



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 1 April 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 ⁷	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	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 ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁸	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 ⁹	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	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 ^{5,6}	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 ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹¹	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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ 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 1 April 2025

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

Bills

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:04): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (12:05): I request a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:05): This bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 to modernise key gambling licensing frameworks.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to make miscellaneous amendments to the Crimes Act 1958, the Criminal Procedure Act 2009, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989, the Sentencing Act 1991, the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 and the Worker Screening Act 2020 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (12:06): I ask the Attorney-General for a brief explanation of the bill.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): This bill makes miscellaneous legislative amendments to support the courts and improve the operation of various justice and legal acts.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:07): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Wage Theft Act 2020 to repeal the wage theft offences, rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, confer new functions and change the title of the act, to consequentially amend other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:07): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:07): The Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025 will repeal Victoria's wage theft offences and related investigative functions and powers in light of the commencement of the Commonwealth's national laws and rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. The bill will also acquit recommendation 1 of the Wilson review of Victorian government bodies' engagement with construction companies and construction unions by conferring a complaints referral function on the workforce inspectorate to allow it to receive and refer complaints from any person relating to public construction.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (12:08): General business, notices of motion 18 to 20 and 48, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

Announcements

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

The SPEAKER (12:08): I advise the house that on 24 March 2025 I administered to Liana Buchanan, the Deputy Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the affirmation required by section 31 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Legal and Social Issues Committee on the inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence in Victoria, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 5

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 5 of 2025, on the following acts and bill:

Bail Amendment Act 2025

Family Violence Protection Amendment Act 2025

Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

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

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order under s 17D granting a lease over Albert Park Reserve

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report on the operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* – released on 24 March 2025

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

Ararat – GC242
 Ballarat – C259
 Banyule – C178
 Bass Coast – C174
 Baw Baw – GC242
 Boroondara – C415
 Buloke – GC242
 Darebin – GC242
 East Gippsland – C173, GC242
 Frankston – GC242
 Gannawarra – GC242
 Glen Eira – C270, C271
 Greater Bendigo – C274, GC242
 Hepburn – C89
 Macedon Ranges – GC242
 Maribyrnong – C190
 Melbourne – C477, GC242
 Monash – GC242
 Moorabool – GC242
 Murrindindi – C77
 Northern Grampians – GC242
 Port Phillip – GC242
 Stonnington – GC242

Safe Drinking Water Act 2003 – Drinking Water Quality in Victoria – Report 2023–24

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Freedom of Information Act 1982 – SR 7
Heritage Act 2017 – SR 13
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 – SR 8
Inquiries Act 2014 – SR 14
Integrity Oversight Victoria Act 2011 – SR 11
Local Government Act 2020 – SR 9
Ombudsman Act 1973 – SR 10
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 – SR 12
Supreme Court Act 1986 – SR 6

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 6

Wildlife Act 1975:

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 1 (*Gazette G10, 6 March 2025*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 2 (*Gazette S107, 14 March 2025*).

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

Bail Amendment Act 2025 – Whole Act (other than ss 11 and 12) – 26 March 2025 (*Gazette S138, 25 March 2025*)

National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989 – section 29(3) – 31 March 2025 (*Gazette S109, 18 March 2025*).

Bills

Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025

Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:11): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Bail Amendment Bill 2025 and the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024.

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:11): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025.

Motions

Motions by leave

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:11): I move, by leave:

That this house notes:

- (1) that Muslims in Victoria are observing another Eid while Israel continues its genocide in Palestine;
- (2) that over 900 Palestinians have been killed since Israel broke the ceasefire on 18 March; and
- (3) that motions by leave are not going to change anything, but they are one of the only tools left for us to remind this chamber of its complicity.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Program

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:12): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 3 April 2025:

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

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

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025.

It is great to be back in the chamber with three very important bills on the business program this week, bills that reflect our government's priorities and the values that we seek to live every day that we have the opportunity to govern in this house. To that end we have a bill before this place that is all about working to deliver on the housing infrastructure that Victoria needs to meet our ambitious targets for new homes and to ensure that Victorians have roofs over their heads. We are also working to drive

down the costs of energy and ensure that we meet our ambitious climate goals, because on this side of the chamber we are not climate change deniers; in fact quite the opposite. We have led the nation when it comes to taking real action on climate change. Finally, we have a bill before this place that is about ensuring that we are keeping pace with the changing modes of transport that Victorians are choosing. To that end I speak of e-scooters. I have a little bit more to say about each of those three bills that are before us as part of the government business program this week.

As I have already indicated, there is the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill. Victoria needs 2.24 million new homes by 2051 to preserve the dream of home ownership, one that young working people right around our state aspire to and one which this government is committed to delivering on. We want to make sure that people have homes to live in and that young people can get a job, aspire to own a home and start their family. We are not blockers and knockers on this side; that is those on the other side. We are about delivering housing. Building more homes starts with building better quality homes, so we need homebuyers to be more confident in the lasting quality of a new home, especially if they are making off-the-plan purchases of apartments. We know that if they are confident in that they are more likely to buy. The bill facilitates the creation of a new integrated building watchdog and gives it tough new enforcement powers to fix dodgy work. It also delivers new building insurance schemes to make things fairer for consumers, which I know is very, very important to people in Victoria.

In terms of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, I can already predict that those on the other side of this place are going to oppose this bill, and do you know why? Because they oppose delivering cost-of-living relief to Victorians and they oppose taking real action on climate change. Our government is committed to supporting Victorians with the cost of living, reducing emissions, managing the impacts of climate change and growing our economy. As I said earlier, this bill is important to be considered this week so we can extend the life of the scheme. This is the scheme that we are extending the life of till 2045.

Finally, the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 is all about recognising that e-scooters have become an increasingly popular form of transport. I know this myself from the degree to which young people in my electorate rely on e-scooters in order to help them travel that extra mile home from the train or other forms of transport. Share schemes in Victoria have become some of the most popular in the world, but it is really important – of course, as health minister – that we have safety measures in place. That is why this bill is really important, because we know that the current regulatory framework is the strongest compared to other jurisdictions and we want to make sure that we keep it that way. The rules are practical and safety focused and are aligned with international best practice, and the bill delivers on our government's commitment to improving e-scooter safety and compliance through making the necessary amendments to the act. I commend the government business program to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:17): I rise to make my contribution on the government business program. I thank the Leader of the House for her explanation of the government business program and note her enthusiasm, but I have to say that I do not share her enthusiasm for this government business program and inform the house that the opposition will be opposing the government business program – but for very good reason. The principal reason that the opposition will oppose the government business program is because we had sought to go into consideration-in-detail on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. Regrettably, the government have declined our very reasonable request to go into consideration in detail to scrutinise this bill because they lack the temerity to answer any questions that we have on that bill.

I note the energy efficiency target amendment bill seeks to do a number of things, one of which is extend the Victorian energy upgrades program. Without anticipating debate, some members may recall how shambolic the Victorian energy updates program became two years ago. In my electorate office I was receiving calls from dozens of businesses, particularly hospitality businesses, who had

found fridges on their doorsteps. Fridge after fridge after fridge was being left on the doorstep of hospitality businesses from Lilydale through the Yarra Valley and indeed right across Victoria. They were fridges that no-one needed or wanted or had asked for – as a result of this farcical program. Some of these Yarra Valley hospitality businesses had fridges left on their doorsteps when they were actually closed, when they were not even open for business. No-one knew where these fridges were coming from at the time; no-one had ordered them. Indeed a number of them had low star energy ratings so were not really achieving any climate emissions reductions whatsoever. Businesses were told that they were receiving these free fridges under this scheme, and it became very clear very quickly that this program had been scammed and rorted by taxpayers for fridges that no-one wanted. As a result of the spectacular failure of the Allan Labor government under this –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, reluctant as I am to do this, I do ask that you bring the Manager of Opposition Business back to the GBP, because the contribution that she is making –

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that this is a narrow debate. It is not appropriate to go into detail. However, in past iterations of the government business program members have gone far and wide. The Manager of Opposition Business is to come back to the government business program.

Bridget VALLENCE: It is precisely because of the failures of the Victorian energy upgrades program in the past that we should go into consideration in detail on this bill. Leader of the House, unless this government is prepared to learn from its failures in the past, it will be bound to make the same mistakes again.

The Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 seeks to make significant changes to domestic building insurance arrangements to help protect home owners from being left high and dry when builders go bankrupt. But whilst it is clear changes are needed as to how the industry operates, there are still many concerns about whether this bill will sufficiently protect Victorian home owners, so we would like to be able to ask more questions on this bill too. We know that exposure in terms of costs for the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority has sharply risen, and we are concerned about whether institutions like VCAT, which is the ultimate umpire in building disputes, will receive the resources they need to determine these disputes quickly and efficiently.

We have also got the very long-titled Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025, which seeks to regulate the operators of e-scooters and e-bikes. Like most things with this government, it has suddenly come to the realisation that this needs some regulation around it, and I very much look forward to the shadow minister's contribution on this bill. It will be interesting to see if it has any real impact.

We are seeking to go into consideration in detail on the energy efficiency bill. There are significant concerns and questions, yet this Allan Labor government continues time and time again to fail to allow us to scrutinise these bills.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:22): I rise to speak on the government business program. Although I am saddened to hear the opposition will not be supporting it this week, I will endeavour to carry on. I will be supporting the government business program. In coming to this place this week I was reflecting on how full the government business program was a fortnight ago and the fact that this house sat, debated and deliberated upon really important things that matter to Victorians and we stayed here until the wee hours of Friday morning, if memory serves correctly. I think that was an exemplification of this house working to address things which really matter to Victorians. There is another government business program this week that similarly reflects the priorities of Victorians, a legislative program that is aligned with the priorities of Victorians. The Leader of the House has gone into some detail about the legislation that is on the table and that we will be debating. I am looking forward to the debate on these bills.

The first – not necessarily in chronological order in the way they will be debated – is the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025, which I think is a really interesting piece of proposed legislation to respond to an emerging area of consumer behaviour in the economy and in society and the need to regulate and to legislate for an appropriate scheme for regulation of e-scooters. It is illustrative of how technology and consumer behaviour does change rapidly and has changed rapidly over the recent years and that existing legislation may not be adequate to address all of the emergent challenges.

Where you have an increasing number of people using e-scooters and e-bikes, it presents challenges for other road users, whether that is pedestrians or whether that is cars and cyclists and so forth, but it also has a cascading impact, if it is not properly regulated, on our health system, which I am sure the Leader of the House knows very well. Presentations at emergency departments of people who are using e-scooters in a way that is unsafe and puts them and others at jeopardy is something that as a government and as a Parliament we need to be responding to. I think this proposed legislation is incredibly timely in order to do that. We have got a body of evidence that has been accumulated as a consequence of the trials that have been in place –

Bridget Vallance: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is anticipating debate on the bill. I would ask you to bring him back to the motion.

The SPEAKER: Member for Greenvale, you cannot go into detail on the bill before the house.

Iwan WALTERS: Certainly not, Speaker. I was merely reflecting on the fact that we have had trials in Victoria since 2021 and they have informed what is coming to the Parliament this week. I look forward to that debate. I am certainly not anticipating debate in any way, or at least not intending to.

The second significant piece of legislation that I think is again very timely and very much aligned with community concerns and expectations is the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I am particularly looking forward to speaking on this bill. We know the importance of the construction sector to the Victorian economy, to employment in our state and to economic activity more broadly, particularly the importance of housing. I represent a community that is growing and where we have greenfield development. As a consequence I have been very concerned about the number of people who have sought assistance from me and my office relating to the loss and the hardship that they have suffered as a consequence of unethical and unscrupulous conduct by dodgy contractors and others as they have sought to build houses for their families. It is incredibly important therefore that we are debating legislation this week that I hope will seek to improve the safeguards for constituents like mine. We do need to ensure, I think, just in broad terms, a functioning market with appropriate levels of regulation –

Bridget Vallance: On a point of order, Speaker, yet again the speaker has strayed far from the narrow confines of the motion. I would ask you to ask him to come back to it.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Greenvale that it is not appropriate to go into detail on the bills. Talk to the government business program.

Iwan WALTERS: Certainly I was not seeking to talk about any of the provisions of the bill itself, just commenting upon the circumstances as to why it is relevant that we will be debating this bill today. As I say, it is relevant because too many constituents of mine have suffered hardship, and striking that appropriate regulatory balance is important. There is also of course the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 we are debating. I commend the business program to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:27): It should come as no surprise that on this side of the house we are opposed to the government business program, because once again we have been denied the ability to consider particularly the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 in detail. I think we can all agree that the devil often lies in the detail, and without

our ability to properly scrutinise these things, then history has shown that we have to come back and make amendments. It takes up very important time on the legislative agenda when we could be really helping communities in regional and rural areas and across all of Victoria with issues like the cost of living instead.

There are a few things on the government business program this week that could certainly hurt the cost of living and increase it for Victorians. I have been spending a bit of time this morning talking to the member for Narracan, who has done a power of work with regard to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. The member for Narracan, some might argue, has few levels of expertise, but building and construction is one of them and one that he is very –

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I do not think he would argue that point with me.

Wayne Farnham: No-one would argue with you.

Jade BENHAM: That is true. It is certainly a point of expertise for him, and he is very commonsense in his approach and puts it in terms that the common man that is buying a house – whether it is their first, second, third or whatever – can understand. The point that he made to me is that there are some issues with this. No-one is arguing that purchasers of property should not be protected – of course they should. However, in a housing crisis, adding \$30,000 approximately, on average, to the price of a house could be quite problematic. Having builders potentially losing licences is again problematic when we are already struggling to get tradies and builders to perform these duties in a housing crisis.

