination and our ongoing



commitment to delivering justice and fairness for Aboriginal people and practical outcomes for Aboriginal people. As the Minister for Health I know precisely the impact of self-determination in delivering better health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The bills that we will be debating this week include the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Speaker, I want to commend you and thank you for the work that you did, quite some time ago now, on the rehoming pets taskforce. I am sure that you remember it well. You did that work with the member for Narre Warren South and the former Animal Justice Party representative in the other place Mr Meddick, and I thank you for the work that you did. It was my pleasure to be able to commission that work from you as Minister for Agriculture, and I certainly remember that very beautiful visit that we had to Lort Smith Animal Hospital on the day that we launched that taskforce.

Our government, since we were first elected, has had a proud history of really moving the dial when it comes to animal welfare in this state and in doing so reflecting the changing expectations of the Victorian community. Of course we were proud when we came to government to end puppy farming. I might say it was something that was promised by a former Liberal government and, unsurprisingly, was not delivered by them. However, we were able to implement that. We made it an offence to sell a pet without a valid microchip and source number from the pet exchange register, and in doing so we broke the market that existed for illegally farmed puppies.

We removed the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public. We produced Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, recognising that animals are sentient. We were really proud to give renters the right to keep a pet. You will all remember that we were able to tell all those renters that they no longer had to hide their cat or pretend that they did not have one – no more secret cats – and that we would make sure that people with cats and dogs were able to have those in their homes. We reformed the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure that government was receiving expert advice, and we became the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds. We launched a targeted cat desexing program, as well as developing a statewide cat management strategy.

With this bill before us the government is furthering the animal welfare agenda by delivering on its commitment, as I said, to implementing the findings of the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets, and the bill delivers on five recommendations from the taskforce. The framework will introduce a voluntary authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations through amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and repeal current provisions that establish the voluntary foster care registration scheme. It is important that the house debates the bill this week to allow the government to deliver on its commitments in terms of implementing the recommendations of the taskforce.

We will also be debating the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which amends the Casino Control Act 1991 to support the implementation of the royal commission's recommendations and ensure the regulator has the powers it needs to hold the casino operator to account. As I said, with this bill we are holding Crown to account by ensuring the regulator has the tough new powers that it needs to enforce compliance with the act. Our government maintains a zero-tolerance policy for unlawful practices while delivering gambling harm minimisation across the system. Finally, the budget take-note motion will be the last chance to contribute. I commend the business program to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:51): First I want to take the opportunity to note how this Parliament came together earlier today to express our deep and sincere condolences to the two police officers killed in the line of duty protecting our community at that awful event in Porepunkah. We mourn the tragic loss of these two courageous Victorians, these two courageous Victorian police officers, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart. My deepest sympathies to their families, friends and the entire police community. This is a time for Victorians to put our arms around the Victoria Police community the way that Victoria Police

always have their arms around us. The work that they do day in and day out, 365 days of the year, protects us. In many ways our police officers are the best of us. When we are in trouble, our police come to protect us, and when we are at risk, they look after us. They run towards the challenges when many run away. These two brave Victorian police officers lost their lives doing their jobs to protect us, to keep us safe. They will be remembered. I thank the members of the Yarra Ranges police who are assisting still today in the ongoing efforts up in Porepunkah and Victoria's High Country to find the perpetrator and to bring justice and peace to the families.

Moving forward, for this parliamentary sitting week the government has a pretty flimsy legislative agenda again: just two bills – one about cats and dogs, quite literally, and one about the casino and gambling. Any quiet Victorian out there would be scratching their head. After the horrific, brutal murders of two children on the weekend, in a crime crisis with escalating violent youth offending, machete attacks rife and aggravated burglaries in people's homes and in local small businesses, why isn't the government using this week's government business program to introduce bills to take tougher action on crime? That is what we need. We need tougher action on crime. We need community safety put first; Victorians deserve no less. Yet with the perfect opportunity this government had this week to bring in laws to take tougher action on crime, because they are failing dismally to do so – they are failing Victorian people, they are failing our Victorian youth – instead we have a bill about cats and dogs. They could have had the opportunity. After the brutal murders of two children, one just 12 years old, all they can do is bring in this very flimsy agenda. I think Victorians know really what the priorities are, and the priorities that this Labor government have are all wrong.

The Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business is straying from the government business program in her contribution. It is on relevance. It is a narrow procedural debate about the government business program. I ask that you ask the member to come back to –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The point of order, I believe, is on relevance. The Manager of Opposition Business, I believe, was giving context to her opposition of the government business program.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** That is precisely what I was doing. I was giving context that we will oppose this government business program because, frankly, this government's priorities are wrong and it should have had different bills in the program this week. All we have here is the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025, which itself has issues. And we understand that before we have even debated it here in the Assembly the Labor government have already indicated that they will be making house amendments in the Council because they know that they rushed this program. They got things wrong. We knew that there were issues with this, and we sought to go into consideration in detail. The Labor government has denied that very reasonable request, and we will be opposing the government business program on that very basis.

**John LISTER (Werribee) (15:56):** It is my pleasure to rise to speak for the first time on one of our government business programs, and it is indeed an important program this week. And I too would just like to pause and reflect briefly on this morning and what we have seen in the house around that sharing of grief for the two officers in our state's north-east and echo those same condolences myself on behalf of the Werribee community. I would also just like to make a nod on behalf of the member for Melton and myself. Over these last few days, we have seen some horrific things happening between our communities. I just want to say that the things which are most important, to paraphrase Bob Hawke, are not always the loudest. We have been having those meetings with those community leaders – speaking directly to our superintendent in charge of north-west metro too – and making those moves around what we can do locally to address these issues.

We are here this week, with this government business program, to speak about some important things, but I did just want to make a little note: we are seeing some opposition towards important legislation around the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is a particularly important piece of legislation, because it goes to trying to make sure that our animals are looked after and that there is a process around rehoming them in the community. There is a lot of dog whistling from those opposite, but I appreciate that we have a bill here that is all about cats and dogs and making sure that they have a good home.

This bill establishes a regulatory framework for pet rehoming organisations in Victoria, introduces a voluntary benefits-based authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations and clarifies powers of entry for authorised officers to enter premises. Just on that, I would like to pause and note that we have also seen some horrific incidents with our RSPCA authorised officers throughout the years when it comes to this, because quite often violence is seen first directed towards some of our most vulnerable creatures in society – which are animals – and our RSPCA authorised officers do amazing work in the community, especially around my community. We have had a few incidents lately in regard to guard dogs and the condition that guard dogs are kept in, so the work of our authorised officers with local government is so important. It also amends the Domestic Animals Act 1994 to clarify that the specific class of dog entitled to reduced registration fees can be prescribed in regulations. This is all about making sure that we have a set process to make sure that we are rehoming animals properly and making sure that it is done with regard to their wellbeing and also in regard to supporting those organisations that do this – making sure that we are taking away some of those barriers that may make it difficult to find homes for these animals.

This week we are also considering the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, looking at some of those reforms that we need to do out of some of the behaviour that we have seen at the casino around people using funds that may not have been gained in the most appropriate of ways. Looking at the cashless trial, this is a particularly important piece of legislation as part of the package of works that we have been doing around gambling regulation. Particularly in communities like mine, where gambling is a prominent feature, it is really important to consider this here in this house, and I welcome that the government is bringing this in.

Finally, this week on our program we are going to look at the budget again. This budget was fantastic for our growing suburbs out in the west. I note that hundreds of millions of dollars went towards critical road infrastructure. A lot of that infrastructure is getting to the point now where we are seeing works and roadworks happening to get these projects connected into our network to help make it easier for people to get home sooner. There will be an opportunity for those in the house to also take note of the budget and some of the measures that we are putting in place to ensure that we have financial sustainability and we keep working towards having a good debt-to-state product ratio, which is important when it comes to things like our credit rating but also to show that debt for infrastructure is helping to build the future. It is something that we need to have. I commend the government business program to the house and thank you for listening.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:01): I rise to talk on the government business program today. From the outset, as every other member has stated today, our hearts and thoughts do go out to all our current police officers on the beat doing the right thing for us at the moment and keeping us safe and also to the families and friends and work colleagues of the police officers that tragically lost their lives a couple of weeks ago. I note also that there are police officers from the Latrobe Valley that are up looking as part of the search.

On the government business program this week, as the member for Frankston alluded to, we do have the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I do concur with our Manager of Opposition Business that we will be opposing the government business program, because we did ask to go into consideration in detail on this exact bill, the domestic animals amendment. We all know – and it does not matter where we are – the importance of animals in our communities and in our lives in general. I know only too well with my own canine friend Stormy, who

I have had for a couple of years now, the importance of how our family does run and how these pets actually do take over and control our lives – more than us controlling them, they do control us. I do hope that we can have some constructive talk around the act. As we see in everybody's communities, there are unfortunately those that do the wrong thing when they are sometimes illegally breeding cats and dogs. We need to make sure when these animals are taken away or thrown out onto the streets, that we do have things in place so we can actually rehome these animals. I note too that we have a problem with our homeless fraternity that are living on the streets, and a lot of the time the reason they do not wish to go into a house is because they have pets. Some of these facilities that they do go into do not allow pets to come in. We need to make sure that we have the opportunity to rehome these very much loved animals. It will be interesting to see everyone's take on this.

The other thing we have up is the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Often we have bills come through to do with gambling and the casino. We need to make sure that we are putting all the checks and balances in place to make sure that for people who do have issues with gambling – unfortunately spending too much and gambling too long – we have procedures in place that actually help them out. While this is spent greatly around the casinos, I note that some of our local establishments and clubs do have poker machines and so forth. I just want to give them a bit of a shout-out, because I know of the lengths that they go to to protect the players that do come in and have a gamble. They know and can identify which participants are in dire straits, when they cannot get up, move away and stop spending their money. We need to make sure that we check these amendments and also have everything in place there.

Then we move to the budget take-note motion, because we do only have two bills on the agenda. I note that last year we did go on for quite a while before we all got the opportunity to stand up and talk about the budget, so I am looking forward to being able to – hopefully – get a spot where I can stand up on the budget response and talk about the issues in my community. As I said, we are opposing the government business program this week.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:06): Well, it feels like it has been a very long day already. We have had some really big, big things happen this morning and this afternoon. I will start my contribution on the government business program by joining my colleagues, in fact everyone in this chamber, in expressing my deepest sympathy and condolences to the family members of the two slain police officers – incredibly tragic and traumatic circumstances. My heart and thoughts go out to their families that are left behind. The intense grieving that is happening for those immediate family members at the moment is absolutely shocking. My thoughts also go out to the police officer who is seriously injured and in hospital, and I do wish him a speedy recovery – although, as I am hearing in some of the contributions, I think it is going to be a very long road ahead.

I also think we have just had something pretty significant happen here in this chamber, and that is the introduction of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. What a momentous occasion here for the Victorian Parliament and indeed Victoria. We have just made history. The bill has not yet passed, but having it introduced here with a gallery of incredible First Nations people who have been so passionate on this journey of us getting to the point of being able to introduce this bill to the Parliament is absolutely extraordinary. I think we should all just take a moment here in this place to really think about the history that has just been made. It was wonderful to be able to stand with colleagues and clap not just the Premier but also the First Nations people in the gallery, who were deeply, deeply moved. It has been a long journey indeed. I am talking about not just the years that it has taken to get to treaty but the decades and centuries that it has taken this country to get to a point where we can be here and introduce such an important bill. It is absolutely extraordinary, and I feel extremely proud to be on this side of the house to stand in celebration and also acknowledgement of the struggles and the journey that First Nations people have been on here in this country. As I said, it is not just the past couple of years but indeed many hundreds and thousands of years that they have been here as one of the oldest living communities in the world, really. It is quite extraordinary.

There are two other bills that will be debated here in this place, as other members have talked about. The Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I always look forward to speaking on these bills. Gambling and gambling harm is such a relevant topic and experience that currently exists in my community, and far too many people lose too much money when it comes to problem gambling just in my local community, in the LGAs of Brimbank and Wyndham, to point out a couple. With this one we are going to be talking about the critical amendments and updates to our legislation governing the Crown Casino as they go about implementing the reforms as required by that very important royal commission.

I also am looking forward, as I think everyone who is a cat or dog lover is – it may cause some divides here in the chamber as people talk about either their cats or their dogs – to the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I might even be speaking about my own little Ringo Starr, who is at doggy day care as we speak. I know I will be getting home tonight and he will be waiting for mummy so he can get in bed with me. So the sooner we get out of this place, the better it will be for Ringo Starr. But in all seriousness, this bill will –

**Belinda Wilson:** That is the name of her dog.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** It says so on his lead. The comments I get every day are just extraordinary, including ‘Do you have another three beagles at home?’

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** The beagles, yes. I know we have a lot of pet lovers in this place so I think there will be a great deal of debate and some good humour here later in the week. Our government has made incredible progress through its legislative program. Time and time again we get up and start the government business program, talk about it, and lay out our legislative reforms for the week. This week will be no different, and I commend it to the house.

**Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (16:11):** I rise to speak to the government business program, which we will be opposing. I rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business as we speak to the bills that are proposed before the house today: the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025, as well as – as you said, Manager of Opposition Business – the light government business program this week. I cannot remember the exact wording you used, but it is very flimsy. It is light on the budget papers, which I will note that I did not even get to speak to last year. So we will see how that one goes.

Firstly, can I too offer my condolences on behalf of my family as well as the coalition for the two slain policemen. As I have said before in this chamber, Neal Thompson was actually a family friend. I was with my father-in-law this weekend as he was mourning the loss of Thommo. He got on the bus from Wangaratta police station just yesterday with the rest of his police veterans, as well as others that were friends with Thommo, to attend the funeral yesterday, which was a very hard day for him. He fondly told me yesterday that the tractor on the family farm is actually one we bought off Thommo. It is with great sadness that we offer this condolence on behalf of our family and on behalf of the blue family.

It is said that the moment for both of the officers was like a sliding door moment – one was only three days away from retirement and other was just there for a two-week secondment. It is the case that if it was three years earlier, my father-in-law was actually the senior sergeant and officer in charge at Wangaratta Police Station and it would have been him possibly going through those doors of Dezi Freeman’s house. He was a known offender to my father-in-law, who served in the police force and retired after 38 years. Thirty-eight years is how long Thommo – Neal Thompson – served for, and so I rise to offer that condolence. Unfortunately, when I last rose to offer that condolence here in this chamber, it was sadly and rudely interrupted by a member opposite who mocked and made rude gestures at me during the condolence motion that I offered on behalf of my family. That was very shameful. It was a deplorable action, and I understand that the footage is being reviewed by the Speaker presently.

To the bills before the house, again we are opposing them because we did ask to go into consideration in detail, which of course the government denied because – no surprises here – they are just not interested in scrutiny. They are just not interested in wanting to allow us to look at these matters that they purport to be very, very important and very, very serious, more so than the things that we are seeing taking place across our state. I would put it to the house that it is more urgent and it is more important to actually introduce bills that would protect Victorians in this house.

Just this weekend we saw the murder – and not just the murder but the brutal slaying – of two young men, 15 and 12 years old. When you read these stories, when you see the footage, which I have not even been able to bring myself to see, having volunteered to work with the South Sudanese community in my early 20s – I cannot even watch it because it is so frightening and it is so devastating. I do not understand why we are not speaking to those things, why we are not introducing bills to protect Victorians in this place, when a 12-year-old waiting for his mum to pick him up from basketball training gets chased down by a youth criminal gang – by thugs – and gets macheted to death. Yet this week the government proposes that we speak to different bills that are not about protecting Victorians, that are not about protecting young people on our streets, that are not about protecting victims but instead want to speak to these things. Not only that, but then when the Leader of the Opposition seeks to raise these issues in this house, the government then decides to not answer those questions. They silence us. They silence the opposition from standing up for Victorians. They silence us.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (51):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

*Just a Farmer*

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:22): It was a pleasure to join hundreds of residents recently in the Fish Creek hall to socialise, celebrate and mingle at a showing of the Australian film *Just a Farmer*. Telling a story of tragedy and triumph, *Just a Farmer*, a film by Leila McDougall, touches on issues farmers in Australia and around the world face – mental health, suicide, loneliness and depression. It is also a celebration of the farmer's wife and the resilience of them and the rural communities they nurture and support. The evening was a great opportunity for farmers and others in the community to get together to share a meal before the show, have a drink and reflect on the issues we need to talk about. Congratulations to the Fish Creek hall committee for putting on the event and all those sponsors who supported the viewing.