We hear the government talk about how they are delivering houses and they are delivering X amount. It all becomes white noise. The member for Lowan's family, who own a Mitre 10, are actually delivering more houses practically on the ground right now. On this government business program there are three important issues, particularly for us in the Nationals: housing, roads and energy. I was, as the Speaker well knows – we sat on the panel – at the Women's Climate Congress over the weekend, and there are some very differing perspectives. I notice that last night Farms for Food held another forum regarding this. They, along with other advocacy groups, are not against renewables, cleaner energy and more sustainability – not at the cost of regional Victoria and not at the cost of farms that produce food.

We in the Nationals, who again are upholding the speaking program on this side of the house, are looking forward to discussing the energy bill and transport and e-scooters. I would like to think that e-scooters might become part of the landscape in tropical north Victoria, given that we always have been a tourism destination but more so with the launching of the Trail of Lights last weekend, which is magnificent, absolutely brilliant. Unfortunately the minister could not attend, but it just adds to our offering. It would be great to see e-scooters also enter the landscape in a tourist destination like Mildura. However, for those that have to charge them themselves, because the energy prices are too high, it is too expensive to charge e-scooters. Anyway, riding them around in regional and rural areas might end up with you hitting a pothole and breaking an arm and then having to be taken to the hospital, where you could possibly sit in the waiting room for 6 hours. You can see how these bills have flow-on effects, one after the other after the other, but we are looking forward to upholding that speaking list.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:33): It is an absolute pleasure to rise today in support of the Allan Labor government's business program for this week, our last sitting week before we take a break and return to our electorates for a few weeks over the Easter period. I take this opportunity to wish you, Speaker, and everyone here a very happy Easter break. I also thank the parliamentary staff. I am sure they will be very pleased to have a break as well over the period, perhaps a nice break from all of us. As members we will recall that we had a busy last sitting week with a rather late sitting night, and this week's government business program is just as jam-packed. It is another jam-packed program. I do note with

disappointment, although not with surprise, that the opposition is not supporting the government business program. In fact I can count on one hand the number of times that the opposition has supported the government business program in this parliamentary term. Like I say, it is disappointing – it is very sad actually – but not unsurprising that the Manager of Opposition Business is not quite as enthusiastic as we are on this side about the government business program for this week, because on this side of the house we are getting on with the job and tackling the issues that are important to Victorians, delivering legislation around building and around energy and tackling issues that are going to have a real impact in people's lives. We are going to see some important real-world impacts of the legislation that we will be debating this week.

As we have heard from colleagues earlier, there are three bills that will be debated this week. First, we have the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. This bill is particularly important when it comes to implementing the building reform program, which aims to support Victoria's housing statement. I am really proud to be a member of a government that is delivering ambitious housing targets, ensuring that we as a state are building housing where people want to live: near their friends; near their families; near schools, universities and TAFEs; near excellent, world-class public transport systems; and near where jobs are and where job opportunities in the future will be. It is just so important that we are building housing exactly where people want to live, and that is what Victoria's housing statement is all about. The Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 will help contribute to that.

The building reform program helps address important findings from several government reports, including the Victorian Cladding Taskforce and the Commonwealth Building Confidence reports. These are incredibly important in ensuring that in Victoria we have the right settings, the right regulations and the right frameworks to ensure that building is done appropriately and to ensure that houses are built appropriately and to ensure that the buyers of these houses are protected. Once it is fully implemented the building reform program will overhaul the building regulatory system, introducing new laws and improving regulations for the regulator, for insurance and for the monitoring of building work, among other changes.

Another bill that we will be debating this week – we have heard a bit about it already this afternoon – is the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025.

Members interjecting.

Ella GEORGE: As my colleagues around me are saying, we cannot wait for this one. We are really looking forward to this, and I am really looking forward to hearing contributions from colleagues on this throughout the week. I know the Manager of Opposition Business had a lot to say about the Victorian energy upgrades program. I have to say I disagree with the Manager of Opposition Business on this one. It has been an excellent program. I know that residents in my community have absolutely loved this program, and they really appreciate the opportunities when the government is willing to make things a little bit cheaper when it comes to upgrading energy appliances and installing energy-efficient appliances throughout their homes. The member for Bellarine and I just had a chat about it. It is well loved in her community. It is so much loved that they have some neighbourhood batteries starting up, which is really fantastic. The communities across Victoria are really embracing the Victorian energy upgrades program. This bill will continue to ensure that this upgrades program can be delivered throughout the state so that more families, more households and more business right around the state can benefit from this government's investment in renewable energy, in energy efficiency and in energy storage, which is what our community battery programs will deliver to this state. It will be another busy week for us on this side of the house, and I commend the government business program.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:38): I am pleased to rise today to talk about the government business program. As we have previously stated, we do oppose the program today, mainly because the government is too scared to go into consideration in detail – that is the reason why – on the

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I do not know if they could make that title any longer than what it is; it is a very long title. I do not understand why the government are too scared to go into consideration in detail. When they put forward bills, why don't we really go into detail on them?

All credit to the member for Essendon, who put forward the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023, as he actually had the guts to go into consideration in detail. He sat here for quite a few hours discussing the importance of that bill, which he wanted to get through the house. If bills are so important, why don't we go into consideration in detail? I do not mind working until 12:30 am; it does not worry me. I thought last week was a unique experience for us new MPs, going that late. I would be happy to go to 12:30 am every day. I know the Greens would probably put in for triple time, because that is a bit past their bedtime – they are not here to sledge me back – but I would be more than happy to go to 12:30 am. By the look on the Speaker's face I do not think the Speaker wants to, but I would be happy to.

We do have three bills before the house. I have already mentioned the one that we wanted to go into consideration in detail on because it is important to the government. I am looking forward to debate on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I am very much looking forward to that debate. The member for Greenvale said he is looking forward to it as well. I would love to debate the member for Greenvale on this bill. By the time I have finished on that bill this week hopefully I will have educated the government on what is bad about the bill. I will not get into debate now, but I think there is going to be a very interesting debate on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I do not think the government have done their homework on it, and that is going to be the big problem that we have on this side.

The other bill that we have before us today is the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025, which is pretty much about e-scooters and regulation around e-scooters. I sat in on the bill briefing on that one. It is not that exciting, but it needs to be done. We need to get these things done and in place, but there are plenty of other things on the notice paper that I think are worth debating.

The Leader of the House mentioned housing targets earlier and how important the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill is to housing targets. Unfortunately this government is failing on housing targets. They have not reached any targets that they set – you know, 80,000 houses a year, 800,000 over 10 years. Whichever way they want to spin it, they have not met those targets. The Leader of the House can debate me all she likes on this, but the facts and the figures are there: 26,000 houses short in the first year. They are probably going to be over 50,000 short over two years. I am happy debate that with the Leader of the House. It is a target set by this government which it is failing dismally. They say they want to get roofs over heads and they want people in homes, but everything they do stalls that process. Everything they do makes it less affordable for people to get into the housing market. That is true. What this government has put forward makes housing less affordable in this state. If the Leader of the House would like to debate me on it, I am more than happy to do that. But the fact remains that housing targets have failed in this state.

We oppose this business program, because this government is too scared of scrutiny on bills. They are happy to have quick debates, guillotine them and move them on, but what they are scared of is scrutiny. This government does not like it, and that is why we would like to see consideration in detail. I would love to see consideration in detail on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I would love to see consideration in detail on that. Maybe the Leader of the House can give us a bit of leeway on that and put that one up for consideration in detail. Yes, we oppose it; it is bad.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

Noes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, 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, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway

Motion agreed to.***Members statements*****Ramadan**

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:48): Eid Mubarak. What a joyous occasion for the Muslim community all over the world celebrating Eid. Thank you to all those who invited me to Eid celebrations and iftar dinners over Ramadan. Thank you to Asmi and Jahan for the lovely home iftar; the Sri Lankan food was exceptional again. Thank you to the Victorian Bangladeshi Community Foundation for welcoming me to their annual iftar dinner. Thank you to the United Muslim Residents Association, who conduct Friday prayers every week in Point Cook and who I joined for the start of Eid celebrations yesterday.

Laverton Magpies Football Netball Club

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:49): On another matter, I was at the Laverton Magpies Football Netball Club launch on Saturday night. What an extraordinary club – 101 years old – and a new scoreboard has been produced by the Victorian state Labor government. We have got some more work to do on their clubrooms. I hope that Hobsons Bay council turns up as well and supports them in the same way the Victorian state Labor government does.

Saltwater Reserve, Point Cook

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:49): Finally, the federal Labor government have announced that they are delivering funding to upgrade the Saltwater Reserve in Point Cook. They have turned up with \$5 million for something the Point Cook Football Club, the Point Cook Cricket Club and the whole community have been calling for because it will be a great community facility. State Labor has turned up with \$1.4 million, and I invite Wyndham council to turn up as well. Too often the Labor government is supporting these wonderful sporting facilities across our community. Councils need to, too.

Bulleen electorate roads

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (12:50): I walked into this chamber some months ago and said that the Labor government plan to redesign the Porter Street–Fitzsimons Lane intersection was going to lock out MarketPlace Fresh, Templestowe – that whole business – from being able to operate because the Labor government designed the intersection off a Google Maps analysis. They did not go onsite to look at it; it was done from a Google Maps analysis. It blocked left-hand entry into Templestowe Park, and the supposed upgrade, which put a median strip through Porter Street, blocked the entrance to

MarketPlace Fresh. Lo and behold, some months later a very popular local business has shut its doors because it has gone broke, because the Labor government just cannot get projects like this right and support small business.

Now what is happening at Bridge Street–Templestowe Road is all the businesses there have suddenly realised, dear God, that the same geniuses who sent MarketPlace Fresh broke and destroyed Templestowe Park now want to redo the road at the front of their businesses. God help them. That is why I raise today a disastrous Labor government which does not understand small business, does not listen to local ideas and does road rebuilds via Google Maps analysis. It had better start listening to local people and not stuff up this one too.

Pakenham electorate achievements

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (12:51): March has been a great month in the Pakenham electorate, with brilliant people, great weather and more new community resources. I was very proud to accompany the Minister for Emergency Services in handing over the keys to Pakenham fire brigade for their new BA support vehicle. This hardworking brigade supports the Cardinia group of brigades – 16 of them – with filling and maintaining breathing apparatus equipment.

The Minister for Children came to visit to see firsthand the progress of construction of the new Boollam Boollam kinder in the Pakenham electorate. We were both very impressed with the new kindergarten facilities.

Special to my heart, though, was joining the Minister for Disability to open the new Changing Places facility in Barrington Park and Pakenham train station. This facility really is life-changing for people with disabilities to participate in social and physical activities away from their homes.

I was honoured to be interviewed by the incredible Jane Simpson at the FightMND Shady Ladies fundraiser. What a great day that was, particularly as I got to share it with some of my team and parliamentary colleagues.

To top the month off, I represented the Minister for Education to officially open the new learning and meeting spaces at Officer Specialist School. If you ever need a feel-good boost, then this is the place to visit. Principal Helene Rowe, her team and her students radiate the most positive and happy energy and are thrilled with their new facilities.

Val Barrass

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (12:53): I was incredibly sad to hear of the passing of Val Barrass, who passed away on 17 March aged 93. Val was a special friend to me and an outstanding and much-loved member of our community. Val was well known across the region, particularly for her love and support of local sport and for her years of dedication and service to the Shepparton Netball Association, their players and families.

Val's netball journey began when she was 12 years of age, and she was still volunteering at the age of 92. In 1958 Val was honoured with life membership of the Shepparton Netball Association. Val received a Netball Victoria distinction award in 2001, a City of Greater Shepparton sports award in 2002 and in 2019 was named volunteer of the year in Netball Victoria's community awards. In 2023 the Shepparton Netball Association honoured Val for her incredible 80 years of dedication as a player, volunteer, umpire and committee member. It was a joy to be there and to honour Val's incredible 80 years of service, which truly is outstanding.

For over 30 years Val volunteered in the control box and filled the role with dedication, fun and always a friendly smile. It is fitting that the control box was named in her honour five years ago and that her legacy is set to live on at the netball courts for generations to come. Val was always so positive, happy, inspiring and a beautiful person in every way. Val has left a lasting legacy. She was truly one of a kind and will be deeply missed. Vale, Val Barrass.

Dr Ravin Sadhai

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:54): I rise today to congratulate Dr Ravin Sadhai of Bacchus Marsh Medical Centre on the outstanding success of this year's pub clinic. It is an annual event dedicated to men's health. This year's event held at The Plough hotel in Myrniong attracted over a hundred men who came together to hear from an impressive line-up of health experts. With a focus on matters of the heart and spine, attendees had the chance to engage with a neurosurgeon, cardiologist, physiotherapist and personal trainer, all in a relaxed and welcoming setting complete with a free beer and nibbles. Dr Sadhai's dedication to men's health and wellbeing is truly commendable. His commitment to breaking down barriers and ensuring that men in our community have access to vital information is making a real difference. I extend my sincere thanks to Dr Sadhai and his team for their ongoing work and passion for community health. The success of the pub clinic is a testament to his vision, and I have no doubt it will continue to grow in the years to come. Congratulations, Dr Sadhai and team, for another fantastic event.

Playgroup Victoria

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:55): I would also like to give a shout-out to Playgroup Victoria for the first-ever playgroup appreciation day, which was the brainchild of one of our local leaders, the wonderful Belinda. I understand it will be a feature going forward.

Melbourne Highland Games & Celtic Festival

David HODGETT (Croydon) (12:56): Today I want to speak on the success of the Melbourne Highland Games & Celtic Festival, which I had the privilege to be part of on Sunday 23 March. It was a terrific event held in Croydon at Eastfield Park with people travelling from near and far, including international locations, to attend the event. The festival showcased a range of highland and Irish dancing, pipe band competitions, a range of musical performances in the folk music tent, displays and information on the clans. The highlight of the day was the hosting of the International Heavy Games Championships for the first time in Australia. A huge thankyou to the organisers and volunteers that ensured such a successful event and brought international exposure to Croydon.