**Gippsland South electorate sporting clubs**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:23): Speaking of Fish Creek, it will be an almighty clash when the Kangaroos seniors footballers take on arch rivals Foster in the Mid Gippsland Football Netball League grand final this weekend. Fishy already holds the title of most premierships in Victorian country football and is going for a three-peat this weekend. Foster has been the top team for most of the year but has hit some injury hurdles at the end of the season, and Fishy has a 2–1 record over the Tigers this year. In the A-grade netball, Foster will take on Meeniyar Dumbalk United. In other Gippsland South leagues, Woodside will be aiming to go back-to-back in the North Gippsland league when they take on Traralgon Tyers United, with Sale City meeting Churchill in the A-grade netball. Good luck to all Gippsland South teams this weekend in football finals near and far.

**Pakenham electorate bus services**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (16:24): Public transport connections have just gotten that little bit easier in the Pakenham district. I have advocated passionately for better bus services, particularly for the families in Officer, and it was great to see more progress on this recently. Last week I caught the 928 bus, on my wheelchair, with Mr Galea from the other place and the CEO of Ventura buses Andrew Cornwall to experience the new extended service. The 928 bus now connects Pakenham train station through to Berwick train station, including a stop at Casey Hospital. I am very pleased to say that this service is now operational every weekday. While some people do not give a lot of thought to buses, I know from speaking to people who live in my community just how these services can change people's lives. I know of a mother who can now work longer hours to earn a bit more money because she knows her kids can get home from school thanks to this new extended bus service.

**Pakenham Secondary College**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (16:24): I also visited Pakenham Secondary College with Senator Lisa Darmanin to present a new set of flags. It was great to see the progress of the \$11.3 million investment that we have given for upgrading this wonderful school.

**Cardinia Gujarati Association**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (16:25): Lastly, I also want to say a big thankyou to the Cardinia Gujarati Association for inviting me to their recent celebrations. It was a wonderful evening. I am so proud to represent such a large Australian Indian community in the Pakenham area. As a state we are collectively all the richer for their contributions to our society.

**Crime**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (16:25): Crime is out of control in this state, and I want to bring to you two examples of people in my electorate who have reached out to me in the last week. One was a family in Vincent Street, Tootgarook. They woke to find their BMW vandalised in their driveway, the badges gouged off with a screwdriver, a swastika carved into the bonnet and the panels scratched. Neighbours captured the incident on video. It has been reported to police, but no-one expects to wake up like that.

I actually received an email this morning at 8:22 am. This is probably the most concerning one I have ever received, and I am going to put this on the record. It says:

Sam, my family and I were victims of an aggravated burglary last Thursday where 5 youths broke in our front door entered our house in Rosebud with guns and knives and forced my wife and I to the ground and hit me with the gun threatened to shoot us, before robbing us.

We no longer feel safe in a house we have lived in for 9 years ... My 16-year-old daughter no longer feels safe to sleep in her own bed and neither do we. We have lived on the peninsula our whole lives, and this shouldn't be happening.

We need more from our government to stop these things from happening ... I want action. I want reforms and the police to have greater power. I want to actually see something from you that matters.

How long do we have to go on receiving emails like this from people in our areas who are being broken into in the place that is supposed to be their safe haven? Crime is out of control. This government needs to act now.

#### **Sunbury electorate ministerial visits**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (16:27): It was terrific to be joined by my friend the Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Carers and Volunteers last week at the Sunbury Neighbourhood House. The house does incredible work running programs such as chai and chat, messy play and the Sunbury dads group – and a huge shout-out and thankyou to the amazing Hope Jenkins, board chair Robert Hill and the incredible team that do some outstanding work each and every day within our local community.

The minister also joined me at the Sunbury food co-op, three organisations that have come together to provide food relief to the local community – and a shout-out to particularly Raquel and Isabella, who do some terrific work there. We then moved on to the Sunbury Lawn Tennis Club to catch up with a couple of members of the committee, who recently received a sports grant for uniforms, and I want to acknowledge everyone within the club who does outstanding work at that club each and every day.

On Saturday I had the opportunity to be with the terrific Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the outstanding members for Melton and Broadmeadows at the Australian Nepalese Multicultural Centre in Diggers Rest – and a really big shout-out to every single person who is involved within that community for the important work that they do. Each and every day we will keep delivering for our community.

#### **Brighton electorate pedestrian crossings**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:28): After years of community advocacy the state and federal governments have agreed to jointly fund pedestrian safety infrastructure in Dendy Village and Hampton Street. The village is a busy thoroughfare. Currently there is no pedestrian crossing and the site is unsafe. After almost a decade of calling for action, a proper pedestrian crossing will be installed. This is a win for our community. I must say a huge thankyou to Debbie and Theo from Fresh Connection for their incredible work on making this happen. Community wins like this only happen because of wonderful community-minded people like Debbie, Theo and the many thousands of people who signed our petition and called for the crossing. Thank you again to everyone who helped make this happen.

#### **Lions Club of Brighton**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:29): The Lions Club of Brighton has been a significant contributor to community service since its establishment on 8 October 1999. As a member I can say how jointly excited we all were to see the establishment of a new Young Lions club, the Leo Club of Brighton, by international president AP Singh. Congratulations to club president Kim Low and Leo mentor Nastasija Siljanova. Our club is very proud.

#### **Barbers of Brighton**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:29): Bayside is a close-knit community. Peter and Vicky and their boys from Barbers of Brighton have been a part of the Church Street community for almost 10 years. I recently met with Vicky. She and her family are going through a really tough time. I wanted to let her know and the family know that our community sends our very best wishes to Peter at this time.

#### **Thomastown Tennis Club**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (16:29): Last Tuesday I met with members of the Thomastown Tennis Club at their clubrooms in Rowen Street, Thomastown. I would like to thank Christie Ind, Margaret McDougall, Mark Liberatore, Lou Petrou, Khoi Tran and Carol Saunders for



meeting with me on that cold, wintry night. The Thomastown Tennis Club has a long and proud history in our area, with families connected to the club going back three generations. The club participates in local competitions both day and night and prides itself on being a welcoming club, supporting locals young and old to embark on a tennis journey, whether playing competitively or for fun. It is one of the few clubs now in the area that has a choice of en-tout-cas, classic clay and mod grass courts.

The club has been seated in the current location since 1999, and the club members do lots of voluntary work. But no matter how hard they work, there are certain facilities that are just not up to scratch for a modern club, and it is holding them back from attracting new members. I have written to the City of Whittlesea, asking them to support the club with new lights for the courts, maintenance around fencing and infrastructure to allow the remote booking of courts at the club. However, unfortunately the council at this stage have not come up with any sort of a plan, even though this is their responsibility. They are responsible for sport and recreation, and it is on council land. I encourage them to apply for the Victorian government Local Sports Infrastructure Fund. Applications close on 2 December.

### **Regional Victoria**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (16:31): No-one should be surprised that the Prime Minister and the Victorian Premier were heckled and booed at the bush summit in Ballarat. It takes a lot to get regional people to turn out and demonstrate and even more for them to be as vocal as they were at the bush summit. It follows a recent Dynata survey that says that 75 per cent of Australians believe our farmers and the whole food chain are underappreciated by government. The new emergency services tax that will raise billions to fund a bloated Victorian bureaucracy, the taking away of farmers rights to object to renewable energy infrastructure being put on their farms and now fining them if they object – why would anyone be surprised that regional people are angry? The whole food and supply chain, starting with farmers, is one of regional Victoria's largest employers. It feeds, clothes and houses us, plus it generates significant export revenue. It is the largest export user of the Melbourne container port.

As well as taxing them more and taking away their rights, the Allan Labor government, in its annual cuts to Agriculture Victoria, has decided that another 17 scientists should be classified as 'no longer required'. Research drives innovation, but the Allan government believe it is no longer required. Regional people are booing for a reason. They have taken their tractors to the streets for a reason. They are angry at the injustices dealt to them by government and want respect and support for their contribution to the state. I no longer have a tractor, but if I did I would have been happy to take it to Ballarat. Prime Minister, Premier, you were both elected to govern for all. How about starting to do it?

### **Keysborough Community Hub**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:33): The Keysborough Community Hub is officially open. What an amazing project and contribution by the Allan Labor government and the City of Greater Dandenong. It brings together early childhood facilities, with over 100 places coming online in 2026. We see maternal and child health services there and a wonderful living library – we know libraries are a great point of community connection. And the open play spaces there and what has been achieved will be a great source of pride for the Keysborough South community for generations to come. To join the mayor, the deputy mayor, a range of councillors and hundreds and hundreds of local residents was truly inspiring. This is what community is all about, and to see that and be able to be part of a government that has delivered this outcome was truly extraordinary.

### **Mordialloc electorate level crossing removals**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:33): I also want to acknowledge the Bear Street level crossing boom gates are gone for good. It is part of our plan to make Mordialloc level crossing free and the Frankston train line level crossing free by 2029. Many said that this was not possible, yet we see an investment like never before as we see the Frankston train line transformed into the future. We

had 30 level crossings there when we came to government. We are seeing them knocked out left, right and centre. New stations have been built for Chelsea and Edithvale, with Aspendale not far away in a few years time. Mordialloc station will be built soon, and Parkdale station has been delivered. Mentone and Cheltenham stations – their level crossing removals have made a safer, more connected and inclusive community, and it is all part of how we are investing in the Mordialloc electorate and transforming it for the better.

### Youth crime

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (16:34): I am so deeply saddened and angered about the escalating violent crime here in Victoria. Machete attacks committed by teenagers on teenagers, two innocent children hacked to death – and the Premier, this government, still does nothing. My deepest sympathies to the parents of the children murdered and to all victims of these horrific attacks. There must be tougher action and tougher laws to deal with Victoria's crime crisis. Victorians are demanding it, and they need it. Our children do not deserve to leave a basketball court and be violently killed with machetes.

Our brave police are at the front line of Victoria's crime crisis, putting their own lives in danger and dealing with the tragic human consequences of crime, and they are now speaking out too about the government's soft-on-crime approach and their utter neglect. Following the weekend's horrific double murder of children, Detective Inspector Banks said:

... there needs to be a strong deterrent for this type of behaviour, for carrying weapons, for people who break into homes with weapons, for people who carjack, for people who assault people with weapons. Whether that balance is right is really a matter for ... ultimately the government.

This is not happening in other states in Australia, and no stupid gimmick of a machete bin is going to stop these violent thugs from terrorising people in their homes or at the shops with machetes and killing people. Labor is failing our youth and our society, and only the Liberals and Nationals will deliver the changes to make Victorians safe with 'break bail, face jail'.

### 1st Inverloch Scout Group

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (16:36): It was a joy to attend the 1st Inverloch Scout Group annual report and presentation evening. The group is a vibrant example of scouting in our local community, with Cubs, Scouts and Venturers in attendance along with their families and friends. It was such a great example of young people learning through doing, getting involved in their community and developing their life and leadership skills. Scouting is the world's largest non-formal education movement, with over 60 million members, including 22,000 in Victoria. These young people plan and lead their weekly program and have had many adventures this past year, with activities such as a 10-day Australian jamboree in Maryborough, Queensland, and camping, hiking, skiing and performing arts programs. A new committee was welcomed and many milestones were celebrated, with group leader Mark Withers honoured for 25 years of service with a loud applause, followed by a cheer to the 10-member volunteer team for over 80 years of combined service. Youth members achieved peak awards in their sections. Massive congratulations to them and also to Felicity Ogden for attaining the King's Scout Award. It is very impressive that so many young people are active leaders, both within scouting and beyond, being involved in a myriad of programs and events including the Inverloch Equinox Festival, Anzac Day and the LifeChanger youth advisory council. This group values community. We see this exemplified in their strong connections with the Inverloch RSL, men's shed and Lions, just to name a few. We are all the better as a town, community and society with Scouts and scouting.

### Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:37): The Allan Labor government has slapped a \$3 billion tax on Victorians at a time when they can least afford it. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis the Allan Labor government are charging Victorians \$3 billion to help the Allan Labor

government manage the economic mess, which they have created and which is of their own making, through the charging of their emergency services tax. In my community many businesses and many residents have been impacted by this tax, and I would like to share with the house just a few of those examples. For an 80-square metre storage unit in Cheltenham, the Bayside council rates – and credit to Bayside council for freezing rates this year – are \$937. The Labor government tax is \$1139. I make that available to the house. For the ice-cream shop in Sandringham village, Sandy Scoops, the council rates are \$1720. The Victorian government emergency services tax is \$1738. For Flavours patisserie in Black Rock their emergency services tax from this government is \$1605. For Park Road Timber & Hardware in Park Road, Cheltenham, the emergency services tax for one property is \$3932.50 and for another property is \$3001.50. Only electing a Liberal and National government will ensure that this tax is scrapped and that money is put back in the pockets of hardworking Victorians.

### **Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (16:39): Thighs of steel climbed the Crown Metropol this Saturday to raise over \$1 million for mental health as part of the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb. Congratulations to my fellow fires from our CFA brigades in Wyndham, who I joined on the climb. I have to say my time was probably not the best out of the four years that I have done it, but congratulations to those from Wyndham Vale brigade, Brendan, Maria, Stef, Sonia, Bridget, Max, Sue, Liam and Shaun; from Point Cook fire brigade, Karthick, Japinder, Doris, Daniel, Brett and Hoikee; from Hoppers Crossing fire brigade, Adrian, Shripad, Juan and Yassir; from Trug brigade, Maurice, Greg and Shane; and from my brigade, Christina, Cameron, Riley, Mitchell and Aiden. And congratulations to Christina for being the fastest female from all our brigades to get up the towers, putting us all to shame.

### **Werribee Mercy Hospital**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (16:40): It was also a pleasure to attend the opening of the upgraded Werribee hospital mother and baby unit that was funded with the assistance of the Allan Labor government. Thank you to Carmen, Melissa, Leah, Victoria, Laura, Kate, Claire and Karen, who were on shift yesterday, for having me there and letting me have a look around and of course look at some really cute little babies. This is a really important service for our growing community to make sure our most vulnerable families get that support when it comes to their mental health and bringing those little kids home.

### **Treaty**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (16:40): Today we are taking a historic step towards First Nations justice with the first ever Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. I am so, so proud to stand in support of that treaty bill. It is a really powerful and hard-won moment. It is the result of generations of staunch First Nations leadership. For too long our systems have denied the sovereignty and the law of this land's First Peoples. We cannot rewrite history, but this treaty represents a movement towards change by centring First People's knowledge, law and leadership. It is being led by First Nations people for First Peoples.

I would like to thank the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for working so tirelessly to lay the foundations in negotiating this treaty and the Yoorrook Justice Commission for their crucial truth-telling. This work, alongside years of campaigning from so many First Nations leaders, activists and organisations, has brought us to this day. Their legacy is a permanent First Nations body, Gellung Warl, and with it the power to question ministers, guide curricula, shape cultural practice and hold governments to account. This is the first treaty, but it will not be the last one in Victoria. Let it be the foundation for a better future for all of us. To the First Peoples who have worked tirelessly, thank you.