Blooms on Brice

David HODGETT (Croydon) (12:56): Next I would like to offer my congratulations to Jessica, an apprentice working at Blooms on Brice in Mooroolbark, a local florist in my electorate. Jessica entered her very first competition at the recent Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, and she was awarded third place for her entry. This is a credit to her talent, and it is an outstanding accomplishment in her very first competition.

Tony Clarke

David HODGETT (Croydon) (12:57): Lastly, on a more sombre note I would like to acknowledge the passing of my good friend Tony Clarke. Tony was married to the late Heather Clarke, and just as she was, Tony was a dedicated Liberal and often made contributions to Liberal Victoria as well as the Croydon electorate conference. Tony was always up for a chat, had a caring nature and enriched the lives of all who knew him. My sincere condolences to his sons Andrew and James. May he rest in peace.

Tristan Ewins

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:57): I rise to mourn the sudden passing of Dr Tristan Ewins, a much-loved member of the Box Hill ALP branch for over 30 years. Tristan was a freelance writer, PhD graduate, qualified teacher, blogger, social commentator and big-picture thinker. His contributions to the branch meetings were always heartfelt and meaningful. He always sought out a carefully considered path that would lead to a more equitable and just society. As recently as at the February branch meeting, Tristan moved a motion calling on the federal government to massively expand the Housing Australia Future Fund as a means of increasing access to public housing and generally

increasing housing supply. While steadfast in his principles, he always valued the input of others and sincerely believed that in the long run the best opinions are formed through understanding all points of view. Tristan was a kind and generous person who gave up much of his time to participate in branch events and help out during election campaigns, and he will be greatly missed. Vale, Tristan.

Mont Albert Cricket Club

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:58): Congratulations to the Mont Albert Cricket Club women's team, who in their inaugural season have taken out the Eastern Girl's and Women's Cricket senior B-grade premiership. Taking on the previously undefeated Deepdene, Mont Albert lost the toss and were sent in to bat on a slow outfield at Stradbroke Park, scoring a total of 110. However, a strong bowling performance saw Mont Albert bowl the opposition out on the final over, 18 runs short of the target. Captain Ellie Bonnett completed a great all-round performance, scoring 40 off just 50 balls, followed up with 2 for 14 off seven. Congratulations to all involved.

Polwarth electorate projects

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:59): I rise to put on the record today for the house the unfulfilled expectations of many of the communities in Polwarth with the upcoming budget, and I refer specifically to two projects.

The first one is the Colac West Primary School, which was promised two years ago \$10.5 million for a much-needed upgrade. Colac West Primary School is one of the oldest physical structures in education in the Polwarth electorate. It is in much need of renovation and an update. In fact the last renovation of any substance that they had was back in the early 1980s. This school is in desperate need. They were devastated last year when the government just chopped them without notice; in fact they were not even notified by the department that they had been chopped from the list. We really look forward to the government restoring some faith and credibility in its education department by restoring that funding to the Colac West Primary School this year.

It is interesting that we have the Minister for Health in the chamber this afternoon, and I wonder whether the people of Torquay can look forward to seeing that big parcel of land at the entrance to Torquay actually being turned into the health centre that has been promised over two elections, 2018 and 2022. Each time it has been promised to the people of Torquay that they would have a health centre and a hospital campus from Barwon Health. It still has not been delivered, and in fact the signs are still there and now overgrown. We look forward to the minister delivering on her promise.

Narre Warren South electorate ministerial visit

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (13:00): It really was fantastic recently to welcome the Premier to the outer south-east to see some of the state initiatives that are supporting my electorate of Narre Warren South. Our first stop was Endeavour Hills police station alongside the member for Narre Warren North to catch up with some of our hardworking local police officers and talk about the incredible work that they do. Endeavour Hills station is also assisting the Narre Warren police station while those upgrade works and building works are taking place. I thank them for welcoming us and I thank all the duty officers who stopped by for a chat. It was an opportunity to thank these officers for the dedicated work that they keep doing to keep our community safe.

We then headed over to Lyndhurst Secondary College in my electorate, which is in the planning and design phases of the \$13.6 million upgrade announced in last year's state budget. I would like to thank principal Eloise Haynes for taking us through the school's excellent pathway programs that are on offer to students, including the impressive trade skills centre with its fully equipped auto shop. The Premier and I enjoyed talking to students undertaking the VET automotive course about their plans post school. I thank the Premier for her visit, and I know many students appreciate the educational pathways that are now available to them to gain the skills they need to access their dream job.

Mountain Track

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:02): Last week I had the pleasure of attending Mountain Track in Jumbuk. It is an intervention program that meets the needs of vulnerable young people, with many young people hailing from the Latrobe Valley. During my visit I was struck by how much these young people genuinely want to be there. The enthusiasm from the boys showing me around on the Kubota was remarkable, and they proudly shared their personal experiences. Mountain Track offer structure, trust, attachment and a space to grow for these young people. The participants, young people with significant trauma and criminal convictions, are invited into the wilderness for transformation rather than punishment. The program helps develop the practical, social and life skills these young people need to confidently transition to independent living. Through structured programs, Mountain Track provides accredited and non-accredited employment training and practical work experience. Their hands-on approach helps participants master skills and gain independence. Working with partners like BlazeAid, the young people help rebuild communities after disasters, reinforcing the value of community service while gaining real-world experience. Special thanks to David, Laura and the boys who showed me around, showcasing their wonderful program. I cannot wait to return in the near future.

Aintree Community Garden

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (13:03): It was with great excitement that I officially opened the Aintree Community Garden on Saturday 22 March. This project was made possible by a \$75,000 grant from the Living Local Fund's suburban grants, enabling We Love Aintree to bring this community garden to the heart of Woodlea. A huge thankyou to Jono from We Love Aintree for turning this vision into a reality. The occasion was celebrated in a unique way with a pumpkin vine ribbon-cutting, symbolising the growth and abundance that this garden will bring to our community.

This incredible space features 41 Foodcube wicking beds providing 47 square metres of growing space. Thanks to the 39 dedicated volunteers during maintenance Mondays, these beds are already filled with fresh produce. If you would like to get involved, gardening sessions and morning tea will happen every Monday between 10 am and 11 am. A special highlight of the day was the Ben's Bees locally harvested honey that was available for sale. I proudly bought a jar, and I can attest that the honey is magnificent. The celebration was filled with nature workshops and a barbecue cooked by our amazing local Scouts group, along with a sushi sandwich stall, where kids learned to make healthy snacks. A particularly heartwarming moment was when young Esther, who had saved up her money for two years, showed me the apple tree that she had bought and proudly donated to the community garden. This is just the beginning. With a range of programs ahead, I am excited to join Jono and We Love Aintree as we continue growing the community together.

Armstrong Creek projects

Darren CHEESEMEN (South Barwon) (13:05): South Barwon electorate is one of the fastest growing state electorates in the state of Victoria, and within that very fast-growing state seat is the Armstrong Creek growth corridor. As that community is growing, with many thousands of people now calling it home, the community quite rightly expects the state government to deliver services to help it thrive and survive. Within that context, the Allan Labor government has previously committed to building a career fire station and a new ambulance station and has funded the business case for a secondary school. I am hopeful that with the upcoming 2025 budget these exciting projects can be taken to the next step to ensure that the Armstrong Creek growth corridor gets the services that it needs to keep itself safe, to educate the community locally and to make sure that the missing ambulance service is delivered.

Ramadan

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (13:06): I wish to thank Zaynab and Mohammad Osman for welcoming me and my family to a very special iftar dinner in their home. We greatly appreciated your kind and generous hospitality. It was so special to attend, meet your friends and enjoy the delicious

Afghan food prepared by your mother. It was also a privilege to attend iftar at the Ballarat mosque and meet community members during the holy month of Ramadan. I wish to send my best wishes and happiness for Eid to Zaynab and Mo and all members of the Ballarat Islamic community. Eid Mubarak.

School holidays

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (13:06): I wish all our principals, teachers, support staff and students a great last week of term and an enjoyable Easter holiday. Term 1 is such a busy start to the school year, with new students commencing, school camps and excursions, NAPLAN, swimming and athletics sports days, performing arts rehearsals and plenty of out-of-school sport, including rowing, cricket and basketball. I want to thank everyone in our schools who has worked so hard across the term to make it a positive and constructive term, and I hope you all enjoy a well-deserved break.

Talking of school holidays, Ballarat is a great place to come and visit for a day trip or a mini break. Come and enjoy our gold rush heritage, streetscapes, botanic gardens, diverse cafe and dining options, distilleries and bars, farmers markets and galleries. A trip to Ballarat is an outstanding way to spend the Easter period, and with our fair regional V/Line fares, the most you will pay is \$11 full fare and \$5.50 concession.

Marion Mackie

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:07): I wish to pay tribute to and congratulate a fabulous member of the Probus Club of Lilydale. Marion Mackie was recently appointed as a life member of Lilydale Probus, an extremely well deserved honour for her. Marion was the first woman president, in 2016–17, after Lilydale Probus became a combined club for men and women 10 years ago. Despite only officially being a member for 10 years, Marion really has been part of the Lilydale Probus club for 24 years. Since Doug joined, Marion has supported him in a variety of busy executive roles and has helped to attract new members, particularly women, doing an incredible amount of work to connect local people and engage them in a variety of activities. In 2010 Marion started Probus Pals, an important opportunity for women to socialise and support one another. She has written and coordinated the newsletter and always made everyone feel valued and welcome. Congratulations, Marion.

Evelyn electorate roads

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:08): With the state budget just a month or so away, I again call on the Allan Labor government to allocate funding in the budget to upgrade dangerous and congested roads across my electorate, including the Hull and Mooroolbark roads bottleneck, Warburton Highway in Seville East and Clegg Road in Wandin and to get on with the Maroondah Highway at Killara Road in Coldstream, which the government has had \$20 million in Commonwealth funding for since 2019. Road safety is such a significant issue across my electorate, and we are seeking funding for these dangerous and congested roads.

Wathaurong Booln Booln Cultural Centre

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:09): Yesterday was a significant day for the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative as they celebrated the official takeover of Narana, now known as the Wathaurong Booln Booln Cultural Centre. A large crowd gathered for a special smoking ceremony to celebrate the public opening. There is a long history to the Booln Booln site given that it was operated for over 30 years as Narana not by the Aboriginal community but by the Uniting Church. I acknowledge and thank Wathaurong CEO Simon Flagg, the Wathaurong board and the staff for all the work that they have put into establishing Booln Booln, led by the Aboriginal community, as it should be.

Aboriginal businesses

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:10): I was pleased to announce the Geelong recipients of the Victorian Aboriginal business investment program. Well-known local businesses Blak Brews and Wanyaari Aboriginal Consultancy Services were two of the businesses awarded grants for training, mentorship, networking, marketing and expert advisory services and accreditations. AH Plumbing Services in Belmont was one of the local businesses to receive a grant to help them expand into new markets, complete building works and invest in developing their workforce. Investing in Aboriginal businesses is not just an economic opportunity, it is a pathway to empowering communities, creating sustainable jobs and driving us towards achieving economic equity within a generation.

The Outpost

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:10): Last week I also participated in the official opening of The Outpost in Geelong. I acknowledge and thank Amy Flint, the board and volunteers for the incredible work they do in providing support and assistance to homeless people.

Philip Sacca

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (13:11): Congratulations to Philip Sacca, humanitarian, activist, mighty contributor to Australia and proud Palestinian Australian. I had the privilege of attending the Philip Sacca lifetime achievement ceremony on Saturday 29 March 2025. Philip was honoured for his humanitarian contributions over decades since migrating to Australia with his wife Begona. Mary Musleh, current president of the Beit Jala Palestinian Association, spoke of his work starting the organisation in the late 1980s to connect and support people who had migrated to Australia from the Palestinian city of Beit Jala and also to preserve culture and raise awareness of the Palestinian fight for justice. He was also the driving force behind a book on the history of Beit Jala and the association in Australia. We then heard from Moira Kelly about Philip's advocacy to her to assist him in bringing ill children living in Gaza to Melbourne for life-saving and life-changing medical treatments. She spoke of her trips over the years to Gaza with Philip and his impressive negotiating skills as well as his selfless work. The final speaker, Andrew Laidlaw, president of Global Gardens of Peace and also landscape architect at the botanical gardens, talked of Philip's achievements in establishing the calming garden that has been built here in Melbourne at the Alfred hospital in the mental health ward and also the food forest at the Yooralla Ventilator Accommodation Support Service in Northcote.

Wyndham Park Primary School

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:12): I rise to acknowledge the talented artists at Wyndham Park Primary School. As a new MP who was a teacher only a few months ago, you cannot get me out of the classroom for too long. The students were tasked with designing my new office birthday and thankyou cards, and they sure came up with some fantastic designs. Thank you to principal John Eskander for organising this. I am pretty sure the kids are tuning in for this speech right now, so I want to give them a shout-out. The students' designs were all great, and it was very tough to pick out winners. Now for the reveal. Here are the students whose art will be used for my community cards: Zion, Dah Gay, Elijah, Savanna, Lucy, Zin and Luna. Congratulations. I will see them very soon to show them what their cards will look like and drop off some prizes.

Werribee electorate roads

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:13): Now pivoting to another very important announcement: yesterday the Allan and Albanese Labor governments announced that we are going to build a new bridge over the Werribee River as part of the Wyndham ring-road. This bridge will connect Armstrong and Hobbs roads in Wyndham Vale to Sayers Road in Tarneit, creating a direct road link for Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes and Tarneit, thanks to the advocacy of the member for Lalor Joanne Ryan and the member for Tarneit as well. My electorate is rapidly growing, and my constituents have spoken to me about the need to have more local roads to reduce local congestion. As a local road user I too see this,

and I know it is a priority. That is why we are already building the Ison Road overpass and upgrading the Werribee Main Road and Ballan Road interchanges. This new bridge will mean that our communities are connected, and I will continue to fight for Werribee.