### **Community safety**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (16:42): Today I rise to celebrate Victoria's incredible multiculturalism and the privilege it is to represent the diverse community of the electorate of

Mulgrave. Mulgrave is home to people who have come here from all over the world, from Vietnam, China, Cambodia, India and so many other nations. Our diversity is our greatest strength and our beauty. It brings with it a richness of culture, vibrant food, deep traditions and countless stories of resilience and courage. I too come from a multicultural background. My mother came to Australia from India. She raised me to honour my Indian heritage and to see it for what it truly is: a strength and something I should be proud of.

All Victorians should be proud of their heritage and proud to be part of a multicultural state, which is why I was so disgusted to have seen rallies recently filled with racist slogans and symbols and to hear language of division and fear. Australia is not a place for hate or fear, yet that is what many of us saw two weeks ago. To add to that hate, federal Liberal Party senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price last week made baseless and offensive claims about the Indian community in Australia. We must not be silent in the face of this racism. All sides must call it out.

I would like to make it clear that it does not matter where you come from; you are welcome here and deserve respect, safety and dignity. As a representative for the Mulgrave community, I know they hurt because I hurt with them, but I am proud to be part of a government that embraces and celebrates this diversity and stands up for Victorians.

### Legacy Week

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (16:43): We have just marked Legacy Week, a time to honour and support the families of our fallen and injured defence force personnel. Legacy is very personal for me. My nanna Pat was put through school by Legacy as an only child living with her widowed mother, my great-grandmother Blanche Colee, formerly Sherrin, after my great-grandfather Reginald Colee died from mustard gas poisoning effects following World War I. Founded over a century ago, Legacy, including local clubs like Mornington Peninsula Legacy, look after the families of those who have died or been injured due to war, continuing to this day. Legacy Week is about action, support and community, ensuring no veteran's family is ever left behind.

### Mornington electorate sporting clubs

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (16:44): Congratulations to our incredible local sports teams in finals. Mornington Football Netball Club women's seniors claimed a premiership, and the under-19 men are going straight to the grand final. Mt Eliza Football Netball Club has five teams in finals and grand finals. South Mornington's C2 netball side secured back-to-back premierships. Mornington Baseball Club's A2s missed the title by just one run. Peninsula Raiders and Mornington Peninsula Hockey Club also had and have multiple teams in finals contention, with the women's metro 1 hockey team off to a grand final. Congratulations and well done to all local teams in finals and beyond.

### Koonung Secondary College

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (16:45): Congratulations to Koonung Secondary College on its successful production of *Chicago* the musical last month. I would like to praise the fabulous cast: Bethani Bingley, Alysha Clegg, Emily Nash, Charis Gibson, Victor Azubel, Gwen Mander, Zarah Buchanan, Sierra Clark, Sophie Newbury, Lilla Buchanan, Ruth Chen, Shion Chenhall, Stephanie Coleman, Bridget Dods, Millie Ferdowsian, Georgia Fleming, Gisele Freiha, Poppy Fukushima-Taylor, Meika Guy, Nathan Hanslow, Wilson Li, Ashton Lonnen, Josie Mander, Quinn McNeil, Jack Moran, Tiffany Sync, Clio Vassiliades, Zach Watkins, Chloe Wightman and Milla Wightman.

A performance such as this does not happen without many contributors who cannot be seen on stage. So a big shout-out to all the crew: Jennifer Molloy, Vernice Pang, Zune Pang, Olive Brodie, Hilary Dods, Xavier Cronin, Hana Drohan and Lucy Cooper on backstage; Jeremy Ball, Sienna Forrest, James Le, Simon Cronin and Josh Verco on sound; Micaela Poon, Michael Harding, Zoe Newbury, Sabrina Hutchinson and Noah Bentley-Mackinnon on lighting; Khushi Patel, Hime Delaney, Lachlan Cartledge, Alessio De Luise, Daniel Goulding, Sienna Pugliese, Moksha Iyer, Aaron Chee and Afra Eftekhari on front of house; and Jasmine Missen, Tehmi Harding, Alisa Watthanawiphak, Chloe

Cooper, Megan Zerna, Elly Zachariou, Indiana Iannotti and Atrina Nia on hair and make-up. Finally, I would like to congratulate and thank the amazing band as well as all of the wonderful parents who assisted with all the costumes and construction.

### **Working from home**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (16:46): Working from home works for families. I know that the communities that I represent know that family balance, that work–life balance, being able to take their kids to netball training, being able to prepare healthy meals for their family, all of that is improved by having the option to work from home. That is why we are reaching out to ask people what they want to see in what we have committed to: making working from home a right. Some may say, ‘Why do we need to make it a right? Why can’t we leave it to employers?’ Well, I will tell you about the people that I have met doorknocking. I met a woman with a young child who has permission to work from home until the end of the year, but that is it, and she is worried about next year. How will she make life work travelling in with a young baby? Making working from home a right two days a week for those who can absolutely makes sense for families, and I encourage my community to get involved in the community engagement to give their view on how it will work best for them, what they want to see under the legislation and how it can improve life for us, not just at home but on the roads as well. We have got the Yan Yean Road upgrade stage 2 kicking off in November. The community will be patient with roadworks. Working from home will make life easier through that as well. Working from home is so important for my community.

### **Dr Thong Thel**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (16:48): I rise to pay tribute to the late Dr Thong Thel. Dr Thong Thel dedicated more than three decades of service to communities across both Cambodia and Australia in the fields of education, language and cultural support. Born in Cambodia, he arrived in Australia in 1975 on a Colombo Plan scholarship to pursue a masters degree in linguistics while his late wife Long Lay Thong and their young children remained in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge took over in the same year. In 1976 he undertook an interpreting and translating course, which marked the beginning of his longstanding commitment to supporting refugees and migrants in their settlement journeys in Australia. Later he shared his expertise by training future interpreters and translators at RMIT. His wife and children survived the killing fields and reunited with him in Australia in 1980.

In 1992 Dr Thong Thel worked with United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, where he led the school of Khmer language programs and culture and taught Khmer to 650 UN staff who were responsible for monitoring polling stations during Cambodia’s historic 1993 democratic elections. He was one of the founders and former president of the Cambodian Association of Victoria and a pioneer of many interfaith multicultural communities. He continued with roles as a UNESCO and UNICEF representative, overseeing educational policy and curriculum development, and completed a PhD. Vale, Dr Thong Thel.

### **Bellarine electorate women in business**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (16:49): Recently the Minister for Small Business and Employment visited the Bellarine and engaged in a roundtable discussion focusing on women in local business and small businesses. It was a fantastic opportunity to hear directly from local business owners about the challenges that they are facing and to explore how the state government, through Business Victoria, can better support them and their business growth. Conversation covered a range of important topics including red-tape reform, workforce and skill development, finance and mentoring, technology, business growth and the experiences of women in business.

A special thankyou to Sarah from Bellarine Smokehouse & Providore in Drysdale for providing a beautiful venue and showcasing her new addition to the business with a unique shared dining experience in an open kitchen and dining setting. A massive thankyou also to Marie-Claire from the Q Train, Leanne from Jericho Pottery, Amanda from Gemaxis, Mel from Ducks Nuts, Bianca from

Bellarine Tan and Glam and Nexus Excavations, Mira from St Leonards hairdressing and Alyssa from Bellarine Wholefoods, who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with me and the minister. Engagements like these are essential in shaping our policies that truly respond to the needs of local businesses. I am grateful for all those who participated, and I look forward to continuing these important conversations across the Bellarine and with the minister.

### **John Fawkner College**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (16:51): Recently I had the pleasure of attending the Melbourne Victory primary school gala at John Fawkner College. It was such a joy to see students from local primary schools Moomba Park, Belle Vue Park, Fawkner, Pascoe Vale North, Westbreen, St Matthew's, Merri-bek and St Thomas More out on the pitch having fun, building friendships and learning new skills. The Melbourne Victory School of Football is operating at John Fawkner College, which boasts some of the best sporting facilities in the region, including two state-of-the-art full-size pitches and access to CB Smith Reserve. These facilities were proudly delivered during my time as a councillor at Moreland, now Merri-bek. Through the program John Fawkner students have the opportunity to train with professional Melbourne Victory coaches and participate in friendly matches with other leading football schools, including from interstate and overseas. The program not only increases participation in sport but also improves school engagement, develops teamwork and builds confidence, resilience and leadership skills.

It is great to see exciting things happening at John Fawkner College, including growth in NAPLAN results this year, which is a testament to the school's renewed focus on high expectations, inclusive practices and strong leadership under principal Dr Lisa Vinnicombe. It reflects the hard work of students, staff and families and shows what is possible when we invest in our schools and believe in the potential of every young person. I was so proud to secure a massive \$14.5 million to deliver new classrooms and world-class science, technology, arts and food tech buildings at John Fawkner. The Victorian School Building Authority were outside again this last week, and I am looking forward to building work recommencing on the project soon.

### ***Bills***

#### **National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025**

#### ***Council's amendments***

#### **Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 50, page 80, line 20, omit "subparagraph (i)." and insert "subparagraph (i); and".
2. Clause 50, page 80, after line 20 insert –
 

“(c) to, through the payment of grants of money from the Fund, support biodiversity outcomes in Victoria, including support for the implementation of biodiversity programs, and the carrying out of biodiversity research, in Victoria.”.
3. Clause 50, page 81, line 24, omit "Fund;" and insert "Fund.".
4. Clause 50, page 81, lines 25 and 26, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
5. Clause 50, page 82, lines 1 to 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
6. Insert the following New Clause before clause 63 –

#### **‘62A Definitions**

In section 3 of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** insert the following definition –

“**public sector employee** has the same meaning as in the **Public Administration Act 2004**.”.

7. Clause 63, line 8, omit "person" and insert "public sector employee".
8. Clause 65, line 26, omit "person" and insert "public sector employee".
9. Clause 65, line 27, omit "person" and insert "public sector employee".
10. Clause 65, page 127, lines 1 to 7, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

11. Clause 65, page 132, line 6, omit “60” and insert “30”.
12. Clause 65, page 137, line 26, omit “60” and insert “30”.
13. Clause 65, page 139, after line 29 insert –
  - “(1A) In determining whether there are reasonable grounds for making the order, the Magistrates’ Court must have regard to the extent to which an electricity corporation or the CEO VicGrid has complied with the relevant obligations described in subsection (1B) in relation to entering –
    - (a) onto the land in respect of which the application is made; and
    - (b) in the circumstances in relation to which entry is sought to be authorised under the entry order; and
    - (c) for the purpose for which entry is sought to be authorised under the entry order.
  - (1B) The relevant obligations for the purposes of subsection (1A) are obligations that –
    - (a) are imposed by the provisions of a Code of Practice referred to in section 93(5)(d); and
    - (b) require things to be done before (and not during or after) entry onto land.”.
14. Clause 65, page 143, line 17, omit “60” and insert “30”.
15. Clause 65, page 149, line 4, omit “60” and insert “30”.
16. Clause 65, page 149, line 25, omit “60” and insert “30”.
17. Clause 65, page 152, line 4, omit “6” and insert “4”.
18. Clause 65, page 152, line 9, omit “6” and insert “4”.
19. Clause 65, page 152, line 14, omit “6” and insert “4”.
20. Clause 65, page 152, line 24, omit “6” and insert “4”.
21. After clause 75 insert –

**‘75A Magistrates’ Court may make entry order**

In section 93BL(1A) of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** omit “or the CEO VicGrid”.

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (16:52): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I will just add a few comments to that. We are at a critical stage of the transition in our energy system. Our existing traditional generators are ageing, are becoming increasingly unreliable and are set to close, and we must deliver the replacement capacity to allow our industries to grow, to ensure reliability and to keep bills as low as possible. To keep the lights on we must build critical new transmission infrastructure; there are no two ways about it. This bill is a critical step in order to make this happen.

The government has accepted a number of amendments to this bill that arose in the other place. These amendments are the Greens amendment 1, to expand the renewable energy zones community energy fund to encompass supporting biodiversity outcomes and biodiversity research in Victoria, and amendment 2, to prevent funds from the renewable energy zone community energy fund being paid into the Consolidated Fund. Legalise Cannabis Victoria also moved some amendments, including to reduce the maximum fines issuable by authorised officers and the Magistrates Court, to clarify that authorised officers may only be public sector employees and to require that VicGrid comply with the Essential Services Commission’s Land Access Code of Practice before exercising the powers provided to the Magistrates Court to issue penalties up to the maximum amount prescribed in the bill. I would like to acknowledge the Victorian Greens, the Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis Victoria in the other place for their collaborative contributions to this bill. I commend it to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:54): The coalition has said since day one this bill is an absolute disgrace. It is an absolute abomination. As the minister just said, the government is pushing ahead with a steamroller in the transition of our energy system. But in doing so it is taking away the property

rights of Victorians. You saw only the other day at the bush summit the feeling of regional Victoria. Not only is regional Victoria outraged by the new taxes that are being imposed upon them – and those are incredible burdens – but you also heard them talk about the renewable projects being forced onto people's properties. No longer will those Victorians have a say in what is happening on their own property. And they know it is true – Victorians now know it is true. That is why the attendees at the bush summit had nothing they could do other than try and use that opportunity to have their voices heard, because their voices are not being heard. You saw the Premier attend with her script. Imagine waking up in the morning and needing a script to read into the record, not even being able to talk about your own life without a script. Nevertheless the community saw how fake, false and lacking in empathy the Premier and this government are when it comes to the regional communities of our state.

And what did we see as a result? We heard the mayor of Ballarat speak out bravely. Very rarely are people able to speak out, but the mayor in that instance spoke out. The mayor of Ballarat Tracey Hargreaves spoke out and said that the community's passion was a reflection of just how deeply people care about their region and care about issues like this VicGrid bill, this abomination of a bill, which attacks the rights of regional Victorians on their properties. The mayor spoke out in support of their passion and their right to have a say. And what did we hear from this government? We heard the member for Wendouree describe people's passions and them putting their views on the record. She was disgusted. She was disgusted by her constituents. 'Disgusted' is what the member for Wendouree said. Imagine speaking about your own constituents that way.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** That is a direct quote. When I am finished, I am more than happy to make the article where those quotes were directly lifted from available for the members of the house. The member for Eureka attacked her constituents as well, as did the member for Ripon. I mean, the member for Ripon – wow. Talk about talking out of both sides of your mouth in this place and then out in the community. We will see what happens at the next election in the seat of Ripon.

Talking about those attendees' behaviour, you cannot attack your own constituents for voicing their views on what the government is doing to these communities. It is wrong – it is simply wrong. Not only is this bill wrong, not only are the taxes that are being imposed on the community wrong, but for the government to attack people for having their say is an absolute disgrace. How can you attack thousands of your own constituents? It was extraordinary to see that. Those three members did it, which has been reported in their own local papers. It was a bizarre, unhinged attack on communities that only adds insult.

What these amendments do not do is make this bill better. You heard from the minister that a number of amendments have been agreed to. On some of these amendments, the coalition will be opposing them. We would ask of course, considering the package of amendments, that the question be split, because this package of amendments is significant. It is 21 items on my read, and it is reasonable that the question be split.

In relation to those amendments, there are some that reduce the personal fines that are going to be imposed on people who do not comply with the government turning up to their house and telling them what happens on their property. In principle we oppose those fines, let me make that very, very clear. The coalition opposes those fines, full stop – fines that initially were \$14,000 and almost \$49,000. The Council has amended, through amendment, a number of those fines to reduce them. We oppose them in principle. However, those amendments –

**Michaela Settle:** Acting Speaker, on a point of order, I take offence at the comments made by the member for Brighton regarding my comments in the *Courier* about the bush summit, and I do not believe that he reflected them correctly. I am more than happy for him to quote on the record –

**James Newbury:** What's the point of order?



**Michaela Settle:** I have taken offence at your comments because they are incorrect. I take offence at your comments because the article does not say what you said. I would like you to withdraw it.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Member for Eureka, I do apologise. I am not sure if I was in the chamber or I was swapping over, so I did not hear the comments. I would suggest possibly talking to the Speaker about it, but I cannot rule on it at this moment, because I did not hear it.

**James NEWBURY:** I will continue. I have never seen a member so concerned about what was reported in their own public paper, where they report their own comments attacking their own constituents. How bizarre.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I take offence at the comments. If the member would like to read my comment from the *Courier*, at no point did I attack my constituents. I said that events of the day had crossed a line, if you would like to read the quote, member for Brighton. I take offence that he is suggesting that I am criticising my electorate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Member for Eureka, I stand by my earlier comments. If you have the opportunity to debate this bill, you will have the opportunity to –

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Thank you, member for Eureka.

**James NEWBURY:** Bizarre. That just goes to show how much the comments which were reported in the media have upset those members. Every member can talk, and every member is perfectly entitled to get up on these amendments and put on record whether they used words like ‘disgusted’, which are in the media.

In relation to the amendments, as I was saying, we oppose the principle of a fine. However, the fine is being reduced, so we will not be calling a division on that particular amendment, though in principle we oppose strongly these fines that are going to be applied to hardworking Victorians because they do not allow people to have a say over their own property. You can see it when it comes to renewable energy in relation to planning more broadly, but this specific VicGrid bill is part of the broader suite of changes this government is bringing about.

What this government is doing is saying, ‘We are going to build what we want where we want – not just in regional Victoria but in Melbourne too. We are going to build what we want where we want, and you do not have a say about what is built where you live because this government knows better than everyone else.’ You can see with the feedback towards the Premier and the Prime Minister how strongly the community feels about that. Why should they not have a say about what is built on their land? Why should they not have a say over who can go onto their property? Of course they should have a say. What this government is doing is saying, ‘You should thank us because not only were we going to introduce fines but we are reducing the fines we were going to impose. That is what these amendments are all about, so say thank you.’ You are still up for thousands of dollars – or, in terms of businesses, tens of thousands of dollars. They are just not as big as what was once being proposed. What a disgrace – this bill is a disgrace. And you can see that regional Victoria can see quite clearly through what this government is doing in relation to this bill, in relation to planning more broadly, in relation to the imposition of renewables onto people’s land and also in relation to the imposition of taxes that are being imposed across the community. You could see that at the bush summit. You could see so many people say that they –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** The yelling and screaming from that side of the chamber does not in any way show respect to their community. And every member on that side –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** I do not know who this is. Who is this? This is clearly not Danny Pearson. Who is this? His photo looks nothing like this.

**Danny Pearson:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a workplace, and I feel my hearing is being damaged by this unhinged rant from the member for Brighton, who is clearly auditioning to replace the member for Gembrook.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** There is quite a lot of noise in the chamber and I would like to take it down. Maybe use your inside voices for a while.

**James NEWBURY:** Quite clearly a stranger is in the house. I am absolutely sure –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Are you reflecting on the Chair, member for Brighton?

**James NEWBURY:** Not at all. ‘A stranger in the house’ is a parliamentary term. The members on that side of the chamber can scream, they can shout and they can abuse their own constituents. They can say they are disgusted, which has been reported in their own newspapers. They are going to be held to account by their own constituents. At the end of the day, those communities are unhappy, rightly, with their rights being taken away. They are unhappy with the imposition of projects onto their own communities without a say. They are unhappy about the big government coming in and saying they can access properties or fine you otherwise. They are unhappy that this government, under a claim of supporting emergency services, is taxing the community again and again and again. The government can say there is nothing going on here, but when the Premier stood up at the bush summit we all saw what regional Victoria thinks. When the Prime Minister had to flee the event, we all saw what regional Victoria thinks.

These amendments, which we will oppose in part, are simply a reduction in a number of bad fines. We do not support the fines; I say that very, very clearly. But a reduced bad fine is better than a higher bad fine. Simply because we do not have the choice to knock it out completely anymore, we will not cause a division on those items, but otherwise, in principle we could not be clearer. We could not have been more clear on this issue. We could not have been stronger on behalf of our communities.

I know that the National Party members who are speaking after me have been unbelievably strong in terms of representing their communities on these issues, and all of the whingeing and moaning from that side of the chamber about their own constituents only reflects on them. If you cannot work out that you should not attack your own constituents, you do not deserve to be here. So in relation to this package, we are seeking a split of the amendments, and in certain instances we will oppose them but in others we will not.

**Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (17:11):** That was most unpleasant, wasn’t it? That was tough. We are in here to speak on the amendments to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. I think the member for Brighton went to that for about 2 minutes and for the rest of it just screamed utter dross. It was a tough 15 minutes or so to get through, ranging from essentially just misleading the house in respect to what some of our members had to say within the media last week and really just talking about absolute nonsense. It is no secret that the coalition and the opposition have gone out into the community and sought to drum up as much fear as they possibly can in respect to this bill. It is what they do on most bills, but they have been particularly unpleasant on this one.

I think it is most concerning that the member for Brighton wants to stand up here and reference some of the behaviour that we saw at the bush summit by some people in regional Victoria and talk about that, because some of that behaviour towards the Premier, towards a female politician, is quite frankly deplorable. But we have seen the colours of some of those opposite today. We have seen the Leader of the Opposition kicked out of this place for standing and abusing a Speaker for, what, 20 seconds –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, we are debating a set of amendments.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I would ask the member to come back to the set of amendments.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Yes, sure. I will use 30 seconds of my 10 minutes – a bit like the member for Brighton did. He is the champion of regional Victoria, of all the out-of-towners. Honestly, the two-faced nature of the member for Brighton is –

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I do note that it was a wideranging discussion.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Member for Brighton, do not yell at me from your chair, please.

**Dylan WIGHT:** I am simply rebutting some of the dross that I heard for the 15 minutes prior to me standing up. The member for Brighton does not need anybody to reflect on him – he does that all by himself. Like I said, he barely touched on the amendments. I have said this before: you take a point of order –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is a piece of legislation which some members of my community and other members of Victoria are very, very upset about.

**Danny Pearson** interjected.

**Emma Kealy:** This point of order is on relevance, Danny, if you are listening. I ask you to bring the member back to the amendment because it is important to all Victorians who are very upset by this legislation.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I also remind members to use proper titles.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Tarneit is debating this amendment. The member for Brighton made contributions, and he is reflecting on those contributions, which is wholly within the debate. I ask that you rule it out of order.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I ask the member for Tarneit to come back to the amendments.

**Dylan WIGHT:** I understand that this is an issue that is important to many Victorians out there, and I will debate this piece of legislation with respect to that. But frankly the member for Lowan should maybe just give an elbow to the guy next to her, who carried on with complete and utter nonsense and went nowhere near it for 15 minutes – went absolutely nowhere near any of the amendments for 15 minutes – until just about the very end of his contribution, when he spoke about some of the divisions that they will have and some that they will not and how they do not support the legislation as a whole. If you want to stand up and talk nonsense for 15 minutes, then someone is going to eventually rebut it. Like I said, you would take a point of order, but you are better off just to let them go and embarrass themselves.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT:** That is what you are doing after point-of-ordering me three times. These are incredibly important amendments. I do thank those in the upper house – I think it was the Greens, Legalise Cannabis and Ms Purcell from the Animal Justice Party in particular – for putting some of these amendments forward and bringing them back to the Legislative Assembly for us to debate here this afternoon.

To go to some of those amendments, we have got an amendment from the Greens to expand the REZ community energy fund to encompass supporting biodiversity outcomes and biodiversity research in

Victoria. We have also got a Greens amendment to prevent funds from the REZ community energy fund from being paid back into the Consolidated Fund, into consolidated revenue, to make sure that the government are not using that to prop up their bottom line come budget time. Another one from Legalise Cannabis Victoria reduces the maximum fines issuable by authorised officers and the Magistrates' Court, which I do think the member for Brighton actually touched on. Another one from Legalise Cannabis clarifies that authorised officers may only be public sector employees.

This piece of legislation as a whole supports the government's transition to a renewable energy future. This government, it is no mistake and it is no secret, has some of the most ambitious renewable energy targets not just anywhere in Australia but anywhere in the world – 95 per cent by 2035. For those opposite, it is a pretty simple equation: as our population grows, our energy needs to increase. So the energy mix that we have had in Victoria for the last hundred-odd years, being coal-fired power and gas, is no longer –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a narrow debate which goes only to the amendments, and I ask you to bring the member back.

**Dylan WIGHT:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it has been a pretty wideranging debate. We had things in bush summits –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I will rule on that point of order. There is no point of order. It has been very wideranging. I came in when the member for Brighton was on his feet, and it was quite wideranging.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Indeed. This bill is an incredibly important part of Victoria's renewable energy future. As our population grows, our traditional energy mix will not suffice any longer. Coal-fired power is bad for the environment but is also becoming expensive and unreliable. We see at the moment down at Loy Yang issues with faults in the power station there. We know that in the Otway Basin in particular and the Gippsland Basin gas is less plentiful than what it was. It is also the most expensive energy source that we have here in Victoria at the moment. What we need to do is rapidly move to a renewable energy future. It is a difficult transition, but it is obviously a difficult topic for those opposite as well. Not only do they oppose basically every onshore renewable energy project that we try to create, whether that be wind or solar, they oppose offshore wind as well.

*Members interjecting.*

**Dylan WIGHT:** The member for South-West Coast – I am happy for you to go through *Hansard* – has spoken at length about her opposition to an offshore wind project off Portland, I believe because of whale migration. To move to a renewable energy future, both onshore solar and wind projects and offshore wind are going to be integral to Victoria's future, but so is getting power from A to B – building those transmission projects and those transmission lines through parts of Victoria so we can move that energy which we are creating from A to B.

These amendments to this bill are, in my view, incredibly helpful, but the piece of legislation itself is one that I understand is hard for some people. I do not discount that, and I am not trying to be a smart alec about it. I do not discount that it is a hard topic for some people in regional Victoria, but it is one that is absolutely essential to making sure that we can meet the energy needs of Victorians in the future. As coal-fired power becomes less reliable and as gas becomes less plentiful, it is incredibly important that we have pieces of legislation like this to ensure our energy future.

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (17:21):** I would like to speak on the amendments regarding the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, and I would like to pick up that last topic that was raised by the member for Tarneit: 'This is a hard topic for some people in regional Victoria', in reference to renewables. I am deeply offended that regional Victorians would be pitched in such a way. It shows how tone-deaf Labor MPs are in this place when it comes to the concerns of landholders, and I note the giggles from the member for Wendouree. It is disgraceful.

They are your members. These are Labor members representing them in this place, and they are laughing at Victorians, who are being told that it is a hard topic for them. Do you know why it is a hard topic for regional Victorians – because they are being pitched as being some sort of group of people who do not like renewables, a group of people who are Neanderthals in some way, who are all backwards, and they need to take this on for the greater good. I mean, it is like that *Hot Fuzz* movie around the greater good: ‘Why do we do it? For the greater good.’

Listen to what people are saying in regional Victoria who own property or live around the VNI West corridor. They are saying that they are not being heard, and at no point through Labor’s discussions and their government bureaucrat discussions on the ground have they actually made the effort to hear what country people are saying. That is the point. It is completely unfair, and it is maligning regional Victorians to put it any other way. There would be members in metropolitan Melbourne who would be equally upset if there was a road proposed to go from one side of Melbourne to the other and we did not know where the road was exactly going to go. You are speaking to thousands and thousands of different households: ‘It might go here or there.’ You are pitting neighbour against neighbour. You are looking at offering different rates for different properties. You are organising meetings and saying you will not meet with a group, you will only meet one on one, but then you bring five people from the department with a security guard onto their property. That is a one-way conversation. That is not consultation, that is being consultold that the government is going to enter your property. This is what this legislation does.

Within the VicGrid legislation and the amendments there is a reference that not only can you not have the discussion, which is the experience of regional Victorians who live through the VNI West corridor, but actually now we have got Labor making legislation so that if you refuse to let those officials onto your land you get a fine. This is not bringing people on board. They have simple, straightforward questions. They have legitimate concerns. We have got biodiverse areas which VNI West looks like it will run through. These are particular areas of forest that contain areas of native environment – plants and animals – that are on the endangered list, and the government are not even listening to that. Isn’t it bizarre that we are saying, ‘We’re going to save the environment with this new powerline by unlocking more wind and more solar to save the environment, and at the same time we’re going to bulldoze very important, diverse protected areas of our natural environment’? It simply does not stack up.

It also does not stack up when you look at the cost of this project. It is a project that has gone from \$5 billion to \$7 billion, and now we are expecting \$11 billion in just two years time. And that is not funded by the big energy companies. It is not even funded through the mystery coffers of the government and diverted taxpayer dollars. It comes under ‘poles and wires’ on each and every Victorian’s energy bill. Have a look next time you look at your energy bill: it is coming through, and it is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. One of the aspects of that is poles and wires, and that will be VNI West. That will be a huge chunk of money on every single Victorian’s power bill, whether you are a household or whether you are a business. That will have an impact on people’s ability to feed their family, keep a roof over their head and keep on running their farm and growing the food and fibre that Victorians and Australians and people all around the world rely on and enjoy. That is the implication of that.

It is a cost-of-living issue, it is a cost-of-business issue and it is something that appears to have not been heard by Labor MPs. It is deeply concerning, because our regional Victorian voice has not been heard for many, many years. I do not like seeing my people forced to protest on the front steps of Parliament. I equally do not like the fact that we have got farmers who are resorting to getting in tractors and chasing the Prime Minister down the street because they do not feel like they have been heard. I do not like that there is a local woman who is so concerned about the mental health impacts of this government’s bulldozing of local people’s rights that she is going to the bush summit holding a noose around her neck – not because she has not tried to have the conversation, not because she has not engaged with the government and not because our people have not written to the Premier and

written to ministers and written to their local Labor MPs raising these issues but because they are not being heard. They are not getting a response. They are not getting anything back apart from this bill, which just puts a great big fine in place.

I asked the government – and this might be something that is unexpected from me – to please, for the mental health of our community, provide more mental health supports. I suggest to the government – and this is in respect of comments from previous speakers that the Labor government just want to get on with it – that if you are going to get on with it then just do it. Have compulsory acquisitions of land and make it quick and make it fair so our people can move on, because it is completely unfair to grind down the mental health and the welfare of people who live in regional Victoria. It is cruel, what the government is doing to our people. It is cruel for the people who grow our food and grow our fibre to have this level of uncertainty – ‘You might be in or you might be out’ – when we are continuously told this project will happen. I call on Premier Allan: please, if you care about regional people, go out and do compulsory acquisition, as you would for a Melbourne project, and let our people deal with this, because the uncertainty is dividing families.

I met with a school last week where I saw the impacts on the kids who hear these concerned conversations from their parents. They see the tears, they hear the conversations, they see what is happening in the media and they are taking that to the schoolyard. Principals in tears, teachers in tears, kids in tears – that is not fair. I ask every single member of this chamber to at least please listen to this, no matter what party you are involved with: have some fairness and find some kindness and respect, because our people are not being treated with respect right now. Our people have been let down time and time again, and the only response that they ever get from the government is that it is a hard topic for them. Absolutely it is a hard topic. They have been trying so hard to have the conversation, but nobody will listen. No-one will say what is next. It is so cruel and unfair, and I invite everybody in this chamber to do what I have done: sit at the kitchen table, go to the Wallaloo Golf Club and have a meeting with impacted landholders on VNI West. Go and actually hear what their concerns are, because in just speculating and stereotyping that they are some sort of rednecks that hate renewables you have completely missed the point. That is so rude. It is so disrespectful – to even think that people in this state could be maligned in that way. It is grossly unfair, and if it was based on race you would be calling it out for racism. It is against regional Victorians. Respect them.