Dandenong Ranges community events

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:14): If you want entertainment, culture and information, the Dandenong Ranges and foothills are the place to be. Saturday 1 March saw the Cockatoo Country Market twilight markets, celebrating 10 years of this great community institution. Knox Fest, located at Wally Tew Reserve in Ferntree Gully, spanned the whole day, and it was bigger and better than ever. The following day saw the Monbulk Car Show spruik all things classic automotive, and the annual Belgrave Survival Day was a great day, bringing so many people from across the hills together for a day of deadly talent and community spirit.

The past two weekends have seen the continued success of Dandenong Ranges Open Studios, showcasing more than 50 artists and their talents who open their studio spaces up to the public to view, and all for free. Two weekends ago the inaugural Repower Festival in Monbulk was held. Organisations and businesses full of information on all things sustainability and resilience were there to answer everyone's questions, and it was fabulous that the Minister for Energy Resources and Minister for Climate Action and Minister for the State Electricity Commission could join us there.

Last weekend I was delighted that the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery could join me at Emerald's Emergency and Energy Family Fun Day, a really informative but very fun event about all things resilience. The festivities celebrating the centenary of Kallista being named as such this weekend were wonderful to be a part of. The music, food and entertainment were all top class.

This year's KaBloom festival has begun, and I cannot wait to get out there and see the work that Tesselaar has put into another celebration of all things floral. It is looking to be bigger and better than ever before, and I am really proud we are supporting this with a regional tourism fund grant.

Next weekend the ever-popular PAVED Festival returns to Emerald. Here's to a great autumn, everyone.

Make a Difference Dingley Village

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:15): Congratulations to Make a Difference Dingley Village on 40 years of service to the community – 40 years of providing support and services to those in need in our community. They have helped thousands. Each week the emergency relief program distributes a host of food vouchers and gas and electricity bill contributions from out of the Marcus Road office. Their financial counselling service is also making a huge difference in the lives of many individuals and families. Thank you to Marion and Scott and the committee, staff and volunteers for all the work you do for your community. You are all amazing.

School breakfast clubs

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:16): Thank you to the volunteers at the Westall Primary School and Keysborough Primary School breakfast clubs for their hard work and for having me along this week. It was lovely to share some breakfast and to chat with students and staff. 52 million meals have already been served up to kids across Victoria. Great job.

Rite Mentoring

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:16): Finally, congratulations to Rite Mentoring, who have been successful in their Future Ready program application for \$115,000 to support 19 youth groups across five culturally diverse government secondary schools and six campuses. It is a great program and a great opportunity for our community. Thank you and best of luck.

Melton electorate infrastructure

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (13:17): It has been busy out in Melton over the last few months, with major construction steaming ahead across Cobblebank secondary school; Staughton College, with upgrades and expansions; and the St Padre Pio parish and the Toolern Waters primary school sites. It was fantastic to have the Minister for Education Ben Carroll turn the sod at the Cobblebank secondary site, which is well underway. The St Padre Pio primary and early education sites at Thornhill Park are also progressing. We also stopped by the Little Royals Early Learning Centre to deliver kinder bags. But it was the expansion and upgrades to the Staughton College administration building and the new classrooms that blew my mind. This expansion will cater for an additional 400 students in this growth area.

But not only are we upgrading and investing in Melton schools, we are getting on and delivering much-needed infrastructure. Melton's three level crossing removals are progressing, and the brand new station is well on track for completion next year. We applaud the Albanese government's \$1 billion commitment to upgrading the Western Freeway. In just three years of having a state and federal Labor government partnership, we have delivered a business case and are now forging ahead with adding more lanes and building new and improved overpasses. Thank you to our federal member for Hawke, Sam Rae.

It was great to have the Minister for Health out in Melton to open Melton's sexual and reproductive health hub and to chat with the ambos at the Melton West station. It was great to attend the Melton SES training night last week, and I thank them for everything that they do. Construction on the hospital is well underway, with major works set to begin over the next couple of months. The completed Bridge Road extension now provides direct access to construction vehicles.

Cranbourne Uniting Church

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:18): I would like to say how grateful I am to all the businesses that support the Uniting Church food truck – in particular Alex Makes Meals, Aspire Early Education, Bunnings, Coles Botanic Ridge, Nossal High, Toorak Uniting Church and St John's Anglican Church. We are very lucky to have businesses and organisations that support the homeless.

Rulings from the Chair**Member conduct**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (13:18): Before we move on, I will just remind the house of Speaker Lindell's ruling from May 2010:

Just as acknowledging the public gallery by members is unparliamentary, comments to the viewing audience over the live web broadcast are also unparliamentary.

Bills**Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025*****Second reading*****Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (13:19): Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of an amendment to this bill, and I request that it be circulated.

Amendment circulated under standing orders.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (13:19): I have the honour today of standing up to put the case for the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. Over the last couple of weeks the

opposition has had an opportunity to work with stakeholders on what this bill means. At the outset can I say that there is no doubt there is need for reform and improvement in the way that we deal with the relationship between consumers and builders, particularly in the domestic home building market. There are clearly two main areas which this bill seeks to address. They are around the standard standalone domestic home and the product of a more than three- or four-storey apartment building with multiple units, so we are talking domestic up to three storeys and above three storeys into a more commercial application. Nonetheless, these places that are built ultimately become people's homes. They are often the most valuable asset that those people living under that roof will have, and their hearts and souls are invested in these properties. It is only right that the government has a legislative framework that seeks to protect those investments and those homes that people have.

I make the observation that in recent years we have had a growing housing crisis. We have talked many times in this Parliament about the fact that this government has single-handedly failed to get the amount of homes built and underway needed in this economy to keep people housed. We see it in the figures. We have got record amounts of homeless people and we have got a public housing waiting list that is growing at some 2500 families a quarter, which is at a record speed. We have now got basically an MCG full of homeless people. We have also got despair and angst amongst younger generations who feel that the object of home ownership is far from their grasp because of increasing costs. Some recent work on this very topic released by KPMG makes it clear that if you are in the bracket of affordable housing that includes a home worth from about \$400,000 up to about \$850,000, it is almost impossible at the moment to construct that with the options this government is putting forward.

For those people lucky enough to be in a position to build a home or buy a brand new home off the plan or however they acquire it, it is vital that they get what they think they paid for. Many Victorians were caught out in recent years when the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority, single-handedly failed in its monitoring of insurance. Ultimately that has led to this Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 this year, which many in the industry have cynically called the 'Porter Davis bill'. They have called it that because this is the government's knee-jerk response to what was a completely unsatisfactory problem, a problem in which the huge bureaucracy we already had in place to oversee and regulate the building industry completely failed, and that failure had a huge impact on many, particularly younger couples acquiring their first homes. It makes sense that a responsible government would look at what went wrong and seek to amend the legislation, so this bill has come to Parliament. But through the process of understanding the pros and cons of this bill, what has become very clear is that, as is so often the case, this government has decided that it can solve a problem by renaming it, so it is going to rename the Victorian Building Authority and give it a brand new name, the Building and Plumbing Commission. Most people out there who have disputes about their homes will fully understand that a name change in itself is not going to save them from peril.

That is one key element of this bill. The other key element is to essentially shift more of the blame in the relationship between the customer – the person acquiring the new home – and the builder, to move the relationship to be one of blame against the builder rather than strengthening a good contract. Those in the commercial world understand that good contracts have a good balance between consumer and supplier. It makes sense that you get that relationship highly tuned and developed and that then, when you have the contract well developed, you put the monitoring in place. This bill, sadly, fails abysmally at getting the contractual relationship right. This government undertook a review of the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995. They finished that review in February last year and have not revealed any of the details of that review in the lead-up to the release of this piece of legislation. The industry is quite rightly concerned – and so would consumers be – that the fundamental basis of the relationship between a home owner and a builder has been completely ignored. And not only has it been ignored, it has not been discussed and it has not been put out for proper public consultation. As a result this government has leapfrogged to managing how they are going to penalise the building industry and the construction industry rather than making sure the fundamental base, the foundations of the relationship, have been sorted first.

We will go into greater discussion on what some of those reforms are, but essentially the government has leapfrogged getting the foundations right and moved straight to blaming one side of the equation as a solution. That comes with consequences, and those consequences we will also discuss as the opposition details its position. Our position will be, sadly, to oppose this bill. We will be opposing this bill because it fundamentally will not deliver to the consumers of Victoria the protections. In discussions with the industry and the real estate agents and those dealing in this space all the time, what is fundamentally letting Victorians down is the monitoring of the construction industry. Through the process of construction and building, have we got the monitoring in place? Are we checking at the high-risk points, whether it is at the foundation stage, at the water and drainage stage or the final finish? Are we implementing and beefing up the capacity for the industry to have those key crunch points that cause disputes monitored and regulated? This bill does not deliver on that. This bill does not do anything for the end consumer apart from seeking to make a more complicated dispute resolution system rather than trying to avoid the problems to start with through a strong contractual foundation, and that is of great disappointment.

Not only will we be opposing this bill, but we have a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until details of the consultation on the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, along with any proposed reforms, have been released to the industry.'

The reason that this is an important reasoned amendment is this bill in its current form clearly puts the cart before the horse, and it is nonsensical to progress this further until such time as we know what the arrangements are that we are dealing with between consumers and the construction and building industry. I think that is entirely reasonable.

In preparing for this bill my assistant Wayne Farnham and other members of the opposition met with many industry representatives from Master Builders Victoria, the Housing Industry Association, the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the insurance industry and a raft of small, large and medium construction companies, all of whom were amazingly disappointed with the lack of consultation that this government had with all the various players. These are the key players in the task that Victoria faces of getting more homes built, and it is of great concern when one of the primary feedbacks is, 'We've met with the government, but they just have not listened to any of the feedback that we have been giving them.' They have not been able to answer many of the questions we need. Not only are they sitting and flying blind on where we are with the details around any reforms to the contracts act, but, more worryingly, in this legislation there is endless reference to changes in regulations, and none of those regulations have been detailed or foreshadowed in any detail to the building industry. As I will go through shortly with some of the more direct feedback from the industry, what the industry is saying is it is expected to sign up with just not enough detail and information made clear. One of the most obvious examples of where detailed information has been just left out is around defects. What we are actually dealing with with this bill are the consequences of defects or inherent structural or building problems, yet this legislation fails to deal with them – whether minor, major, structural, inherent or whatever definitions they want to put around them – with any certainty or in a satisfactory way.

I guess the other important fact that the government have ignored but the industry and those dealing with these problems have made clear is that, by and large, while the system that we have today has some very large problems in it and has caused some great distress to many homebuyers, at the end of the day they are still a small percentage of those that are engaging in a relationship between homebuyer and home builder, and by and large the industry has been quite capable of dealing with them. Where it has gone wrong, where it has gone pear-shaped and where consumers have been left out of pocket or, worse, out of home, the industry itself wants to see that reform. The industry itself wants happy customers. They do not want operating in their industry people that do not provide good service, do not correct defects and do not make good on contracts made. Conversely, the industry also needs to have protection from malicious or vexatious customers who at times might play the system in order to

get their own way. That is why having good contracts is such an important foundation to solving the overall problem of defects and building problems getting in the way of a good product and a safe home for people to live in.

I want to now take the house through some of the more specific details of the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 that have been identified by some key people in the industry. To be honest, I would need more than the 17 minutes that I have left to detail the numerous problems, but I just want to put on the record some of the work that has been done by the industry in giving us advice on this and bring it to the house's attention. For example, in clause 33, 'Proof of insurance for persons intending to rely on automatic deemed registration', and clause 34, 'Financial probity requirements', one of the concerns is that the term 'minimum financial requirements' is very vague. Financial requirements may be burdensome for smaller builders or sole traders who are currently managing their own books and who would need to engage accountants for this work.

One of the problems with what this bill will do is that we will move from an insurance system of an insurer of last resort to an insurer of first resort, and there will be a monopoly insurance system. What was formerly under the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority will now be under the Building and Plumbing Commission. This is important because – once again, without proper consultation – the industry fears that the government has set up a system that will be okay for large-volume builders, who perhaps have huge back office administrative capacity and skill sets, to comply with what they want to understand about the builder that they are insuring. The concern of the industry is that if you are a smaller operator – you may in fact be the builder, on the tools yourself, on jobs with only one or two employees and are also, after hours, the administrator and office manager, which is often the case for many small builders – this could potentially be hugely onerous.

Unfortunately right across the economy over the last 10 years small business has suffered at the hands of this government's large, bureaucratic approach to admin. I am talking about pages and pages of forms or websites that do not always function if you do not have great internet connection as you are operating your business in a country community. There will be a huge disadvantage for a smaller operator in being able to meet the financial objectives. As the industry has highlighted, most probably this will be a new added cost to doing business – getting insurance and providing a builder – because the builders themselves are going to have to engage more back office power in order to get the requirements right to get the insurance in place. We are not delivering; this particular section of the bill will really add no extra benefit to the process.

Clause 36, 'Grounds for disciplinary action', inserts new subsection 179(1)(ea), allowing for disciplinary action if the VBA finds that a building practitioner does not meet the required financial standards. There is great concern that a well-operated small business builder operator may have their registration cut or severe financial pressure put on them because they are unable to keep up with the bureaucratic requirements of this government. Clause 38 refers to that as immediate suspension of registration. That can cause huge financial distress and hardship to a builder who may only have one or two houses on the go. Cash flow is everything in this business, and if you have that registration suspended, if you are a builder out at Horsham or in far East Gippsland or a long way from Melbourne, you will be severely disadvantaged in getting those processes and paperwork that the now government monopoly will insist that you provide.

Other concerns have been that suspension or disciplinary action could be fatal for a builder and should only be used as a last resort rather than a first line of action. The industry is very concerned that while the government have failed to be prescriptive on regulations and expectations, they have been very prescriptive on their penalties and costs that could be inflicted upon builders who are not necessarily

able to respond in an appropriate way to the government's demands. Under clause 44, 'Definitions and interpretation', a new definition is to be inserted. It states:

insurable domestic building contract means a domestic building contract –

- (a) for the construction of –
 - (i) one home; or
 - (ii) 2 or more homes in a building with a rise in storeys of 3 or less; and
- (b) under which the builder will receive more than \$20 000 ... for the carrying out of the domestic building work ...

Some of the concerns around that are that the phrase 'for the construction of' potentially puts a limitation on contracts for certain types of domestic building work being categorised as insurable domestic building contracts. It is not clear how associated work, renovations, alterations, extensions, repair work, demolition work and other typical work projects that a builder may be engaged in on an existing site will be treated. This is an example where had the government properly negotiated with and listened to and responded to the industry's concern, it could have had that cleared up. But as it stands now the work that this bill refers to is 'for the construction of'. Quite frankly, if you have got to pull down an old garage, that is destruction of the garage; it is not construction of the garage. That would be just one example. Deconstructing parts of a house in order to build something new is not unusual, yet this bill has fundamentally failed to deal with that basic expectation in the building and construction industry.

Clause 56 inserts a new part 9A, 'Statutory insurance scheme for domestic building work', which includes a definition of an associate of a developer as a director of a developer, an employee agent of a developer or their spouse, domestic partner, parent, brother, sister or child. Once again this government, when we have fishing bills and other legislation in the house dealing with small to medium enterprises, loves to rope everybody in without necessarily thinking through the consequences. The concern from the industry is around the definition of 'associate'. It is far and wide reaching. For example, if the builder is an individual, a company in which the builder's spouse or child holds a controlling interest will be an associate of the builder. If the builder is a company, then the spouse or child of an officer of that company will be an associate of the builder. This definition is relevant when assessing who is entitled to assistance under the scheme. Basically what the industry is concerned about is that it is not uncommon for a small builder to build a family member's home but they are going to be excluded from having insurance on that product, and that seems entirely unfair. It is also being suggested by the industry that if a builder died and had provided a home to a family member of some description, the whole arrangement would be without insurance, and that seems inherently unfair.

The concerns are many and varied, but just to continue with a few more of them: section 137J, 'Building work to which statutory insurance scheme does not apply'. This section expressly excludes categories of work which the insurance scheme will not apply to. Notably this includes domestic building work for the construction of residential apartment buildings in subsection (e): domestic building work that is prescribed domestic building work or that belongs to a prescribed class of domestic building work is also excluded. In this whole area of apartments there has been great concern added, because the government still has not got its head around what you do with large-level apartments. Considering that this government's thrust for housing Victorians in the future is in fact in multilevel apartments, you would have thought that they would have put a lot more thought around how we make sure that we do not have water leaking from the top apartment to the bottom apartment and everything else in between, for example. We saw it through the minister's amendment today where they managed to, on what is arguably one of the most important compensations for Victorians, get the percentage wrong. Anyway, we have learned today that it is officially the 2 per cent figure. The 2 per cent bond, is the only way the government plans to keep Victorians who buy apartments safe from any problems that may arise.

Once again, water-based issues, whether drainage, water in or water out, whatever the case may be, are one of the largest causes of disputes in apartment buildings as well as normal domestic buildings. If you can imagine for a moment: if you do not get the regulation and the key milestones of a major building monitored properly and inspected properly all through the process, sticking a 2 per cent premium on the cost of that apartment for the end consumer to ultimately pay is not really going to solve the problem if the problem is buried deep within the fabric and the structure of the building. At the end of the day that is the only protection the consumer is getting out of this bill in a major apartment. The government has not said, 'Oh well, we've done a bit of research, we've done a bit of homework and we realise that, if we put more energy and focus into certain key milestones along the construction of a building, we'll be able to really drive down any of the defect problems.' No, they have not done that. What they have done is the lazy option. They have said, 'Okay, what we're going to do is we're going to add just 2 per cent extra to the cost of building this apartment. We're going to put that in a bond, and we'll let that eat away.' Now, you do not have to be a construction engineer or a building expert to realise that the 2 per cent is not going to keep away some of those horror stories that we have seen on *A Current Affair* and in other media, where cheaply and poorly and shoddily built apartment buildings have really caused great distress to their apartment owners. This does not solve that, and so that is of great concern. Really, greater knowledge of what the problems are and how to solve them have been ignored by this government in this bill.

This is just a smaller item, but it again speaks to the fact that it should not be an issue for the industry had the government paid attention to some of the consultation they allegedly did in the lead-up to it. This is under section 1370, 'Builder must pay insurance premium'. Well, of course they expect to pay insurance premiums, but they are now compelled to pay the premium before the first 10 business days after the contract was entered into or the domestic building work starts. If a builder is carrying out speculative building work, the premium must be paid before the work starts. Some of the concerns around that are that ultimately this means that most builders will fall into the category of needing to pay for the premiums within 10 days after the contract is entered into. However, the project is generally not financed or approved until quite some time after that – up to 30 days even. The concern is that once again builders and small builder operators will be forced to further cash flow and fund the project when they are clearly not up to it.

Section 137Q, 'Premiums order', relates to the premiums and other amounts payable or methods by which the premiums or other amounts are payable. The authority must obtain the minister's approval by which method the premiums are to be calculated.

Quite frankly, this government has a disastrous reputation when it comes to calculating premiums, whether it is the TAC or WorkCover. What we have learned over the last 10 years is you can bet your bottom dollar that a Victorian Labor government insurance monopoly will head in only one direction, and that is premiums up. Victoria has traditionally had some of the lowest premiums; we are now going to have some of the highest. One of the reasons that will be driving that is there is another little trick this government has regularly done, and that is to see the monopoly insurers at WorkCover and the TAC just become cash cows – playthings of the Treasurer. It would be of great concern to the industry and to everybody trying to get their foot in the door of their first home if these insurance costs just kept cranking up. The industry has no faith that – while we put clear, transparent actuarial principles in place to safeguard first home buyers in particular and home owners generally – they are not being taxed through the back door to help prop up this government and this broken budget that we have here in Victoria. That is an important concern that the industry has, and this government has been very, very light on explaining what principles will be used to make sure that the insurance levels people are paying are fair and just and equate to the potential risk that would be associated.

That is a list of some of the concerns, and I am sure many of my colleagues will continue to relay to the house concerns from the industry. But the fact is that it runs many, many pages thick, and each one of those could have and should have been addressed by the government in dealing with this.

Some of the key points we will finish off in the last couple of minutes that I have to deal with this. This bill is moving to first-resort insurance rather than the last resort. At the moment the overwhelming majority of defects and faults that occur in domestic building are dealt with between consumer and builder. Most are resolved in a low-cost, efficient and effective way. What the opposition is concerned about is that, rather than getting that contractual relationship right where builders and consumers can deal honestly with each other and openly and get a problem solved, this government wants to move to a new authority and a new agency to deal with it, so we are automatically implementing extra cost and inefficiency into a system that 95 per cent of the time works well. That is an important key change.

It is never easy to support, from the Liberal Party's side of the chamber, creating a government monopoly. There is some competition in the market there. It has a position, it serves a particular cohort of builders very well, and by and large the prime motivation there is to work with good builders who are very low risk. They can keep the premiums down, so there is a check on the premiums. And the system has not worked too badly. On investigation for this, it seems that the private insurance incentive that is in there is a very useful check and balance against the excesses of an entirely state-run insurance scheme.

There is great concern in the industry that in a time when we need to absolutely get more homes built and we want more and better homes built, one of the keys to doing that is engaging and working with the small builder market. The concern around this is the expanded 10-year warranty system that is at the heart of this bill and the lack of regulation in the bill about what a defect is and what warranty obligations are. The warranty obligations are going out to 10 years. This is a huge concern, because no-one knows how responsible a builder will be in 10 years time. In fact, for many people, if you are an older builder, would you want to take on a job if you were nearing retirement that is going to potentially dog you for another 10 years? That is not fair. That is going to force people out of the industry at a time when we need more and more people engaged in the industry. With 2 seconds left, the opposition will be opposing this bill this week.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (13:49): While listening to the member for Polwarth all I heard was 'industry, industry, industry', no talk of the victims. I do not know how members opposite can look their constituents in the eye when they come into their electorate office and tell devastating stories where everything they have ever had they have spent on a home and they have been victims of dodgy builders. We know where the Liberal Party stands now, and that is with dodgy builders, because consultation does not mean capitulation, and that is certainly what the Liberal Party did in 2013 when they introduced their own bill to deal with these issues. The Housing Industry Association did not like it, so they pulled the bill.

I am very pleased to make a contribution to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, and as Parliamentary Secretary for Homes, I am so proud of the work that has been undertaken by everyone involved in getting us to this point. Before I speak to the contents of the bill, I will speak briefly to the amendment circulated by Minister Staikos earlier. Due to a printing error, the second reading of this bill stated that the amount to be held under the developer bond scheme was 3 per cent of the construction costs. We have introduced a house amendment to reflect the government's policy that the amount paid by the developer into the developer bond scheme will be set at 2 per cent of the construction costs for a building four storeys or higher. It changes the wording of clause 96 of the bill, which inserts a new section 137ZP(3) into the Building Act 1993. The section currently states that the amount to be secured by a developer bond for a residential apartment building would be 3 per cent of the total build cost for the residential apartment building. With this amendment the section will read that the amount to be secured by a developer bond for a residential apartment building is 2 per cent of the total build cost for the residential apartment building. This position was reached after extensive stakeholder consultation with building industry bodies.

This bill is a landmark reform that goes so much further than simply reforming the Victorian Building Authority or making changes to building insurance. Fundamentally this bill is about giving Victorians

confidence in our housing system – confidence that they will get what they pay for and confidence that our regulatory systems will do the right thing by them if their builder has not.

Housing is at the core of my work as parliamentary secretary but also of the work of the Allan Labor government. No other government has set out with a vision like ours, a vision for more homes and more opportunities for all Victorians. From our Help to Buy scheme, which has formed a crucial part of the federal government's reforms, to activity centres and precincts, the Suburban Rail Loop and a multipolar approach to densification, we are pulling all the levers necessary to increase the supply of housing where it is needed most.

These efforts, however, will be for nought unless consumers have confidence in the quality and accountability of our residential building sector. At the outset I want to make it clear that the Allan Labor government recognises that the vast majority of builders and developers do the right thing. This bill does not set out to demonise a vital industry or its workers. In fact clearer regulations and processes to weed out and punish dodgy builders will help strengthen the industry through increased consumer confidence and removing any advantages gained by improper practices.

Purchasing a home is often the biggest purchase any of us will make in our lifetime. It is preceded by years of stringent saving and sacrifice, of early morning inspections and of late-night research sessions. Saving for a home and all the steps that come before settlement are inherently stressful. With keys in hand, the next most stressful moment should be deciding where to put your furniture. But sadly for too many Victorians this is not the case; the most expensive decision of their life also becomes the most harrowing experience of their life. The consequences of poor building practices extend so much further than simply structural defects. The cost to individuals, to families and to communities is immense. This cost is not just financial but emotionally traumatising as well.

As an MP I have met with dozens of residents who have suffered greatly at the hands of dodgy builders and developers. These residents are working people who have done nothing wrong, and in fact they have done everything right. They, like so many, have been victimised by builders and developers who have acted in such a negligent way, with such a lack of empathy and basic human decency, it feels cathartic to take this opportunity to speak to legislation that will prevent them from hurting others. Indeed one of the first constituents to walk through my door when I was first elected was a Vietnam veteran who had spent his life savings on an apartment only to discover that he was living in a fire trap of flammable cladding. And so began my work with residents who needed help.

More recently I met with residents from an apartment complex in West Footscray – the development ironically named Eternity Apartments. Residents, many of whom bought off the plan, were sold on an environmentally sound design that included native timber facades, green walls, solar hot water, bike racks, smart meters, rooftop terraces and more. What they got was unrecognisable from the renders and the brochures. They got a rotting timber facade, a soulless concrete rooftop and not a single one of the amenities I just listed. And that was the good news. Structural defects are rampant in units and common areas. The elevators were not complete for over three months despite an occupancy permit being issued by the building surveyor, acting in lockstep with the developer. The builder was also registered as the developer. He was the architect and an owner. Of course he is an owner in name only. What he really owns is a disability accommodation provider that owns 26 per cent of all units in the complex, exactly enough to prevent any major resolutions being passed by the owners corporation – resolutions that may seek to take a developer to court, order rectification works, raise funds or in any way hold this bloke to account. And here is the kicker: the developer is suing the owners corporation for lost income because he cannot rent out some of the specialist disability accommodation because it is noncompliant. The change of use from residential to part SDA was also not registered. The fire engineering report is now invalid, as the assessment was not made with the needs of those with specialist accommodation in mind. And remember, the lifts were not functional for months after their supposed completion.

Not far away, also in West Footscray, the notorious ‘as seen on *60 Minutes*’ developer Shangri-La was responsible for a building that had completely inadequate waterproofing. The rectification of the building has been completed, no thanks to the developer. Shangri-La were supposedly in liquidation but have now seemingly phoenixed and set up shop as SLC Bayside.

This bill is about accountability. Dodgy builders must be held to account for the harm, the distress and the pain caused to decent, hardworking people. This bill sets out to do this through several mechanisms. The first and primary mechanism is through the creation of an integrated regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission or BPC. The BPC will take on functions currently performed by the Victorian Building Authority, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria to create a one-stop shop for homebuyers, renovators and practitioners. The BPC will have tough new powers, including and especially for enforcement. If serious defects identified by the BPC are not rectified, the regulator can suspend licences, stop the issuing of occupancy permits and prevent off-the-plan sales for apartment buildings. In other words, if it is not fixed, it is not for sale. The current regulatory system is overly complex, making already difficult situations even more so for consumers.