I appreciate that there are amendments in here that mean that the community benefit fund cannot be redirected to consolidated revenue. I absolutely support this. I also ask the government to ensure that every dollar of the community benefit fund goes back to the communities that are hosting this infrastructure. They deserve it. They deserve better roads, they deserve better hospitals, they deserve better schools and they deserve better public transport, but, more importantly, they deserve far more respect than they get from the Allan Labor government. They should not be paying the price for this mindless end towards bulldozing landholder rights.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (17:31): I would just like to reflect on the member for Lowan’s contribution there and the tone that she set when reflecting on this idea of respect in these sorts of debates. I do want to return briefly to comments made by the member for Brighton at the start of his contribution around what we saw in Ballarat. I do not know if the member for Brighton has a subscription to the *Courier*. After all, he is an out-of-towner when it comes to Ballarat issues, and he refused to quote in full the contributions to that fine regional newspaper by my colleagues the member for Eureka and the member for Wendouree – I have to remember it is not Ballarat anymore. I think it is really, really important to reflect on this idea of respect when it comes to debate, respect when it comes to protest. It is about calling out bad behaviour at these kinds of rallies that distracts from –

*Members interjecting.*

**John LISTER:** Your mates – the issue at hand. It is something that I find very strange when those opposite, with their absent leader, stand by chalk-painted slogans on the sides of CFA trucks in Synnot Street in Werribee – misogynistic slogans on CFA government-funded appliances.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the amendment is in relation to the VicGrid bill. The member has not even touched on the bill or mentioned the name. I ask you to bring the member back to the bill, because this is nothing about any random protest. It is about VicGrid, and it is a narrow debate.

**Danny Pearson:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, when the member for Lowan made her contribution she talked about respect, and what the member for Werribee said is, 'I'm taking up that point about respect.' So the member for Lowan wanted to talk about respect; all the member for Werribee was doing was responding to that. So there is no point of order.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I will rule on the point of order. There is no point of order.

**John LISTER:** I appreciate this is a difficult thing to be confronted with when your leader is standing next to these sorts of things – the behaviour that was called out. I remember this from my work in education: we call out not the people but the behaviour. Both of those members – if the member for Brighton would like to read the *Courier* article – called out the behaviour of people there on that day directed towards our democratically elected Prime Minister and the Premier of this state, people who represent our Commonwealth and represent Victorians as a whole.

However, I would like to also reflect that the member for Lowan represents a beautiful part of the world, somewhere where I myself have taught and lived, out in Dimboola, and I know the benefits that those parts of the world have seen from these renewable energy projects, like that at Murra Warra and near West Wimmera. But the critical, difficult thing that we now face is ensuring that we have good transmission lines and good transmission corridors to be able to get that power from these areas in western Victoria to where they are ultimately being consumed – which, ironically, is western Melbourne at data centres, which is another problem which we will not face just today. But it is important that we have good legislation in place that makes these rules clear for everyone. This is how we are going to engage when it comes to making sure that our grid is resilient and is meeting the needs of a growing Victoria.

Over the time that we have been in government there has been \$3 billion invested into climate action here in Victoria. One billion dollars has gone just to the SEC to develop renewable energy projects across the state. The reason why I am going to this when I am talking about VicGrid is because with all this investment in renewable energy we need to make sure it gets to where it needs to go. You cannot just have a windmill running and expect that power to be used out in Horsham, although I am sure if they all turned on their kettles and hot-water services out in Horsham or Dimboola they could probably chew through a fair bit. But the reality is that it needs to get somewhere and as it is generated it needs to go somewhere.

We have also established the renewable energy zones (REZ) and neighbourhood batteries, all really important parts of transitioning to a net zero low emissions economy. While those opposite and their colleagues in Canberra tilt at windmills when it comes to net zero, we are committed to making sure that we have a grid and energy projects that meet this future need. We need to keep the lights on. We need to keep the power moving from where it is being generated through great renewable energy projects, whether it is out in western Victoria or out in eastern Victoria, to get to those places where that high energy consumption is happening. It also means that we have the resilience during natural disasters to make sure that we can keep the lights on.

We have accepted a number of amendments in the other place, and I am going to go to them specifically now because I think those opposite have not necessarily gone to them in as great a detail as they warrant and the work that has been done by our colleagues in the upper house would warrant. One of the amendments is to expand the REZ community energy fund to encompass supporting biodiversity outcomes research in Victoria, something the member for Lowan mentioned. We want to understand the biodiversity in these corridors, and we want to have those outcomes when it comes to

that research. The other amendment that we accepted was to prevent funds from the community energy fund to be paid into consolidated revenue – something the member for Lowan also welcomed, and I think we can all welcome – to make sure that the funds are going to exactly what they are being collected to do. We have also accepted amendments to reduce the maximum fines issuable by authorised officers and the Magistrates' Court. We have also clarified that authorised officers may only be public sector employees, addressing some of those concerns around people from private companies or security guards going onto these properties and making those approaches on behalf of the government. They need to be public sector employees. We also have accepted an amendment that VicGrid comply with the ESC, Essential Services Commission, Land Access Code of Practice before exercising those powers and so that the Magistrates' Court can issue penalties up to the maximum amount prescribed in the bill.

I would like to acknowledge that collaboration between the Greens, the Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis Victoria when it comes to this bill, because, after all, communities like mine that are relying more and more on energy for things like the data centres we are building and our new homes that we are building want to make sure that we have a stable and resilient grid that keeps the lights on. I think it is important in all of these debates that we do acknowledge that it will be difficult for communities, but at the same time we need to ensure that as members of Parliament we maintain and uphold standards when it comes to behaviour at protests and when you are having your say. I think some of the behaviour that has been condoned through silence when it comes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and some of the behaviour around Guru Nanak Lake out in the south-east and some of the behaviour towards the – thanks, mate.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance to the amendments before the house.

**Mathew Hilakari:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this has been a very wideranging debate, and members have been given a lot of latitude to talk about other topics.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I will rule on the point of order. There is no point of order.

**John LISTER:** I understand it is a difficult topic to confront, given some of the comments by their federal colleagues, whether it comes to renewable energy or whether it comes to various communities in Victoria –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I fail to see the connection between what is happening in Canberra and what is happening in Victoria in relation to this and how that relates to the –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** Sorry, your point of order?

**Brad Rowswell:** Is on relevance again, Acting Speaker, in relation to the amendments before the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** There is no point of order.

**John LISTER:** To return to what I was saying about that federal view when it comes to our approach to getting to net zero, that is an important part of framing what we are doing here in Victoria and what the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 goes to in ensuring that we do have a stable energy grid to continue to develop renewables and have that mix so that we are less reliant on fossil fuels.

There are a lot of fossils when it comes to the sentiments of those opposite, but we are here to look towards the future. I might say in the last little bit of my contribution that when I was out helping retirement villages with the power saving bonus I had a very brief conversation about renewables and the importance of them. These people were saying to me, 'We want to transition to electricity from



fossil fuels. We want to have renewable energy options on our bills, because it's not just about us, it's about our kids and their kids and making sure that we have a stable energy grid to continue to deliver renewables into the future.'

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (17:41): I wish I did not have to rise today to make a contribution on the VicGrid amendments. Like the member for Lowan, I spend a lot of time actually talking to members of my community. After last sitting week, instead of going to the bush summit like so many others, I drove home through the corridor that VNI West will run through. I visited Birchip, and I visited Culgoa. Those two areas, particularly Birchip, are of the opinion that the Labor government's policy is to divide and conquer, because that is what is happening.

If the member for Werribee wants to talk about thinking about children and families into the future, maybe it is about time that the Labor government started thinking about the kids and the generations of families that have been the stewards of the land through that corridor for generations and the future that they are having ripped out from underneath them by way of this masquerade of energy reform when there are other options. This is not something that has just appeared since this bill was introduced into Parliament. This has been coming for a long time – several years – since the corridor of VNI West was seemingly moved to the west for what the community, again, are of the opinion are political reasons only. That is all they can see.

If the government had decided to consult on any sort of level that made these communities feel heard, they would not have to protest. They do not want to protest, especially after a rain. Those growers would much rather be out there spraying and looking after that land that they have looked after and farmed for generations. That is their livelihood, and now they are going to have it ripped up for some sort of energy reform. Then they get made out to be anti-renewables, and it is simply not the case. All they are asking for is to be heard and to have other options considered – it is as simple as that.

When we talk about some of these amendments, these communities need more than a media release that the fines have been reduced from six to four points, from \$12,000 to \$8000 – big whoop. It is still a fine for not allowing public sector employees to enter their farmland by force. They can still walk on. It does nothing for mothers in particular – who can be home, as I said last time, for weeks on end with their children during cropping season – to have people waltz onto their land and start surveying for towers. It is the worst thing that these growers and these families can remember happening to their farms and the biggest challenge that they have faced – and Mallee farmers are the most resilient people in Victoria. They have been through fires, floods and droughts, and they come back again and again and again. They rarely have their hand out. All they want is a hand up.

When my dad and his parents came out from Italy, farming was all they knew. But my dad and his family have been saying for decades now, 'It just feels like the government's trying to put us out of business.' For a long time I would scoff and say, 'Don't be silly. Why would they want to do that? You produce food for not only the state and the country but also other countries.' But now I agree with them. It absolutely feels like this government just has so little regard for those that produce food and fibre for this state and that put food on the table of everyone in this place. I agree with him.

It just feels like utter and complete disrespect and disregard by the Allan Labor government, who just want to get to this imaginary net zero policy by any means possible and by bulldozing through communities like the ones I visited last week in Birchip and Culgoa. Whilst I was in Culgoa, it was one of the biggest turnouts that I have seen for a mobile office. Like I said, these people do not want to be getting involved in protests. They are head down, bum up, getting to work and producing what they need to produce to make a living for their families. They do not want to have to be involved in these discussions, but they are at the end of their tether. They are so incredibly frustrated, and they are scared for the future of their children. They are scared for the future of those generational farms that have been handed down through generations. They are scared that their kids will not come home to farm – and they will not, because the future is not secure. It is very evident that the Labor government are not interested in securing the future of farming families.

As well as all the red tape that farmers have to go through – the audits et cetera – there is just no value that these communities can see for the agriculture sector in this state, and they are getting out in droves. I was having a talk to a table grape farmer a couple of weeks ago who has literally sold out and has gone and got a job. My father in fact, at 73 years old – he has farmed his entire life – now cannot make a living off it. At 73 years old he has had to go and get a full-time job because farming in this state is simply not viable. So when members on that side of the house giggle and laugh and are disrespectful to farming communities, they should think about that 73-year-old Italian man who has had to go and get a full-time job. He has survived cancer twice and a stroke once, and that generational occupation of farming is no longer viable for him and he has had to go and get a full-time job.

It is disgraceful what the Labor government is doing to farming families in this state. It is disgraceful, and it is not just in broadacre and not just in irrigated horticulture; the absolute disdain and disrespect that this government has is for the entire ag sector at every level. It is felt by every farming community in this state, and this bill proves it. There might be some amendments and it might make a good media release, but this is utter disrespect. What you are doing to families in this state is disgraceful, and I hope you sleep well at night.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:50): I think it is important with such significant legislative reform to come back to the fundamental tenets of why these changes are being brought about. Nobody is seeking to cause pain or suffering to others in Victoria – that is not the purpose of this legislative reform – and everybody here, everybody in this state, requires energy. We require energy to cook, for heating, for lights and so forth. We are at a critical stage of the transition to renewable energy. Our coal-fired generators – there was discussion about: ‘Well, do something else.’ What else are we supposed to do? Is it nukes they are talking about? What is the other? Is it nukes? Our coal-fired generators are increasingly unreliable and are set to close, and we know that actually the market has driven that, not only here but globally. It is not only our government. We have very good reason, for instance, in driving the legislated renewable energy targets and market soundings, which actually provide, contrary to what has been proffered in the chamber, certainty to the market, because they create a much more even and reliable playing field for the energy market. But fundamentally, if we are talking about the need for sustainability of energy for the benefit of all Victorians, we must deliver the replacement capacity to allow our industries to grow, to ensure reliability and to keep bills as low as possible.

I understand this is an incredibly emotive issue, and no-one is resiling from that. No-one here is seeking to attack anyone. On the contrary, we have a moral imperative – and there is also a practical imperative, to be honest – to provide sustainable energy, reliable energy, into the future. I think that perhaps there are manipulative arguments which do service least of all the farmers that have been discussed. It is certainly contextually relevant of course to discuss those impacted in the regions, but I do not think it is helping them to perpetuate information that I do not think we can even class as information but fanciful ideas about other pathways for energy, sustainable energy, into the future that simply do not exist.

The other factor that I think is very important when we are talking about the transmission of energy and also where we capture that energy, whether it be solar or wind, is that actually geography dictates where, for instance, the optimal wind corridors are. It is not, again, about attacking any particular person who happens to live in any particular part of the state, but it is a fact of science that we know where the wind will blow in the strongest way or the most reliable way, so to speak – I am obviously not a meteorologist but as best I can from a pragmatic point of view. Hence when you are looking at (1) where you capture the energy but (2) how you transmit it, there are some fundamental and practical elements. Of course if there were other reliable mechanisms to do so, then those would have been pursued.

We are thinking of all Victorians across Victoria and their future. I have to say, as a city dweller and on a personal note, I actually feel deep compassion for farmers having to cope with the increasingly

unstable climate, and that is largely as a result of man-made emissions that have been going on for decades. So I come back to that point of the moral imperative: we do have to reduce emissions.

The 2045 zero emissions target is not fanciful, it is something that we are morally obliged to pursue. And it is not only in Victoria, although Victoria is leading the way and we have tripled our investment in renewable energy since we came back to government, and that has been no mean feat. They are not fanciful, they are practical outcomes. I have to say, even private companies are now using rebates and otherwise to make the decision to find more energy-saving mechanisms and better energy capture into the future because they recognise that there is an ethical imperative, if you like, or a moral imperative, and also a scientific imperative to reduce emissions if we are going to be able to mitigate the impacts of climate change, but also because they want to save money. I am going to come back to that fundamental tenet of this being a cost-of-living issue for Victorians. Yes, there is the emissions element, thinking about children of the future and thinking about farming into the future. We have to think about humans and the absolute and fundamental nexus in terms of significantly impacting, to the negative, the stability of our weather patterns. And those most impacted are going to be those on the land. That goes without saying. I certainly feel a sense of obligation with regard to that, hence the imperative to drive forward this transition to renewable energy.

There were, as has been discussed, a number of amendments made to the bill: expanding the renewable energy zones community energy funds to encompass supporting biodiversity outcomes for biodiversity research in Victoria, for instance; also preventing funds from the REZ community energy funds being paid into the Consolidated Fund. These are good, practical measures. Further amendments include reducing the maximum fines issuable by authorised officers and the Magistrates' Court; clarifying that authorised officers may only be public sector employees; and requiring VicGrid to comply with the Essential Services Commission's Land Access Code of Practice before exercising the powers provided to the Magistrates' Court to issue penalties up to the maximum amount prescribed in the bill.

I have to say, though, putting aside the persons that the opposition represent in their regional areas, I cannot recall any debate on renewable energy where they have not vehemently opposed it. They have always found a mechanism to disrupt or at a minimum to completely repudiate the premise of renewable energy. It is consistent. How many debates? I have witnessed these debates because I am extremely passionate about a cleaner energy future.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, again on relevance. I have been listening to the member on her feet, and she has been broadly relevant to the amendments being considered by the house. But on her current point she is absolutely not. I would ask you to bring her back to the matter before the chamber.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** There is no point of order.