There is so much I could say about this bill, but the reason I commend it to the house is for the constituents who have come through my door and raised such shocking experiences dealing with dodgy builders. The Liberal Party and the opposition should be ashamed that they are siding with the dodgy builders and not with the victims of these terrible defects that present themselves to their electorate offices.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:59): In the couple of seconds I have I will first of all be very critical of the member for Footscray’s contribution. She certainly made out the member for Polwarth –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will have the call when we return. I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now for question time.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

Minister for Government Services

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time this week the Minister for Emergency Services will answer questions for the portfolios of government services, women, prevention of family violence, and treaty and First Peoples.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. At Senate estimates last week, in response to questions about the Suburban Rail Loop, Infrastructure Australia said lack of detail on timing and amount of value capture raised doubts about whether the project could be funded. How can Victorians trust that the government can fund this project when the Premier cannot even answer these basic questions?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I am absolutely delighted to receive this question from the Leader of the Opposition. Is this a question from the Leader of the Opposition here in Victoria, or did you get your riding instructions from Queensland on this question as well? The Leader of the Opposition referred to Infrastructure Australia, and I say this to the house: Infrastructure

Australia have had a bit to say about the Suburban Rail Loop. It has been on their priority list since 2022. Further to that, Infrastructure Australia also said that this project presents significant opportunities for Victorians living in the middle and outer suburbs to get better transport connections to universities, to hospitals and to jobs. Infrastructure Australia also noted that it will facilitate more housing. For the same reasons that Infrastructure Australia identified this project as a priority, so has my government and so have Victorians.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Point Cook can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Point Cook withdrew from chamber.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very specific about the funding. How can the Premier guarantee this funding? She is not working with Infrastructure Australia. There is a lack of detail to Infrastructure Australia. What is she doing to fund this project?

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. I ask that you rule the Leader of the Opposition out of order. The Premier has been on her feet just over 40 seconds. She has been entirely relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are of course working with Infrastructure Australia. We are working with a federal Labor government that knows where Victoria is on a map and, better than that, is backing the projects that Victorians want and need, whether it is the Suburban Rail Loop, the Melbourne Airport project, the North East Link Program, suburban roads that are being invested in –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was about detail and timing of value capture, and I ask that the Premier come back to that very narrow question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for the spoiler alert for the next question. I was asked about working with Infrastructure Australia, and that is exactly what we are doing, because Infrastructure Australia recommended that the Australian government –

Interjections from gallery.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house is suspended.

Sitting suspended 2:05 pm until 2:15 pm.

Jacinta ALLAN: To go back to where we were earlier, I was asked about working with Infrastructure Australia and the federal government on delivering the Suburban Rail Loop. I was about to say that of course I will be working Infrastructure Australia and my government will be working with Infrastructure Australia and a federal Labor government that is a partner in this project, because Infrastructure Australia recommended that the \$2.2 billion in funding be released to Victoria. This is the same \$2.2 billion that Peter Dutton's Liberals are ripping out of Victoria. It might be April Fools' Day, but this is no joke.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is an unfunded project. The question was: can Victorians trust the government to find the funding? I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very narrow question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course Victorians have seen this movie before. I will say one thing: Peter Dutton has come clean and said to Victorians he will do it again. We will not get our fair share under a Liberal government, because you cannot trust them.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): With the Premier stating she is working with Infrastructure Australia, documents released under freedom of information show that Infrastructure Australia wrote to the Suburban Rail Loop Authority as recently as May 2024 seeking information first requested in 2022. How can the Premier claim her government is working with Infrastructure Australia while failing to provide the requested information for years?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): Hold the front page. We are working with Infrastructure Australia. I will tell you this: in 2021 when we released the business case I sent it to Infrastructure Australia. We have been working with Infrastructure Australia. And I will say this too: one of the reasons why we are continuing to work with Infrastructure Australia is that we did not get a look-in before May 2022. We did not get a look-in in Victoria before May 2022 because the door was firmly slammed shut by Peter Dutton and his Liberal government, who refused to give Victorians our fair share of infrastructure funding. I say this: I will fight for Victoria's fair share, not take directions from Queensland, like the Leader of the Opposition.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): We have seen how Victorians have been very clear that they want and need projects like the Suburban Rail Loop and the airport rail project. They have voted for them. They want governments to get on and deliver them. Victorians know this because they are the projects our state needs. You might be a young person who wants to go to Monash University and study a course to get the career or the job of your dreams. You might be a nurse who wants to get to Box Hill TAFE, or you might be a commuter in Caulfield or in Bacchus Marsh who wants to be able to jump on a train and get to the airport with an easy connection through Sunshine. These are the projects that Peter Dutton's Liberal Party have said they will cut to Victoria.

Bridget Vallance: On a point of order, Speaker, Speaker Maddigan, in *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, said it is out of order to discuss a possible future government's policy. It is out of order to do so because it is hypothetical.

The SPEAKER: I am not sure the Premier had gone down that path, but I do remind the Premier of that ruling from the Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am referring to an alternate policy that directly affects Victoria and Victorians that has been released today. Of course it is 1 April – it is April Fools' Day – but this is no joke. If you cut funding to Sunshine, you are leaving passengers stranded at the station. You cut access to the western suburbs. You cut access to regional Victoria being able to connect to the airport. But also, worse than that, you are seeing cuts to jobs, workers losing their jobs and families losing those pay packets that they rely on every single week. If you cut these projects, you cut those jobs. If you cut these projects, you cut these vital connections. Whether you want to get to university, get to TAFE or be able to have a house next to one of these great transport connections, the message to Victorians today from Peter Dutton, backed in by his colleagues here in Victoria, is: we will cut funding to the projects Victorians want and need.

Suburban Rail Loop

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. How many new taxes, levies, charges and contributions will the government slug Victorians to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): Again I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to talk about a project our city and state need and to talk about how, under Labor governments, this is a project that needs to be delivered. It needs to be delivered because it is about

delivering those transport connections whilst at the same time undertaking the planning work so that we can have the jobs, the homes and the opportunities around these transport precincts.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very simple about how this is going to be funded using new taxes and levies here in this state, and the Premier has not gone anywhere near how many new taxes Victorians are going to be slugged.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question, but I do remind the Premier that it was a narrow question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed I was coming to the question. Clearly the Leader of the Opposition is not across the details. That is pretty clear to all of us. He is not across the detail. He has got to get his directions from Queensland. On the blower from Queensland: 'Hi Peter'; 'Hi Brad'. The point of talking about the precincts around the Suburban Rail Loop is that they will be places where value will be created.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I renew the point of order on relevance. It is very narrow, as you said, Speaker. It is about how many taxes Victorians will be slugged as a result of this pet project.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question, Manager of Opposition Business. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. I remind the Premier again of the narrowness of the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate the indulgence of the house to be able to explain to the Leader of the Opposition how value capture works. This is not new for Victoria; the city loop had a similar approach. Can you imagine Melbourne today without the city loop? Just imagine that for a moment. Imagine how the city would have ground to a halt, those opportunities that would not have been opened up around Southbank and other parts of the city. It is like imagining the city without the Metro Tunnel. That is the nightmare that the Liberals, state and federal, had for Victoria. That is their nightmare scenario that they had for Victoria.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. I ask her to answer the question: how many taxes will Victorians be slugged?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, we have seen repeatedly the Manager of Opposition Business use points of order as an opportunity to re-ask the question, which is completely out of order, and I ask that you rule her out of order and counsel her against doing it.

Sam Groth: Speaker, on the point of order, standing order 58 does require the Premier to be direct when answering the question, and at 1 minute and 45 seconds into the answer she has not gone anywhere near the question.

The SPEAKER: I remind the Premier that it is a narrow question. Come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am delighted now to also include the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in explaining how value capture works. As we have seen, whether it is projects like the city loop or whether it is projects like those in Sydney – those projects in Sydney that under a Liberal government received funding while Victoria's Metro Tunnel received nothing – we know that these are precincts where value is captured and where there is opportunity because you are creating jobs, you are creating employment and you are creating value. The value capture mechanisms advocated by former Liberal prime ministers, advocated in other states and advocated on previous projects here in Victoria, are mechanisms where it is only fair that those that get value from a project also make a contribution back to the project. This was spelt out in the business case that was released in August 2021, a business case that was sent to Infrastructure Australia –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, you have reminded the Premier three times about how narrow this question is, yet she still defies that ruling. I would ask you to ask her to come back to that question, the very narrow question of how many new taxes Victorians will be slugged.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, when we are bringing world-class public transport, like that which they walked away from with the Metro Tunnel, it is only fair that there is an opportunity to capture some of that value and to return that investment back into the project, all of which was spelt out in the business case in 2021.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): Infrastructure Australia’s evaluation of the Suburban Rail Loop states:

... any value capture revenues required after the project’s delivery may need to substantially exceed \$11.5 billion in nominal terms to offset the upfront cost in real terms.

Serious questions have also been raised by the Australian National Audit Office, the Victorian Auditor-General, the Victorian Ombudsman and even the federal Labor government. Why is the Premier proceeding with her pet project despite having failed to explain how it will be funded?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I understand that the Leader of the Opposition struggles with detail and struggles with the ability to understand when you have a federal government investing in projects in Victoria, because when the Liberal government were in power in Canberra, Victorians continued to be duded. This is a project that the federal Treasurer has said they believe in. This is a project that the Prime Minister, as recently as today, has supported.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and she has failed to say the federal budget has no more funding for this project. I would ask you to ask the Premier to be factual and to respond to the question.

The SPEAKER: There is a requirement for all members to be factual.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate that those opposite are embarrassed that their federal leader had to announce their policies via a press release. I know they are a little embarrassed. What else? What other secret announcements is Peter Dutton going to announce over the next few weeks that the Leader of the Opposition has not even told his party room about? I say this: in federal Labor Victoria has a partner – in the Suburban Rail Loop, in the airport rail project and in the North East Link Program, and we will continue to work with them.

Ministers statements: planning policy

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:28): Whether it is planning for more homes close to train stations and tram stops, introducing housing targets or more homes, including more affordable homes, through the development facilitation program, the Allan Labor government is getting on with the job. We will continue to say yes to more homes, like 87 more affordable homes in Springvale, right near Springvale station, and 61 homes in Brunswick near trains and tram stops. These are fantastic locations, and it just makes sense to build more homes there.

Just today I received an email from Aidan. He told me he has lived for many years in share accommodation in Richmond and is very concerned about housing affordability. He said:

The work you do via the Activity Centre housing reforms is fantastic ... These reforms will make a significant contribution to improving housing choice and diversity for people of all ages in a part of Melbourne that people love to live ...

... Yarra –

local government area –

is already wonderful to live in, and allowing more homes via this Activity Centre program will enable more people to benefit ... which is something I can't wait to experience. It will offer more wonderful things to do, eat, people to visit and experiences to enjoy close to home.

Thank you, Aidan. We absolutely agree with you. Whether it is through the train and tram activity centre program, *Plan for Victoria*, the townhouse code or the Suburban Rail Loop – Australia's biggest housing project – we are getting on with building more homes and more opportunities for Victorians.

It is April Fools' Day, and unfortunately we have all been victim to one long, cruel joke from those opposite. They say they support more homes, but in truth they just try to block them in Malvern, in Hawthorn, in Brighton and in Kew. Most recently the member for Polwarth blocked social housing in his own electorate.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition. She might want to look in Carrum.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister on her feet was only comparing and contrasting this government's action on housing with the inaction of those on the other side. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: I remind the minister that it is inappropriate to attack the opposition in her ministers statement.

Sonya KILKENNY: Building homes for Victorians is no joke. We know the opportunity that comes with a new home, and we will get on with building more of them.

Health system

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:31): My question is for the Minister for Health. Eighty-six-year-old Maria was brought to Mildura Base Public Hospital recently with a suspected heart attack. Maria was left on a gurney in the hallway for 6 hours waiting for a bed without being afforded the comfort of any visitors to hold her hand and support her even though her daughters and granddaughters were outside in the waiting room. Maria died later that night, scared and alone. Why are Victorians like Maria still dying in hospital hallways despite Labor's repeated promises to fix the health system?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:32): I thank the member for Mildura for her question. Firstly, can I extend my condolences to Maria's family at what is obviously a very distressing time. As has always been the case in this place, I am not going to provide comment on individual cases. I would suggest to the member for Mildura, if she is genuine in her concern, that she can approach me, as she well knows, just in my office or correspond with me, and I will ensure that we find out exactly what has happened. But I would say this –

Jade Benham: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was not about the individual case, it was about why Victorians are dying in hallways.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, it is well within *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, that an answer is relevant if related to a question's preamble. That was from Speaker Lindell. The Leader of the House was well within her rights to, as she did, console the family first and foremost, which is what the preamble went to. The minister has only just been on her feet for 35 seconds, so I urge that it be ruled out of order.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I was asked about a constituent of the member for Mildura, and as I have already indicated to the house, I take these matters very, very seriously. If the member for Mildura joins me in that seriousness, then she will share with me information outside this chamber, and I will get a response for her.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:34): Mildura Base Public Hospital has been crying out for a bare minimum 30 additional ED beds for years now. When will the government provide them so patients like Maria can be treated immediately instead of having to lie on a gurney for 6 hours?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:34): Once again I thank the member for her question. There are a lot of assumptions in the question, and I would make this point: here in Victoria we are the only state that continues to see all of category 1 patients that present to our emergency departments immediately. That is a fact that we are proud of. We are the only state that delivers that. Again, my condolences are with the family, and if the member wishes to really understand what is happening –

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, on a point of order, the minister is debating the question. It was very narrow about 30 ED beds and when they will be provided.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Again, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this question. There are a couple of important points that the member made in asking the question. One was that she underlined that Mildura is now a public hospital. That of course is as a consequence of this government purchasing the hospital back from the private providers – (*Time expired*)

Ministers statements: education funding

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:35): On this side of the chamber we know education opens the door of opportunity, and on this side of the chamber we are committed to opening those doors. Building Victoria's future means investing in the next generation. Building Victoria's future means building the schools, houses and transport networks that we know Victorians need. In January this year I and the Premier joined the Prime Minister to announce \$2.5 billion extra funding for our government schools, focusing on individualised support and mandating evidence-based teaching and more mental health support in our schools. The Allan Labor government's record speaks for itself. We are opening 100 new schools next year – compared to what they promised back in 2018, only four new schools – and with the 2200 upgrades that is about 90,000 additional places, or one AFL Grand Final's worth, or for the member for Nepean like the Australian Open's first week.