**Nina TAYLOR:** I was simply pointing out a pattern of behaviour of those opposite. When we come to the context of any discussion on renewable energy, it seems almost inevitable that they will find a pathway to oppose, undermine, repudiate or negate in any which way they can the renewable energy transition in our state.

**Brad Rowswell:** Acting Speaker, a different point of order: I am of the understanding that it is incumbent upon every member to be factual in their contribution. I believe that what the member is saying at the minute is not in fact factual, and I ask you to remind her of that obligation upon her.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** It is not up to me to decide who is factual or not. I understand everyone is being factual.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Well, it is probably not uncommon for us to have to agree to disagree on a number of matters, none the least on the transition to renewable energy. On that note, I will commend the amendments to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (18:00): We might start off with the last speaker first, the member for Albert Park, and to continue on the member for Sandringham's point of order, the member is absolutely wrong. None of us are anti-renewables. What we are anti is having them forced on us without genuine community consultation and genuine community benefit for the community that is hosting them. The biggest problem the Allan government have is they send people out to talk to country people who have no idea about the country and no idea how to talk to country people. They try and ram it down their throats, and that is the backlash they are getting when this happens. We saw recently the Allan government is advertising for some new spin doctors – \$250,000 a year, \$400,000 a year for the boss to go out and sell VNI West. You would not need to employ 13 new spin doctors at those salaries if you actually had a good message to sell. The issue is they are selling a messy sandwich to those people, which they just do not buy. The member for Albert Park is absolutely wrong. This side of the house is not against renewables. It has got to be done in a sensible transition. They have got to be put where they are appropriate, rather than being forced on people.

The minister, in introducing this piece of legislation, talked about the need to get on and have a speedy transition to renewables. It is interesting that the minister and the Allan government are now finding that turning their ideology and their spin into reality is actually harder than they thought – that getting these projects built, getting the transmission lines built, having enough copper just to build these particular projects and having enough labour to build these particular projects is a real challenge. If the minister had not demonised coal so much, had not demonised fossil gas – I do not know what fossil gas is – and had been sensible with the coal generators and had an orderly transition to renewables, we would not necessarily be having these debates at the moment and we would not have the anguish in country communities that we have at the moment. Despite the minister demonising coal and demonising gas, as I understand it, there is a secret agreement between the Allan government and the coal generators that they are going to run longer than their planned closure, because there is a sudden realisation that this transition to 100 per cent renewables is a lot harder than they thought. They have done a secret deal that is going to cost power users, because everything we talk about with increased costs goes on your power bill, Acting Speaker, and goes on my power bill. It is not some mythical bucket of money that pays for this; it is power users that pay for every cost that is being talked about.

At least the minister has stopped standing at the table in question time going, 'Down, down, down – the price of energy is going to go down, down, down,' because she is realising now that the price of energy is going up, up, up. For those of us that are fortunate enough to be on natural gas, which I am, our gas bills have gone up substantially. All of us have electricity. Our electricity bills have gone up as well. The minister constantly lectured us over the last few years that if we have this transition to renewables, prices will go down, down, down. They have not gone down, down, down; they have actually gone up.

The member for Tarneit, in his wander round the subject in a very general sense, talked about the fact that gas was the most expensive energy there is. Yes, it is expensive because the Labor government here in Victoria had a ban on gas exploration. They stopped exploration for gas, so the supply of gas has been restricted. If you have got a restricted supply of gas – the pipelines from Queensland and New South Wales are not large enough to bring in what we need – the prices go up. It is supply and demand. The reason why gas has got so expensive in Victoria is because of an Allan Labor government policy to restrict the search for gas and the drilling for new gas wells into the future. The gas companies say we have gas here, but the government has made it so hard for them to actually do it. I would remind the member for Tarneit: gas may be expensive, but the peaking capacity that we have from gas plants here in Victoria is absolutely essential at times when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. The classic example would be the gas peaking plant down in the member for Lowan's electorate at Mortlake. If we did not have that peaking plant down there to supply the west of the state, we would be in trouble when gas was shorter.

We talk about this cost to renewables. In the member for Lowan's electorate, in the member for Mildura's electorate and in my electorate, not only do we have renewable projects being proposed but we have got the VNI West transmission line. That has gone from \$3.6 billion to \$7.5 billion and maybe \$11.5 billion. That is a lot of money that is going to be spread across all the power customers here in Victoria, and it has been pushed back two years. If you take previous history on infrastructure projects here in Victoria that the Allan government manages, that \$11 billion will probably be \$15 billion or \$18 billion before that particular project is actually built. It will be very, very expensive. The minister's claim that power prices will go 'down, down, down' when renewables are here is just going to be factually wrong. As you have said, Deputy Speaker, as the Speaker has said and as others in the chair have said, it is reliant on those that are speaking to tell the truth. Fortunately, the Minister for Energy and Resources has stopped making that claim because it is just not truthful anymore if you look at the costs of power and energy here in Victoria.

There is some commentary around the fact that one of the amendments is making sure the money goes into the community fund and not into consolidated revenue. Might I say that the same rules apply to the waste management levy here in Victoria. The same rules apply to the water environmental fund here in Victoria. That does not stop the government of the day leaving money in that fund to make the bottom line look better. If you talk to local governments around Victoria who want to get projects going to reduce the amount of waste to landfill to better manage waste here in Victoria, they are concerned that there is usually about \$500 million – about half a billion dollars – that sits in the waste management levy because the Treasurer of the day wants that money there to make the bottom line look better. A similar thing applies to the environmental water fund, where every water authority pays 5 per cent out of people's urban water bills and pays 2 per cent out of rural water bills into a fund for environmental projects. That, again, has quite a lot of money sitting in it because it helps prop up the bottom line. Treasurers have a way of finding how to take money out of the water environmental fund, out of the waste levy or, I dare say, out of this community fund. They will have a way of finding it to fund departmental work, because it might be doing this particular project, but they are going to pay the department to manage that project. That is how they actually get money out of that particular fund into the future.

There was a discussion about respect in this house and the fact that those that demonstrated in Ballarat were not respectful. I would like to remind those on the other side of the house who had a lot to say about this: I did not hear them saying anything when Peter Marshall threatened Jane Garrett. They were very quiet on that other side of the house. I did not hear anyone speaking up against John Setka with his reign of terror out of the union here in Victoria. Yes, some of the people in Ballarat got a bit excited, but they are very, very concerned about their future. The member for Lowan touched on this, and the constant mental anguish they have with the threats to what is going to be built on their property or what may not be built on their property and what compensation they may get. There is this whole process where the bureaucrats are grinding them down and grinding them down and actually destroying their quality of life and how they live in their communities. The member for Lowan did not go that far, but I wonder if the government are not just driving people to the point where we get some suicides before they will actually take notice of what is going on.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** No, I am serious. People are beside themselves with the stress that your bureaucrats are causing them, and one day one of them will end up committing suicide. That will be an absolute tragedy, but it will be because of what you as a government are doing to them.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Peter WALSH:** Deputy Speaker, your government is driving people to despair, and that is just not fair.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Do not reflect on the Chair, member for Murray Plains.

**Peter WALSH:** It is not fair that these people are having the mental anguish of what is being driven onto them with renewable projects, particularly VNI West and the western link. It is wrong. Go out and actually tell them the truth.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind all members not to reflect on the Chair. The minister has moved that the amendments made by the Legislative Council be agreed to. The member for Brighton has indicated that he would like us to split the question.

**Amendment 1 agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on amendment 2:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Amendment agreed to.**

**Amendments 3 to 5 agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on amendments 6 to 10:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Amendments agreed to.**

**Amendments 11 to 21 agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

**Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (18:18): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care Bill) 2025 without amendment.

**Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (18:20): I rise today to speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I know that this is the place to be because no-one wants to go to the Spring Racing Carnival event tonight and nobody wants to go to the Italian dinner with food brought in by the consul general; people want to support our vital dog and cat rehoming sector and particularly the community foster carers out in the community.

I suspect that there will be many contributors to this debate who will talk about their own pets that they have adopted at some point in time, adopted pets within their family and perhaps even just any dog or cat, and the reason is because dogs, cats, pets and any animals make a huge difference to our emotional and mental wellbeing. I know we acknowledge family members a lot, but I have got a cavoodle, Archie, who is at home at the moment. My family are looking after him, I hope. I know that everyone will talk about their connection to different pets. However, there are aspects of this legislation that we will go into greater detail around. There are some concerns with this legislation, and I thank the minister's office for our being able to speak to them on a regular basis to try and work through those. I will flag that we will pursue amendments in the other place to try and resolve some of the issues that have been raised.

But I think first and foremost we all need to thank the people in Victoria who do an incredible job of looking after abandoned and sometimes very cruelly treated dogs and cats. It is one thing to love animals; it is another thing to open up your heart and your home to animals that are in sometimes less than ideal condition, either physically or mentally. It is an incredible commitment by so many Victorians, who just put in so much time and effort. Many dedicate their entire lives to caring for abandoned animals or to, ideally, rehoming them. I think there is no greater reward for people who are community foster carers or who work in the rehoming sector when they not only save an animal that would otherwise be euthanised but also bring it back to a level of health. To find a loving and caring home to give an animal a second chance at life takes a good sort of human being, the sort of human being that we should listen to and we should support. We should make sure when we do have to work within regulation and legislation, as we do with the Domestic Animals Act 1994, that it is fair but it is also supporting the people who have to work within it.

I have my own story of a lovely dog that I adopted when I was living up in Darwin. I was doing vet pathology work up in Darwin. I met with a lot of veterinarians up there, and they just happened to mention they had had a lovely labradoodle named Charlie who had been abandoned. Charlie was one of the most gentle and kind animals, but he had been terribly mistreated. When he was given up to the veterinarian, he had fully matted fur. He was, as I said, a labradoodle. He had just a mat over him that they had shorn. He was full of fleas. I do not think he had ticks. He also had a black eye, but it was not just a black eye; it was a broken blood vessel, a cherry eye, so he could not see out of one eye at that stage. He was a broken dog. You would take him for a walk, and he would see another person, particularly a male, and he would just run. We would go down the beach, and he would see the tiniest

little wave come in and he would just run. He was a dog who had been treated absolutely horrifically by the previous humans in his life.

It took years to gain the trust of Charlie in terms of just creating an environment where he knew he would be fed and loved and cared for. I remember the first night when he was sneaking in the back door, and then every night he would come a little bit closer to the couch and a little bit closer. Then one night he donned this cloak of invisibility and got up on the couch next to me, which was this huge leap forward for him, really, mentally. He had started to learn to trust again. I learned so much from Charlie, from that dog. I brought him back to Hamilton but also to Edenhope when I was CEO of the hospital, and my mum actually ended up looking after him. She had lost her dog, and she needed a dog in her life. She always needs a dog in her life, and I think that they were a good match. They really did support one another, and my mother is one of those very, very caring humans – if she saw any sort of animal that was in distress or in trouble, she would give her heart and soul to that creature to be able to support them. She is a wonderful human. She is a good role model for me, and it really does help me to understand the types of people that are attracted to, particularly, community foster caring of dogs and cats.

This legislation seeks to make a number of amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994, and that is: to provide for an authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations to assist those organisations to rehome dogs and cats, to further provide for councils to be informed about animals in foster care in their municipal district, to provide for the collection of information about the outcome of efforts to rehome dogs and cats, to clarify powers of authorised officers in relation to entering premises for certain purposes and to provide for other minor and related matters.

This legislation has been developed over a long period of time. In 2016, for those that were in Parliament at that time, the Andrews Labor government introduced the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016. This is where the legislation was first amended to enable voluntary registration of community foster carers for dogs or cats through their local council, as described in the second-reading speech at the time. This was seeking to tighten up the rules and regulations, or the legislation, when it came to how dogs and cats in particular were treated. In some ways this was a way of dealing with what could be seen as a loophole, in that breeders could somehow look at then going through a rehoming body or going through a community foster carer as a guise, to basically be a puppy farm and to still breed dogs and distribute them through another means rather than for sale on Gumtree or eBay and other mechanisms that people were using at that time.

I think that the government made these amendments in good faith; however, it is fair to say that the tightening up of the rules and regulations, particularly around recognising community foster carers, has not had the uptake that was initially intended. My understanding is that about 50 community foster carers have voluntarily registered in Victoria, when we know there are thousands out there. And a consistent reason I have heard is that it is around that increasing burden of paperwork that people have to do in order to be a registered community foster carer. This is something that I can completely understand. The people who are community foster carers do it because they love dogs and cats and they want to do good for dogs and cats. They do not do it because they want to be lugged down with additional paperwork or additional costs, and I think that that is something that perhaps was not fully understood when this original piece of legislation, which is being amended today, was drafted.

It is interesting to look back on some of the contributions in Parliament at that time, because concerns were raised by community foster carers, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the wider community that this voluntary registration scheme was not based on consultation with the relevant stakeholders. They felt like they were not part of that decision. I think it was, as I said, legislation that was designed in good faith to close what the government thought would be a loophole for puppy farms. However, in doing that, the government of the day did not have that discussion with community foster carers, and because some of those transactions also involve municipal councils, through the pounds, they also were not involved in that. So in some ways this is good, that we have got an amendment coming through.



There was an upper house inquiry where these issues were first raised and gone over, and that was established by the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee to examine these types of issues but also other issues related to the impact of the bill. The concerns of MAV and the foster care community were captured in the final report, and I recommend it to anybody who has got an interest in this sector. This debate will continue into tomorrow, so if anyone has not prepared their contribution, I recommend that they make the effort to read the inquiry into the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016. If you look at that, it does really capture what has not always been heard, and that is the views of the Municipal Association of Victoria and community foster carers. I will note and pull out of that report that the committee recommended:

That the government withdraw the current Bill and immediately establish a stakeholder group of industry, municipal and community representatives to consult on the drafting of a new Bill.

In some way it was quite disappointing that I read that: the issues we are dealing with today in 2025 were identified by the Parliament back in 2016, and we could have had those changes at that point in time. We could have had the voices of community foster carers heard at that time back in 2016. Instead, nine years later we are having some of those amendments brought through.

However, I do have to note that there are many, many community foster carers who have reached out to me over the past couple of weeks. They have made an incredible effort, really. I do not think in my time as a shadow minister I have seen such a strong uplift of any organisation or any group of people across the state who have really been motivated to have their views heard with the relevant shadow minister when legislation is coming through the Parliament, and I really thank community foster carers for having their say. There are consistent themes that were raised by community foster carers. I do note that the minister's office has been quite forthcoming in attempting to address those concerns. They are matters that I will refer to later on in debate. I also think there will be an opportunity to flesh some of that out further in the Legislative Council committee stage.

There is this disconnect between what the industry or the people who actually do the job understand the impacts of the legislation are and what the legislation actually does, and that again comes down to not just consultation in how you design legislation but also that vital step of working with people so that they understand the impacts. There may be elements in there that need to be amended. We will be putting forward some amendments in the upper house, as I have already foreshadowed, and that will be to try and attempt to ensure that nobody is disadvantaged inadvertently through the transfer in this amended legislation.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given that feedback was heard from the community foster care sector back in 2016, the uptake of voluntary community foster care registrations has been critically low. As I said, only a few councils are offering the discounted registration, to approximately 50 registered community foster carers. This has left thousands of community foster carers unable to access all of the benefits of the registration scheme. They are not able to access discounted pet registration fees, for example, and that was a key feature of the commitment – that that would be unlocked as part of the legislation. But it is not being delivered, because people have not got the time, they have not got the interest perhaps, or they cannot see the benefit in going through a voluntary registration scheme.

Through this legislation we are looking at a transfer from voluntary registration of community foster carers to a system which is voluntary registration of a pet rehoming organisation, which would then encompass all of the community foster carers that sit underneath that. This can be problematic if a community foster carer is not directly associated with a certain pet rehoming organisation, but also we are just transferring the same issues that we saw with the voluntary registration of community foster carers in that pet rehoming organisations are run by volunteers, usually on the smell of an oily rag. There is very little funding available. I know in Horsham we have Paws, which is a fabulous organisation. They run an op shop. They do what they can to try and seek local donations and local support and volunteers who work within that. They do not necessarily have the skills to provide the information to the government which is outlined within this legislation. They do not necessarily have

the time to be able to do that, because their time is dedicated to caring for vulnerable dogs and cats in their care and trying desperately to find their new forever homes. In some ways I can understand the theory behind this, but in some ways it is also same same but different. I think the same challenges will remain in that it is a voluntary registration scheme. We are still facing exactly the same challenges. We need to ensure that the carrot is there, and I am not convinced and the feedback from community foster carers is that they are not convinced that the carrot is sufficient to go through a registration process, particularly as it remains voluntary.

The amendments in this bill fulfil five of the 17 recommendations of the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets final report of December 2021. That was chaired by Andy Meddick, with two taskforce members – Maree Edwards and Gary Maas. Gary is in the chamber today; I should say the member is in the chamber today. I thank them for their work. My understanding is – and I will note this – there are a number of emails that I am getting that raise concern that all of the matters that have been raised by that taskforce have not been delivered within this legislation. The minister's office have assured me there are further commitments to make good on and fulfil the other 12 recommendations and that they are working upon those. This is not a one-stop shop; this is not one amendment that will tick all the boxes for fulfilling those 17 recommendations. There is more work to come, but there are concerns and perhaps elements that are being raised at the moment that could be dealt with in this legislation. It does not mean that we will not see this legislation come back through the Parliament at a later stage with those further amendments.

I know that there are particularly some concerns around the sector talking about the right to take un-desexed dogs and cats from pounds, which was granted in 2011. The legislation does not reflect that that is actually the case, and the amendment bill does not reflect that that is the case. So there needs to be an education piece or a consultation piece to talk about what the impact is if that is not in the legislation. Certainly community foster carers are very, very concerned that if they cannot take un-desexed and un-microchipped dogs and cats from pounds, the council will take the cheaper option, which may be to euthanise the animal. On the other hand, I believe from speaking to the minister's office that the government is hesitant to legislate that, because they do not want to see councils seeing that as an easy option – that they can just handball all of the dogs and cats that come into their care, in the pound, and automatically find someone else to deal with that additional cost. I think there has to be a balance in there, and there may be an opportunity to look at an amendment in the upper house in the journey of the bill through both chambers. If nothing else, this may be an opportunity for the committee stage in the upper house to pull that apart and for there to be more understanding on the pros and cons of that. But there are certainly still a lot of questions and concerns around the community. I have received hundreds of emails around this legislation. There would be at least 100 on that specific element, so it is certainly something that is of great concern.

I think we can look at a way that we can get a good balance in there, so that we can safeguard that councils have a role and a responsibility to have that cost burden if they take animals into their pound. But also I can understand that community foster carers do not want animals to be euthanised if there is an alternate pathway, and I think that is something that needs to be recognised. People are taking those un-desexed and un-microchipped animals at this point in time; it is a breach of the legislation to do that at this point in time. That needs to be clarified. We know that there is something going on that is unlawful. I do not want to see fines starting to be handed out for community foster carers who are trying to do the right thing, and they have a very strong understanding that they are allowed to do that. I do not want to see fines put out to councils, because we know it just ends up being passed on to ratepayers at the end of the day. So I would seek that there is further clarity on what the future is around that specific element.

On the aspect I have just spoken to I would like to be specific about the amendments that we will flag. There is such concern from community foster carers who are registered that they will no longer be able to access the benefits of being a registered community foster carer in the future and that they will have their registration taken away from them through this legislation, which means that they would

lose those benefits as well if they are not associated with a rehoming organisation. In my view a simple solution for that – which would not hold up the passage of this legislation, because there are very good amendments in here as well – which we will seek, would be to ensure that the voluntary community foster carer registration system continues and that the clauses related to the revocation of the voluntary registration of community foster carers be removed from the bill. That would ensure that we can have both systems work in parallel. It means that we are listening to community foster carers who are very concerned about what this might look like in the future, but it also means that the benefits of the rehoming system can be understood. We can see whether there will be as strong of an uptake of the voluntary registration scheme for rehoming organisations as is expected – as we are hearing from the government, as they would hope for – or whether it has dwindling registration. We want to see an improvement and a lift in registration, so I think that is a sensible pathway forward.

Let us continue with the voluntary registration of community foster carers. There is no harm in doing that. They would be continuing to work anyway. For those that are registered, we should be looking after them and we should not abandon them, so I am hopeful that those amendments will be supported by all in the upper house. They are sensible, logical, very small amendments that will have no impact on the costs of the legislation. There might be a few other people involved who are community foster carers who would then be able to apply for certain grants and funding, but there is not a huge number of them. It is not going to make a huge difference to diminishing the pool. As I said, it is a sensible way forward. It is a small and very minor amendment, but I trust that it is a reasonable enough amendment that it gets support.

The other aspects of these that relate to this legislation are around the power of entry and registration fees. These amendments really refer to clarification because, the way that the legislation is drafted, different councils have interpreted the legislation in different ways. There is clarification that authorised officers can enter a residential backyard – for example, to seize a dangerous dog. This is something that has been problematic in that councils have interpreted this in different ways. They have known that there is a dangerous dog and they have known where it is, but they have interpreted it that they were not able to enter a residential area, being the backyard. This is in fact not the case. There is further clarity around that, which we welcome. In doing that it clearly sets out what is a residence. Obviously it is a house, but it clarifies that it could also be a mobile home of some description. It could be a caravan – anything that is used as a residence. This attempts to support councils and particularly people who are trying to make the community safe in finding dangerous dogs, and I think that they are sensible amendments that do make it clearer.

There is no change to the requirement for a warrant to enter residential premises, including a home or a vehicle used as a residence. You still need a warrant for that. There is also clarification that microchipped hounds registered with the Game Management Authority qualify for a reduced registration fee with councils via the prescription of a class of dog that is entitled to a reduced registration fee. This reflects a modernisation of nomenclature, as microchipping is now mandatory for all dogs. It is cleaning up some of the language and ensuring that that can continue. It will be much easier to interpret and read, which is always greatly appreciated when you are looking at legislation as a layperson.

There is a series of points, which I touched on earlier, that have been raised by community foster carers and pet rehoming organisations specifically related to limiting their current activities if they choose not to become an authorised pet rehoming organisation. I have raised these matters. It is really around four different areas. It is around the section 84Y agreements and receiving un-microchipped and non-desexed animals from pounds, which I have spoken to earlier. It is around adoption days and also around microchip records. There are aspects of this legislation that do require a lot of reporting through to the government so that there is clear tracking and traceability to understand the fate of an animal, and that is important for many reasons. However, it does place that additional burden on rehoming organisations, who are already, as I said earlier, running on the smell of an oily rag. They are

volunteers, and they probably do not prioritise paperwork as the first thing that they want to set out to do on a day.

In regard to the section 84Y agreements:

The Bill establishes a head of power to prescribe –

and this is the response from the government –

the persons or bodies that a council may enter into an agreement with under section 84Y of the Act (colloquially referred to as Section 84Y agreements). Consideration may be given to limiting 84Y agreements to authorised pet rehoming organisations as well as other key local council partners including pounds, animal shelters and veterinary clinics. The persons or bodies a council may enter into agreements with would be prescribed in the Domestic Animals Regulations subject to passage of the Bill and following a period of community and stakeholder consultation with local councils and pet rehoming organisations.

I hope that that provides some solace to those that feel like they are not going to be able to continue doing what they are currently doing. There are future steps to be made. I take the government at their word that they will deliver upon that.

I have spoken already on receiving a microchipped or non-desexed animal from the pound. In regard to adoption days:

The Bill does not propose any changes to the requirements currently set out in the Act. There are no proposed changes to the animal sale permit process and any person or organisation may still apply for an animal sale permit to hold an adoption day.

- The Bill proposes that authorised pet rehoming organisations may hold adoption day events at select domestic animal businesses (DABs) to be prescribed in the regulations.
- DABs where adoption days can be held are anticipated to include pounds, shelters and registered pet shops –

so all of those places we seek animals from –

- Authorised pet rehoming organisations would not need a permit to do this but would have to notify state government and the local council where the DAB is located.

The fourth matter is around microchip records:

The Bill makes no changes to the identification information required on an animal's microchip. This information is prescribed in the Domestic Animals Regulations. Currently, the regulations require an owner and the address where the animal is kept to be listed on an animal's microchip. There is no current mechanism for an organisation to be listed on a microchip. However, we are aware that the pet rehoming sector has raised this issue as a concern. As such, policy work is taking place to capture authorised pet rehoming organisations, as well as pounds and shelters (which also place animals into foster care) on an animal's microchip to ensure proper reunification can take place in the event the animal becomes lost or stolen. Subject to the Bill's passage, further stakeholder and community consultation will take place on this topic.

I would like to thank the hundreds of people who have provided feedback to me, my colleagues, the minister and, I am sure, members opposite around their concerns around this legislation. It is clear in every single email that these people are putting their animals first, and for that they really should be commended. That is where their heart is and that is where their passion is, and they do an incredible job doing it. I would particularly like to thank Victorian Dog Rescue, who have done an enormous amount of work to support their members, the Australian Veterinary Association, RSPCA and the Municipal Association of Victoria. I have had a lot of feedback, and it has been very, very much appreciated.

Just in summary, there are good parts in this legislation. A lot of it is just clarifying matters. However, there is an opportunity to make sure we have both amendments in place, as discussed, to retain the voluntary registration of community foster carers in particular and perhaps to refine some of the language that is within the bill still so that we can ensure that we have clarity for everybody. In wrapping up, thank you so much to our community foster carers, thank you so much to our pet

rehoming organisations and thank you to every family who has provided a forever home for a dog or cat that has had a difficult life and given them a second chance.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (18:50): I too rise to make a contribution today on the Victorian government's commitment to implementing those recommendations from the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets with the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Well done to the member for Lowan for making 30 minutes there – very rare. You got there with all the thank-yous. But it is good to see that both sides of the house are in furious agreement when it comes to the tremendous work that our pet rescuers are doing and that our foster care groups are doing in providing that important and essential animal care and rehabilitation that goes with rehoming services, particularly for vulnerable animals. To paraphrase someone – indeed alter the words – I would just like to say, 'We're rehoming the dogs. We're rehoming the cats. We're rehoming the pets that live there.' This is a terrific bill because it delivers on and is the culmination of the hard work and extensive community consultation that has been undertaken.

As we know, pets are a really important part of our everyday lives. Many of us here own pets. My mad little bugger Louie is full of joy, full of energy – one of a handful of gooddles, I think, around this place. I think the member for Footscray has one, Maggie, and I think there is a Larry who roams this place from time to time as well. But our pets are tremendous additions to not only our own lives but our families' lives as well, and as we all know, our pets become very important members of the family. So it makes sense that when pets are abandoned, they are rehomed in the best possible way that is not only good for the family that that pet is going to but good for the foster carers and the rehoming groups where the pet is at and good for the animal as well. It is terrific that this bill is able to deliver on all of that. Those organisations that have been previously mentioned often take care of dogs and cats that have been directly surrendered by owners who are no longer willing or able to take care for an animal. Those key services reduce the number of dogs and cats in Victoria's shelter and pound system, and in doing so these groups save hundreds of animals' lives every year.

Back in the last Parliament it was the then Minister for Agriculture, the member for Macedon, who established the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets with the directive to further improve rehoming outcomes and recognise the services of such organisations. It was a thrill to be on that taskforce with the then member for Western Victoria Andy Meddick, who served as the chair, and also the member for Bendigo West before her elevation to higher office as Speaker. The taskforce did a wide range of consultation with various groups through many different ways, including written submissions, round tables and surveys as well. The bill itself demonstrates the commitment of this government to implementing the recommendations that the taskforce made, starting with some five of the 17 that were made.

As well as the members of the taskforce, it would be remiss of me not to mention the hardworking secretariat that supported the taskforce. There was a power of work in collating all of the data that came together from that taskforce, and I would like to give a shout-out to Joe Wheeler and Maddy Denham who helped put together all of that data which came to fruition in the final report that was delivered in December 2021.

The bill itself delivers on five recommendations of that report and amends the Domestic Animals Act 1994 in doing so, and it implements an authorisation scheme to recognise pet rehoming organisations in the domestic animals legislative framework. The bill also repeals the current foster care registration scheme from the Domestic Animals Act, and it reflects the government's commitment to the recognition of organisations managing all aspects of the pet rehoming process. It will enable scheme participants to access specific benefits and exemptions, such as being able to hold pet adoption days without the need for an animal sale permit and an exemption from registration of foster animals with local council. The bill also enables the development of regulations for the management of animals by authorised pet rehoming organisations. These are likely to include requirements for animals to be desexed and vaccinated before rehoming. The bill will require scheme participants to be registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

to apply for authorisation, and it includes an additional amendment to the Domestic Animals Act to clarify that authorised officers may enter the whole or part of any premises, excluding a building that is occupied as a residential home, and specifically, this amendment clarifies that authorised officers are able to do so and they can enter a residential backyard for the purposes of determining compliance with the Domestic Animals Act. The bill also includes an amendment to clarify that regulations can prescribe a class of dog that is entitled to a reduced registration fee.

The changes that have been brought about, as I said or alluded to previously, have been through significant consultation that the taskforce undertook with the pet rehoming sector and the broader community. The taskforce worked with rehoming groups, local councils, shelters, vets, animal welfare peak bodies, state government authorities and community to gain a wide scope of the sector. The consultation activities included a fairly wide remit. There was wide research into domestic and international best practice rehoming systems, written submissions from 25 organisations and individuals involved in the animal welfare sector and a community consultation survey to gather information on pet-rehoming experiences, which was completed by some 1262 members of the public, so there was wide consultation. There were many round tables and community consultation webinars that were attended really well across different sections of the state, and there were site visits too and meetings with key organisations and industry representatives from the rehoming sector as well. Many of those in the rehoming sector provided written submissions to the taskforce as well.

I was really privileged to be on that taskforce, and I learned so much more about the sector. As I said, it was a privilege to learn and just find out exactly what so many foster carers and volunteers are doing for our pets in our community. And a shout-out to the RSPCA and the Lost Dogs Home in Cranbourne as well. On that note, I think I will close my contribution to this bill. Suffice to say that I am delighted to see this rehoming cats and dogs and other matters bill come before the Parliament today, and on that basis, I commend the bill to the house.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Bee sites**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (19:00): (1300) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is to provide confirmation that bee sites on public land will continue into the future. I have been contacted by a number of beekeepers, apiarists, from around the state, who are deeply concerned that Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action staff are telling them that bee sites will be cancelled on public land in the future. Of course we know that our national parks, our state parks, all of those wonderful land reserves that we have in rural and regional Victoria, provide some of the best homes for the blossoms that our bees rely on to make amazing honey. I would recommend that anybody who buys honey just skips the supermarket aisles; you do not really know what you are getting when you are buying honey from a supermarket shelf. Go to your local farmers market or go to your local beekeeper and buy some of their honey, because it is a taste sensation. It will taste like no honey you have ever enjoyed before, and you will be supporting a local Victorian beekeeper – supporting Victorian farmers, which is fabulous.