What Labor governments do, Liberal governments undo. Imagine waking up on 4 May with Sarah Henderson as the federal education minister and no department of education, because the Leader of the Opposition Mr Dutton last night said on *Sky News*:

... the Commonwealth government does not own or run a school, which is why people ask, 'Well, why have you got a department of thousands and thousands of people in Canberra called the education department if we don't have a school and don't employ a teacher ...

Sound familiar? A bit Temu Trump? We know well and truly what Peter Dutton will do. He will rip out the \$2.5 billion. Sarah Henderson –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, again, in *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, Speaker Maddigan was quite clear about being hypothetical in relation to future federal governments. It is out of order to discuss this and how it might affect the state, because it is hypothetical.

The SPEAKER: I do ask the minister to be mindful of *Rulings from the Chair* in relation to future federal governments.

Ben CARROLL: The only public school I am aware of that Sarah Henderson has visited was one to protest against gender-neutral toilets. We know what is at stake. An Allan Labor government and an Albanese Labor government investing in our future – building the transport, the housing and the next generation – or a Dutton Liberal government and the member for Kew focused on the non-government school sector making sure our needier schoolkids are left behind.

Nuclear energy

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:38): My question is to the Premier. Federal opposition leader Peter Dutton has proposed to put nuclear power stations right around the country, including right here in Victoria. What actions has the Victorian Parliament previously taken to ensure Victoria remains nuclear power free?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): In thanking the member for South Barwon for his question, I was just conferring with the minister for energy – I do think the standing orders allow me to yield the floor to the minister, but I will, through the minister, do my best endeavours –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Oh, come on now; I will answer it outstandingly. The advice that the energy minister has just provided to me is that I think it was in 1985, under a previous state Labor government, that this Parliament passed a bill to make Victoria –

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: nuclear free. Thank you, minister for energy. That is a piece of legislation that sat on the statute books for – what are we up to now?

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Forty years. Thank you again, minister for energy. 1985 – fun fact – is the year that the city loop was opened as well. There is a fun fact for you. The important point, though, is that it was completed in 1985. Museum station – 1985. I will show you the video. That is when it was completed.

Matthew Guy interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Bulleen lives!

Matthew Guy: You can't argue rail with me.

Jacinta ALLAN: I reckon I can. The member for South Barwon, though, has asked an important question. This Parliament, indeed this state, has already sent a very clear message about its view on nuclear energy in this state. In 1983 the bill went through the Parliament. The importance of this is that 42 years later we are now considering, when we live in a state and in a country where we are blessed with abundant sun resources, abundant wind resources, where we do not necessarily have to go down the path that other countries have gone down – the nuclear energy path – a proposition by the alternative government federally, by the alternative Prime Minister, to bring risky, expensive, toxic nuclear energy to this nation and to this state. That again is what is at risk here. This is estimated to be

a \$600 billion commitment from the federal Liberal Party. No wonder they are cutting funding to Victorian infrastructure projects; it is to pay for a \$600 billion nuclear energy thought bubble.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker – the same one as before, *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, Speaker Maddigan – the Premier is speaking in hypothetical terms about a future federal government.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. We are now in the caretaker period of the federal government, where both parties' policies need to be held up to scrutiny. It is entirely appropriate that the Premier of this state compares and contrasts what both of these alternative governments' policy impacts could be on this state.

The SPEAKER: I am going to take the point of order on notice because I think that this particular period in time may make a difference to how I rule on a point of order like that.

Jacinta ALLAN: Reflecting back 42 years, we can perhaps thank the legislators in this place from that time for providing us with a framework to say very clearly to a potential federal Liberal government what our position on this issue is. But what is also important here is that we have an alternative, and that is cheaper, more secure renewable energy.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:43): My question is again to the Premier. What plans does Victoria have in place to provide affordable energy for Victorians?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:43): Of course there are alternatives. It is a cheaper alternative, it is a securer alternative, it is a safer alternative and it is a more reliable alternative, and it is what this government has been doing for 10 years by investing in renewable energy. We have a proof point because Victoria has amongst the lowest wholesale energy prices in the market, the Victorian default offer. There are some draft findings that came out just recently from the national energy market. We have the lowest offer – hundreds of dollars a year lower than New South Wales and Queensland – for households and for businesses. This does not happen by accident; it happens with sustained investment, sustained policy determination and will. I want to thank the minister for energy and climate action, who has driven this work that is seeing Victorians have this alternative, a cheaper alternative to the \$600 billion nuclear thought bubble.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:44): I rise to update the house on how the Suburban Rail Loop will improve the lives of millions of Victorians by connecting them to health care. This side of the house knows –

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, I know you like to have the last word. That is your last word. You can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On this side of the house, we know that Victorians should not be forced to choose between world-class health care and the transport infrastructure and housing that they need. We must deliver both. We are about to open the Metro rail tunnel. This has been made entirely possible by this Labor government, and it has been entirely funded by this Labor government. It is going to connect both patients and our hardworking healthcare workers directly to the Children's, the Royal Women's, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and of course Peter Mac. And we are getting on with delivering the SRL because it is going to play a really vital role in connecting more Victorians to Box Hill Hospital, the Monash Children's Hospital, the soon to be redeveloped Monash Medical Centre and of course our \$577 million state-of-the-art Victorian Heart Hospital. And, do you know what, there is more because that is only stage 1 of the Suburban Rail Loop.

History tells us that without Labor governments at the state or federal level Victorians will get done over every single time, and Victorians know this. That is why they should be alarmed – and I know they are – about who really calls the shots in the Victorian Liberal Party, because it is now abundantly clear that that Queenslander, otherwise known as the Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton, is the one making the policy decisions and the budget decisions on behalf of the leader –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are an opportunity for a minister to countenance policy decisions of the government, not to attack the opposition. I ask you to ask her to desist from doing so.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to her statement without attacking the opposition.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The SRL will connect thousands and thousands, indeed millions, of Victorians to the health care that they need, and it will be duded by that Leader of the Opposition.

Hospital workplace safety

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:47): My question is to the Minister for Health. Last week terrified hospital staff and patients were confronted by a knife-wielding man in an emergency department. Why are security guards being cut in Victoria's hospitals when there are record numbers of code blacks and clinicians that are being threatened and assaulted?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:47): Firstly, I reject the premise of the question. Our security teams in our public hospitals play a very important role in keeping our healthcare workers and patients safe, and they are all very well trained in de-escalation. Their job there is to ensure that we have working environments that are safe and secure and where Victorians can get the health care that they need. We take the issue of occupational violence very, very seriously because, you know what, unlike those opposite, we listen to healthcare workers. We work with their industrial representatives –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very narrow about why security guards are being cut in public hospitals.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Health is answering the question and is being relevant, but I do remind the minister not to attack the opposition.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Of course this is a very serious issue, and it is why we are focused on a range of initiatives that are aimed at increasing the reporting culture in health services so that we are focused on prevention, early intervention and post-incident response.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question is on why security guards are being cut, not why a high number of incidents are being reported by staff.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, from page 155 of *Rulings from the Chair*, on relevancy: a minister should relate remarks to the questions asked. The question went specifically to occupational violence and security guards, and the minister has been answering that completely and utterly frankly.

The SPEAKER: The minister answered the question at the outset. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Having asked a question about occupational violence, you would think that those on the other side might be interested in listening to the response, but clearly that is not the case. In terms of the work that we have done, it includes occupational violence training for all of our frontline healthcare workers. We have introduced the world-leading Safewards program, and we have also provided de-escalation training for a thousand frontline healthcare workers in consultation with health services, with peak bodies and with WorkSafe Victoria.

In relation to the very disturbing incident at the Alfred hospital, can I say thank you to the Minister for Police, because my advice is that police immediately attended and an individual was removed from the premises. Thankfully no patients or staff were injured during this incident. Once again I want to thank our healthcare workers and the police for dealing with this situation so quickly.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is about a horrific situation –

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan will resume her seat. There is no point of order.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:51): Security guards are frontline hospital workers that protect patients, nurses, doctors and other hospital staff from violence. Minister, you promised no frontline job losses in Labor's razor gang cuts to Victorian health services, yet in major Melbourne hospitals security guards have been cut in their numbers by 50 per cent. Why are security guards not considered frontline hospital workers?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:51): On the question, I note that standing orders also require that questions must be factual, and the member for Lowan is just making things up, quite frankly.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, responding to a question is not a time to attack the opposition. Victorians want answers. I encourage the minister to address this.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Health to come back to answering the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I want to take this opportunity again to extend a big vote of thanks to all of our healthcare workers, including the security teams who work with our healthcare workers to protect the safety of our workers and indeed our patients.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance: I do care, Minister for Health, which is why I am asking the question. I care.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Lowan.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I will take the opportunity once again, maybe without interruption, to say a big thankyou to –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the question is very specific about why Labor does not consider security guards frontline hospital workers. I ask you to bring her back to the question that was put.

The SPEAKER: I cannot direct the minister how to answer a question. I remind the minister that it was a very tight question and to come back to the question, but I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Again I thank our security teams for all the work that they do. They are highly valued members of our healthcare teams.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:53): This morning I woke up to what I thought was a pretty ordinary April Fools' prank from the federal opposition leader, but sadly it was just more of the same from them – short-changing Victoria, ripping billions out of infrastructure projects across this state. It is groundhog day. Let us be clear. The Liberals' announcement today means cutting the Suburban Rail Loop, with its 8000 jobs and 70,000 new homes and a much-needed rail link to two of Victoria's biggest universities. It means cutting half a billion dollars from airport rail, ensuring that it cannot be delivered, and this includes cutting works at Sunshine, which would effectively delay Melton electrification by about 10 years.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I know that you said you would take this into consideration further, but in *Rulings from the Chair* as they stand, page 156, former Speaker Maddigan was quite clear that it is out of order to discuss how a possible future federal government might affect the state, because it is hypothetical. I ask that the minister cease until you have considered it further.

The SPEAKER: I will be seeking advice, given the timeframe that we are in, in relation to that ruling. The minister to continue without attacking the opposition.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: My opening must have been pretty good if the member for Benambra wanted a ciggie. In contrast, the Allan and Albanese governments have invested \$4 billion to get on with delivering works at Sunshine. These works are the first stage of Melbourne Airport rail and the first stage also of Melton electrification. They will reconfigure one of the most complex rail junctions in our network and make Sunshine a transport superhub. It will separate tracks to create dedicated suburban, regional and freight paths, creating capacity for extra services and boosting reliability while we are at it. And if you do not do the full Sunshine works, you leave people across the west cramped, congested or simply stranded on the platform. It beggars belief that under Dutton's plan there would be no extra services to Melton or Wyndham Vale, one of the fastest growing regions in our country. Dutton is treating Victorians like fools, and the Victorian opposition leader is cheering him on from the sidelines. Dutton's track record is crystal clear – 10 years of ripping off Victorians – and he is promising to do it again.

Constituency questions

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:57): (1070) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and Minister for Victims. Recent crime statistics for the Murrumbidgee Peninsula reveal alarming increases: a 28.7 per cent rise in total criminal incidents, a 51.7 per cent surge in burglary and break-and-enter offences and a 45.7 per cent increase in theft. These figures have left many residents in my electorate who have been victims of crime feeling vulnerable and concerned about their safety. It is clear that the Labor government does not take this issue seriously, with new bail laws not even as strong as they were 12 months ago. What action will the minister take to support victims of crime in my community who have suffered at the hands of this government's weakened bail laws?

Cranbourne electorate

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:58): (1071) My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, how many families in my electorate of Cranbourne have benefited from our government's school saving bonus? With winter approaching I know many families will need some new winter uniforms, and I would like to take the opportunity to encourage all of the beautiful families in my electorate to make use of the \$400 for just that. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank our business managers, our school support staff and anyone who has been administering the school saving bonus for their amazing work. I very much look forward to the minister's response, and I say how terrific it is to have such great school support staff.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:59): (1072) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Police. The *Red Cliffs and Carwarp Community Plan 2023–2028* highlights growing concerns about crime, safety and a lack of police presence in Red Cliffs, Merbein and surrounding communities. Residents have reported feeling increasingly vulnerable, yet the Red Cliffs police station remains severely understaffed, operating with only five officers instead of the required 10, and local officers are frequently redirected to Mildura. We understand that Victoria Police are under enormous pressure, with around 1200 vacancies statewide. The Mildura region alone is under-resourced by 54 officers, and this chronic shortage is directly impacting community safety. Will the minister commit to urgently addressing police shortages in Red Cliffs and Merbein by allocating more officers to these towns,

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ensuring stable, long-term policing structures, rather than leaving regional Victorians without the frontline protection they deserve?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:59): (1073) My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the Victorian government doing to encourage, support and sustain more women to join the state's incredible emergency service organisations? On 8 March it was an absolute pleasure to celebrate International Women's Day here in Parliament by inviting our local first-responder women for a well-deserved luncheon and celebration, including Acting Senior Sergeant Jessica Kelly from Merri-bek and Moonee Valley police area command; local team manager and paramedic Sarah Taylor and founding virtual emergency department paramedic Amanda Thornton, both of whom work across the Oak Park and Preston ambulance stations; leading firefighters Katherine Dunell and Cara Barker, keeping us safe across the north-west; and SES Fawkner unit controller Goldie Pergl and deputy unit controller Mandy Opie. The day was a wonderful chance to celebrate the amazing contributions local women make 24/7, 365 days per year, keeping our community safe across Merri-bek. It was a great event, joined by the member for Preston and the member for Broadmeadows, and we had an excellent discussion around the issues facing women in emergency services, including shiftwork, rostering, access to child care and many other issues.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (15:01): (1074) My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Mental Health. When will the minister properly fund drug rehabilitation facilities, including outreach services, to deal with the enormous drug problems plaguing my local area? In Chapel Street and surrounding areas like Prahran Square illicit drug use is ongoing and confronting. Users blatantly inject drugs in public, drug dealers openly ply their trade up and down the street and overdoses are common and stretch the resources of our overworked paramedics. These people need treatment to help them kick their addictions. Just as importantly, local residents, traders, shoppers and tourists need some respite from this ongoing nightmare in our area, with used syringes littering the streets. Properly funded drug rehabilitation services would assist addicts and help return Chapel Street to its former glory as Melbourne's premier shopping and entertainment strip.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:01): (1075) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place. Minister, when can residents in my electorate expect to see designs for the brand new Sunbury TAFE? As the minister well knows, recently this government was able to appoint Spowers Architects as the design lead for what will be a significant and important \$25 million investment to TAFE within our local community. This builds on commitments made in Melton and of course the recently opened Broadmeadows. This is a very warmly welcomed project in my community, and I know that the important work is now being done with Kangan to ensure that it is a fit-for-purpose facility. There is great excitement within the local community about this project, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:02): (1076) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Friends of Merri Creek and the Nature Glenelg Trust have proposed the Wallan Wallan regional park, including restoring Herne Swamp to a wetland, at the head of the Merri Creek near Wallan. Without the park, ongoing suburban development in the area will increase stormwater run-off, erosion and downstream flooding and turbidity in the Merri Creek in my electorate. Housing development does not need to come at the expense of green open space, native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Many of my constituents have worked for years to restore the Merri Creek's habitats, and they want the state government to support this crucial rehabilitation work by protecting the land upstream. When will the

government apply public acquisition overlays to enable the creation of the Wallan Wallan regional park?