We know there are a lot of areas of public land which have been impacted by flood or by fire. Certainly in my electorate of Lowan the Grampians were heavily impacted by bushfire over the entirety of the summer. There were a huge number of bee boxes that were lost over that fire experience. That has had an impact, and not just on local beekeepers that lost their hives over that time. We have also lost an enormous amount of forest – the blossoms that would support beekeepers and give them somewhere to keep their bees alive. Pollen is not just there to provide a basis for honey and to provide delicious, sweet, good preserves. What is it? It is not a preserve –

**Richard Riordan:** It is, sort of.

**Emma KEALY:** Yes, a preserve, a conserve, for our toast. We love our honey on our toast in the morning. My daughter Ella certainly loves her –

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** It is a spread. I will correct the record. Thank you very much, Minister. It is something that we all appreciate. I love a honey crackle. I do love a honey crackle. But what is most important is that this is actually food for bees. We need places for our bees to access pollen because that is food for our bees. So I ask the minister to confirm that those bee sites on our public lands will continue into the future. It would provide great support to our Victorian beekeepers, who do a fabulous job.

### **Maryborough District Health Service**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:03): (1301) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, who is at the table. The action I seek is that the minister joins me in my electorate to visit the newly redeveloped Maryborough hospital. This \$115 million project is truly phenomenal. Maryborough families now have world-class health care close to home, with a brand new urgent care centre, a 32-bed inpatient unit, two operating theatres and recovery spaces and a day medical centre with imaging, pharmacy, oncology, dialysis and infusion services. Local mums are also now able to give birth closer to home, with some of the most spacious, beautiful new birthing suites that I have ever seen.

The redeveloped hospital has blown the community away, and there is a real sense of pride in having such a state-of-the-art facility in our local community. Just this morning the hospital CEO Nickola Allan sent me through some fantastic statistics about how many locals have been cared for since the new hospital building opened its doors back in April. 3065 people have presented to the new urgent care centre, 435 patients have been admitted via the inpatient unit, seven beautiful babies have been born, 167 appointments have been had with midwives in the antenatal clinic and 255 patients have used the new sexual and reproductive advice clinic. There have been 570 dialysis treatments, 487 patients through the new operating theatres and 92 treatments via the medical day centre for oncology. The statistics speak for themselves. The redeveloped Maryborough hospital is providing more people with the care and treatment they need closer to home, and Maryborough only has this because of a Labor government. I welcome the minister to visit and see the incredible hospital for herself.

### **Mount Dandenong Road–Wicklow Avenue, Croydon**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (19:04): (1302) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to ask the Department of Transport and Planning to urgently clear the overgrown blackberry bushes that are overhanging the footpath on the pedestrian refuge at the corner of Mount Dandenong Road and Wicklow Avenue in Croydon.

Minister, this is not a new issue. My office wrote to VicRoads a couple of years ago requesting this area be cleaned up, and yet despite the passage of time and the growing concern from residents, the problem remains unresolved. This pedestrian refuge is heavily used, not only by general foot traffic but also by senior residents from the nearby retirement village on Wicklow Avenue. These residents have expressed their concern about the overgrown blackberries, which pose a physical hazard. They are worried about being scratched or injured while simply trying to cross the road safely.

Indeed, this is one of many areas around the electorate that is under the responsibility of the Department of Transport and Planning and VicRoads that is unkept or unmaintained. It is disappointing when you go to other states or other regions and see townships or cities that are kept clean and tidy – the nature strips are done, the gutters are clean, all the bushes are trimmed back, and it makes it a place to show pride in and be proud of. This is just an overgrown clump of blackberry

bushes that grows out over the footpath that really impedes people walking past. As I said, some of the elderly residents and a number of local constituents have raised concerns, worried about being scratched or injured, let alone the eyesore that this creates as you come down Mount Dandenong Road and into Croydon, which is really the gateway to the Dandenongs and the Yarra Valley – to be met by that.

This is a basic safety and accessibility issue, and it should be a priority to remove this patch of invasive blackberries that is overhanging the footpath. I urge the minister to take immediate action and ensure the department of transport prioritises the removal of these blackberries so that all pedestrians, especially our older residents, can use this crossing safely and with confidence.

### Hastings electorate planning

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (19:07): (1303) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to come down to Hastings to meet with business and community leaders to talk about *Plan for Victoria* and how it can apply to the Hastings electorate. There are some exciting projects around the town of Hastings and the surrounding area, with the Victorian renewable energy terminal moving forward and, additionally, the work being done by the Port of Hastings to recognise excess land zoned port-related that could be rezoned into commercial, industrial or residential zonings.

In 2024 the minister asked the people's panel to write a vision statement reflecting the aspiration of today's and future generations of Victorians. Drawing on the findings of the community-led consultation, the panel, comprised of 49 Victorians selected from 20,000 people with different life experiences from Melbourne and cities, towns and communities across regional and rural Victoria, stated in their vision that:

By 2050, Victoria will be a vibrant, accessible and connected community, valued for its diverse cultures, sustainable environmental practices and respect for the First Peoples of Victoria.

Building a state that provides choices and opportunities for current and future generations of Victorians in quality housing, transport, employment, environment and connectivity will require input from the community, government, local businesses and industry alike.

We will create a society that caters to the unique needs of all Victorians, nurturing individual health through physical and cultural recreation.

The minister launched *Plan for Victoria* in 2025. Members of my community are very keen to talk with the minister about her vision, thoughts and goals for our community over the coming years. I look forward to the minister coming down.

### Barwon Downs road safety

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:09): (1304) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the immediate commencement of the long-promised improvements on what is locally known as crash corner, on the Birregurra to Apollo Bay road, right in the heart of Barwon Downs. Crash corner has been an issue, a very large public issue now, since 2018. And after much campaigning we were thrilled as a community to receive a note from the minister back in March 2024. In March 2024, Minister, you promised that by the end of the year, by the next summer season, this corner would have its remediation done to make it safer, because at the moment people speed into that corner and end up in one of two backyards time and time again. With the next summer season coming up, it is absolutely vital, before someone is killed or one of the people that lives in the homes is killed. We need this much-promised repair to the road done.

Back in March 2024 in correspondence sent to my office and distributed widely throughout my community – in the local paper, on the local radio and on social media – we were promised that this corner would be repaired. Now we are coming into our next summer, and there is no sight nor sign of any remediation and no replies from the minister's department. So, Minister, the action my community



really seeks is for the immediate allocation of the funds to this project, which has now been on your books, on the department's books and on VicRoads books since at least 2018.

I guess it speaks to the overall parlous state of many elements on the Apollo Bay road in particular. Unfortunately, Polwarth has quite a collection of poorly maintained and poorly looked after roads, but on the Apollo Bay section once the Melbourne Cup long weekend comes around – and of course we are acknowledging Melbourne Cup here in the Parliament this evening – visitors and guests to our region increase dramatically. This Apollo Bay–Birregurra road is one of the main routes from the Great Ocean Road back to the Princes Freeway and of course people's journey back to Melbourne. They are often at the end of their journey at the end of the day, and these accidents typically happen after 4 pm in the afternoon when people are fatigued and a bit weary after a long journey along the Great Ocean Road to Apollo Bay. For the safety of not only the local community in Barwon Downs but our visitors, guests and tourists to the great electorate of Polwarth and the Great Ocean Road, it is vital that this gets seen to immediately.

#### **Narre Warren South electorate sporting facilities**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (19:11): (1305) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Community Sport and concerns sports infrastructure upgrades in my electorate of Narre Warren South. The action that I seek is that the minister provides an update on the progress of these projects in my electorate. I recently had the pleasure of representing the minister for the opening of the Hampton Park Bowls Club, where the members were excited for their upgraded clubrooms. Grassroots sport is an important part of the wellbeing of our communities, and memberships have been growing, especially with an incredible increase in participation in women's sport. Excitingly, there are several more developments underway, which have been backed by both the Victorian government and the City of Casey. I am sure that the Hampton Park Tennis Club is looking forward to its upgraded pavilion at Robert Booth Reserve, which will complement its recent court resurfacing and lighting upgrades. I understand that the Strathaird recreation reserve's pavilion development is on the way as well, and that is a boon for those local clubs, including the Narre Warren South Lions, the Narre Warren South cricket club and the Narre South Saints Football Netball Club. I have spent many years helping to push for the Grices Road Reserve pavilion redevelopment, and the club serves many constituents in my electorate. I thank all of those clubs involved for their very strong advocacy, for their proposals and for their planning input. These projects are delivering much better facilities for our whole community, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with the community.

#### **St Kilda PCYC**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (19:13): (1306) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Youth, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to provide a comprehensive report on the government's support for St Kilda Police & Citizens Youth Club, the PCYC programs and the future of the associated PCYC facility in Inkerman Street in St Kilda East, this vital youth charity. The imminent and strategic rebranding of the St Kilda PCYC to Victoria PCYC is designed to ensure that this critical and unique police and citizens youth charity does not close its doors after 77 years of serving the state's most vulnerable youth. This request comes as our community faces an unfolding crisis. After 77 years of serving our community, St Kilda PCYC faces an absolutely impossible choice: sell the Inkerman Street facility to fund vital youth services and programs and mirror the PCYC model implemented by numerous other statewide PCYC bodies, or face bankruptcy within 12 months.

This devastating situation exposes critical failures in our state's approach to youth services and community infrastructure. First, this closure highlights Victoria's shameful neglect of proven youth programs. The St Kilda PCYC runs vital early intervention and prevention-based programs, like a mobile activity centre which operates four nights a week mentoring disadvantaged youth through recreational activities to improve self-esteem and behaviour. They run young leadership camps, including for Indigenous youth, developing capabilities for 10- to 17-year-olds through adventures

and leadership challenges. If funded appropriately by the state, this youth charity has the capacity to run more than 15 youth programs that could impact the lives of hundreds of the state's most vulnerable and disadvantaged and engage youths. They currently run six youth programs from manifestly small local and other grants, and they have been investing approximately \$27,000 to \$30,000 a month to keep their doors open. It is just too hard for them. This vital service is something that the residents of Victoria, the youth of Victoria and the youth of Prahran absolutely need.

In addition to this, there are basketball facilities within the facility on Inkerman Street that are utilised by the St Kilda Primary School kids. There are also boxing facilities for young people to go to and a gymnasium. The kids now will have nowhere to go. Where are they going to play basketball? Where are they going to box? Where are they going to get together as a group in a healthy sporting environment? This is what we are currently facing. We desperately need funding for this very important charity, or not-for-profit, to continue to exist.

### **Footscray electorate truck curfews**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (19:16): (1307) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Ports and Freight, and the action I seek is for the minister to consider implementing overnight and weekend truck curfews on Williamstown and Millers roads in the inner west. With the opening of the West Gate Tunnel and the implementation of the no-truck zone cameras on six key streets in the inner west, we are expecting fewer trucks travelling in residential areas. However, residents remain concerned about the volume of truck movements that will continue along Williamstown and Millers roads. These roads connect both Geelong Road and the West Gate Freeway, provide access to Webb Dock and have been important arterial roads. While these remain important for those movements, a curfew would help address residents' concerns around safety as well as noise and other pollutants. I look forward to the minister's response.

### **Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Port Welshpool flotilla**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:18): (1308) The adjournment matter I raise this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide funding for the replacement of the Port Welshpool coastguard vessel. I have previously written to the minister and have more recently provided a business case for the replacement of the vessel to the minister, but I want to impress upon her the need for this.

I met with the coastguard last week. The Port Welshpool coastguard provides coastguard services within Corner Inlet and down to the tip of Wilsons Prom. There is not a replacement or an alternative option between, basically, Port Welshpool and the water police at Paynesville. There is the Port Albert coastguard, but it does not have a boat that can do the same work that the Port Welshpool guys can. They are a fantastic crew of volunteers who undertake quite a number of rescues and other options every year. Unfortunately, their current vessel is now 25 years old and last year was out of action for about 60 per cent of the time due to maintenance issues.

I have a personal interest in this. The current vessel was the previous Paynesville water police vessel. One of the very first things I was able to do as an MP in the upper house, in the other place, was secure that vessel for Port Welshpool, so it came as a bit of a shock to hear that they were in need of a new one, and it reminded me how long I have been around.

The Port Welshpool coastguard does a great job. It regularly looks after all of those maritime activities in Corner Inlet and around Wilsons Prom, ranging from accidents on the prom with hikers who might need to be picked up from a beach to passing yachts, to boaties who get into trouble in the inlet and even down to kayakers. One of their recent rescues was some kayakers that got caught by the weather in a difficult position.

The coastguard provide a wonderful service, and they have put together a really good business case which explains why their boat needs to be replaced quite urgently. It is estimated as possibly a

\$2 million buy for a new vessel, and I have asked the coastguard whether there is the prospect of another vessel that could be repurposed for them. They are not aware of any at this stage, but I would be happy if the minister and her department could provide any advice on that. Certainly, though, their preference is for a new vessel, and I encourage the minister to give this urgent consideration.

### Power saving bonus

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (19:20): (1309) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to update the house as to how many Glen Waverley district residents will benefit from the latest round of the power saving bonus. Since its inception in 2018 the power saving bonus has reached its fifth round, providing a \$100 payment to help ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorian households. This program has already delivered meaningful relief to thousands of families, and this latest round continues that support. I remember doing hundreds of these applications in the old Mount Waverley district office as well. Victorians holding a healthcare card, pensioner concession card, veterans pensioner concession card or a veteran gold card can visit the Victorian Energy Compare website to access this bonus and, importantly, to compare energy prices to ensure they are on the best deal possible.

Alongside the Victorian Energy Compare helpline and our local community neighbourhood houses, my office stands ready to assist any constituents who may need help applying, so feel free to call the office or email the office to book an appointment to come and see us. Or if you cannot make it from your home, feel free to call to book for us to come out and see you to do the application for you. It has been a pleasure getting out and about in our community and talking with residents about the energy bill relief being delivered by the Allan Labor government, and I want to give a special shout-out to the hardworking local neighbourhood houses and volunteers, who continue to provide invaluable assistance to residents seeking my support. Also, a big shout-out to William Kennedy, who I sat down with yesterday for about half an hour just to get his application completed. He told me about the reasons he moved to the area 20 years ago, to Forest Hill, and also about his love of the Vermont Football Club – go Eagles. It was lovely to have a good chat with him, and I look forward to him receiving his cheque through the mail very soon. I also look forward to the minister's response.

### Responses

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (19:23): I most certainly look forward to making time to visit the member for Ripon in her electorate and to visit Maryborough hospital. I remember full well the day we made the announcement that we would commit to this massive redevelopment at Maryborough hospital. It is always a pleasure to visit Ripon, my neighbouring electorate, but of course being there with the hardworking member for Ripon means we will have a great time visiting Nickola Allan, the CEO, and the other staff there and thanking them for the great job that they do, delivering world-class care to the people of Maryborough and indeed the district.

The member for Lowan raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action that she seeks is that the minister confirm that bee sites on public land will continue into the future. The member for Croydon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that he seeks is that blackberries be removed from the pedestrian refuge on Mount Dandenong Road and Wicklow Avenue in Croydon. The member for Hastings raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning. The action he seeks is that the minister join him in his electorate to talk to local business leaders and other community members about what *Plan for Victoria* means for the good people of Hastings, and I am sure the minister will look forward to accompanying him on that visit. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. He is not here. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Sport, and the action that he seeks is that the minister provide him with an update on a range of projects that are underway in his electorate through our government's absolute commitment to enhancing access to community sport and supporting local sporting clubs.

## ADJOURNMENT

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Legislative Assembly

Tuesday 9 September 2025

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The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Youth, and the action that she seeks is that the minister provide a comprehensive report on government support for the St Kilda PCYC. The member for Footscray raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Ports and Freight, and the action that she seeks is that the minister consider implementing overnight truck curfews on selected roads in her electorate, commenting that with the opening of the West Gate Tunnel there will be some truck curfews already being implemented, but she is looking for some further support. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that he is seeking is that the minister provide funding for the Port Welshpool coastguard vessel, while the member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that he is seeking is that the minister provide him with an update on the number of constituents in Glen Waverley who have been beneficiaries of the Allan Labor government power saving bonus. I am sure the minister looks forward to doing that.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:26 pm.**