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (15:03): (1077) My question is for the Minister for Education. How many families in the Lara electorate are benefiting from the school saving bonus? This \$400 bonus has been so well received by families in the Lara electorate. I know that many families have taken advantage of it to date and have spent it on things like uniforms as their children are going back to school, textbooks, camps, excursions and other activities. With the cost-of-living crisis, we know that many families are doing it tough, and this \$400 goes such a long way to help families in the Lara electorate with those extra costs that are required for going to school. I look forward to hearing from the minister about how many families in the Lara electorate are benefitting from the school saving bonus.

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:04): (1078) My question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme. Will the minister advise me when patients will start being reimbursed their costs within her department's own six- to eight-week promised timeline? VPTAS was set up to assist people, but like most things in the Allan government, it failed to do so in a timely manner. People, many of them pensioners, are shelling out their own money on the promise they will be reimbursed and months later are still chasing their money. One regional support service, which often pays costs up-front for financially strapped patients, is now owed almost \$300,000 dating back to October. VPTAS reimburses regional Victorians for accommodation and travel expenses if they go more than 100 kilometres one way for specialist medical care, but this government is refusing to fund that money in a timely manner, and that is unacceptable and unconscionable.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:05): (1079) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children in the other place. How are the Allan Labor government's kinder kits benefiting children in my electorate of Mulgrave? I understand that many families are doing it tough at the moment, and the last thing that they should have to worry about is the cost of early learning materials for their young children. The kinder kits complement the Allan Labor government's free kinder initiative in saving families up to \$2600 a year whilst ensuring that all children have the chance to engage in education from an early age and fostering a lifetime of learning. Yesterday I visited Columbia Park Preschool and saw the joy on the children's faces as they opened and played with their kinder kits. These kits are packed with fun items, and alongside the Parliamentary Secretary for Children I had the pleasure of exploring the toys, from a jumping frog game to excellent stories by Australian authors.

Bills

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:06): I am delighted to continue my contribution on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, which was interrupted by question time. I was saying just before question time that the member for Footscray was very critical of the member for Polwarth's contribution. I thought it was very detailed and very thorough, and he also spoke about both sides of this bill. He certainly spoke about builders – we do not want dodgy builders and we certainly want to support those who have been ripped off by dodgy builders – but his contribution was very level-keeled and I think very even on both sides. The member for Footscray tried to point out that he spent his whole time talking about wanting to support dodgy builders, and that is not the case on this side of the house. We will not stand by as Labor turn their back at every

turn and introduce policies that make it more difficult to own a home, more difficult to rent a home or more difficult to put a roof over your head. Whether it be in regional Victoria or metropolitan Melbourne, the same problem applies.

We know that the bill's intention is to rectify unresolved defects. We have seen companies like Porter Davis and others go broke. They have left home owners absolutely high and dry, and we want to see that that does not happen again. Certainly, some of those were without insurance and some cases were just poor workmanship. Yes, we need to protect purchasers and we need to protect those who are building a new home, because for many of them it is, quite rightly, the biggest investment of their life, and I get that. But there has to be that balance of protecting the purchaser without demonising the builders, and that is what this bill is doing in some circumstances.

Without builders there is no housing industry, and we all know that. The Victorian Labor government is just making it easier for builders to want to build interstate and investors to want to invest interstate, and purchasers are now looking interstate because of the policies that continually get introduced by this government. It is one thing to want to stamp out dodgy builders – I get that – but at the same time we have to protect the builders who are doing a good job and are providing the homes for people in Victoria. I am all for protecting those purchasers, but not at the expense of the building industry, because the building industry is the lifeblood of Victoria's economy.

This bill, like many others – like the rental providers bill that we had earlier this year, the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2025 – claims to protect purchasers, but in fact in the long term it will make life more difficult. It was the same, as I say, with previous bills. It was claimed the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill would protect renters, and that is great – we want to protect renters as well as purchasers – but with more and more protections, in fact in the long term it will actually make it more difficult for this industry, and Labor knows this. They know that there are long-term effects. They just want the short-term sugar hit to try and be seen to be protecting the battler and looking after the underdog, but at the end of the day long-term damage is being done to the builders. We will see those builders migrate interstate because of the policies that are being introduced by this government, and at the end of the day the purchaser will pay the price and all Victorians will pay the price.

This bill also establishes a new Building and Plumbing Commission, or BPC. It has a fancy new name, but it has the same old, tired personnel; it is the Victorian Building Authority, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and Consumer Affairs Victoria. There are no changes to quality control, no guarantee of dispute resolution and no extra monitoring, just an extra stick to whack builders.

It is not just me and it is not just the opposition that are talking about this. The Master Builders is the leading agency in this industry, and here is a quote from Master Builders Victoria:

While MBV supports strong consumer protections, these changes risk unfairly penalising reputable builders while failing to target the real issue – non-compliant operators who evade responsibility. MBV is actively engaging ... to advocate for a fairer and more balanced approach, including reforms that protect consumers while ensuring builders are given a just and reasonable process to respond to complaints.

This is the Master Builders screaming out to be listened to, to be heard and to be consulted – not just the government saying, 'We've written to the Master Builders, we've told them this is what's happening and that's our consultation.' Clearly there has been no genuine consultation with Master Builders Victoria.

Another concern in this bill that I am very concerned about is the 10-year period for defect claims. Consumers are able to lodge defect claims against builders for up to 10 years without a clear definition of what the word 'defect' can mean and without obligations for consumers to raise concerns and issues in a prompt and timely manner. This will lead to ongoing uncertainty and will lead to fewer builders and increased costs, and we know that is the case. Again going back to the Master Builders Association

of Victoria, they want more understanding around the definitions of 'defect' and 'serious defect'. They go on to say:

We consider these need to be refined and narrowed down. An appropriate method for doing this is to note in the Bill – "as prescribed in the Building Regulations" ...

That definition would actually help because a defect is defined as 'anything that is not structural'. It is quite outrageous that currently it is two years to get a defect completed. I heard from those on the other side like the member for Footscray talking about people who do not get their defects fixed, and I want to see that changed. But changing it from two to 10 years is not going to change what is going on currently. Those dodgy builders will remain dodgy builders, and if they are not going to fix a defect in two years, increasing it to 10 years is not going to change anything about the defects. It just makes it a more costly operation for those going long term, and that will have to be built into the price of a new house.

The member for Polwarth also mentioned monopoly insurance. As we know with other state government insurers like TAC and the Victorian WorkCover Authority, there is a strong concern that bureaucratic costs will not be capped, premiums will steadily increase, compliance costs especially for small builders will become burdensome and premiums will be at risk of becoming a new tax. The new BPC, the Building and Plumbing Commission, will be able to use the need for their insurance as a powerful lever to insist on certain actions and behaviours from builders that could be unfair or unreasonable, particularly during an unresolved dispute. As I say, if the nanny state continues here, builders will continue to leave Victoria if these policies continue to be introduced. We know we have a housing crisis. That is something we all agree on, on both sides. We do have a housing crisis, and with these policies, although we know the intention, the bill certainly does not solve what it is trying to solve.

Another major concern is the developer bond scheme. The intention again is builders being responsible for their work. But the mechanism does not fit with existing accountability structures, and there is widespread concern about the 2 per cent bond scheme. The 2 per cent bond scheme will just add a further 2 per cent onto the cost of the building, particularly when 2 per cent is paid before the certificate of occupancy. It would be more sensible to pay that 2 per cent after the unit has been sold, and that would be more practical. Rather this is another up-front cost by the builder. You would have to be blind Freddy to not understand that that cost will just be incorporated into the build, and it will make building more and more expensive. There is a list, which I do not think I am going to get time to go into today, of costs and associated costs that are going to increase the cost of a build anywhere between \$23,000 and \$35,000: the developer bond scheme, the first resort warranty insurance, compliance and documentation, increased inspections and extended liability. That could be anywhere between \$23,000 and \$35,000, as I suggested.

As I say, it is not just the opposition that is concerned about this bill. MBV, Master Builders Victoria, and HIA both condemn the proposed new building legislation as unfair and unworkable. They go on to say:

Master Builders Victoria (MBV) and Housing Industry Association (HIA) have issued a united rejection of the Victoria Government's proposed new building dispute resolution legislation, describing it as 'unfair and unworkable'.

The Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections 2025) Bill, which was introduced into Parliament ... is intended to better protect consumers, but MBV and HIA say while the intent is laudable, the impact of the proposed changes goes way beyond protecting consumers and will unfairly punish reputable builders with hasty and misconceived definitions and powers.

Although we all want to see dodgy builders get thrown out of this industry so our new purchasers are protected – we get all that – it is criminal to see what we are going to do to the good builders, the builders who do a good job in Victoria and support the building industry. It is really important to get behind those builders and not demonise them as this government seems to be wanting to do.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:16): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise in favour of, and make a contribution on, the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I do so, unfortunately, with a whole bunch of experience from dealing with constituents in Tarneit that have been caught up in the very thing that this legislation is aiming to stop. Unfortunately the great Australian dream of owning your own home, building your own home, has far too often turned into the great Australian nightmare. It certainly has for a number of hardworking families in my electorate of Tarneit.

I have listened to the couple of contributions prior to me. I listened to the member for Polwarth sort of ramble on for half an hour about protecting the industry, about making sure that we protect the industry. Protecting the industry from who? From hardworking families that have been put out of pocket, that have had their dreams destroyed by dodgy builders and unscrupulous activities that have made their dreams absolute nightmares? I say to the member for Polwarth, I know who those on this side of the house stand with and that is those hardworking families that have had their dreams destroyed by dodgy builders. The member for Polwarth and the opposition have made clear to the Victorian people who they stand with, and it is not hardworking Victorian families.

The member for Ovens Valley, just prior to me speaking, went on at length about the Allan Labor government and this legislation demonising builders – trash, just absolute trash from the member for Ovens Valley. Nobody on this side is demonising builders. Let me just say, if you are a builder doing the right thing and delivering the product, the house, that you have been paid to deliver, you have nothing to fear. There should be no dramas. These are incredibly important consumer protections, and to say that introducing them and supporting Victorian families is demonising builders, I will repeat, is just trash.

It is frankly astounding that I am standing here and making this contribution whilst those opposite move a reasoned amendment – ‘Oh, we understand there’s an issue, but here is this reasoned amendment, so just do nothing’ – like we have not consulted with the industry. The member for Ovens Valley said that we have not consulted with Master Builders Victoria. I guarantee that we have. What a surprise that the master builders association does not like this legislation. Who would have thought that?

It is astounding that the opposition stand here today in opposition to this legislation and in opposition to supporting Victorian families. It is astounding in itself why you would side with dodgy builders instead of Victorian families, but it is also astounding because of the enormous 180 that the opposition have done on this issue, on this piece of legislation, in the past decade. This is a party that in 2013 looked to introduce legislation that looked very similar to this. When the Liberal Party room in Victoria were able to find some values, when some of them had some values, they planned to introduce legislation that looked very similar to this. In fact at the time the member for Bulleen and his Liberal colleagues promised the reforms would provide fairer, quicker and cheaper resolution of disputes, which sounds pretty similar to this piece of legislation to me. Yet, as we unfortunately typically see with the Liberal Party in Victoria, they got cold feet and the Napthine Liberal government at the time pulled the bill from the legislative program.

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Yes, perhaps. So in 2013, a fantastic time in Victorian history, the then Liberal government decide to actually do something with the gift that is government over four years – because I am not quite sure that they achieved much else – so they find some values, they find some morals and then at the last minute they pull the legislation, because they do as they always do, and they do not side with Victorian families. We could go through several examples of those who they choose to side with instead of Victorian families, but in this instance they side with dodgy builders instead. Can you imagine that? You have got a situation where not all but a very small minority of builders out there are doing the wrong thing, and instead of putting in robust frameworks through legislation to help Victorian families and to protect them and to protect their investment – the largest investment

that they will ever make in their lives – you walk in here, you move a reasoned amendment to do nothing and you oppose the legislation. It is utterly shameful, yet we should not be surprised.

The other thing that makes the position of the opposition quite astounding, frankly, is that just last year the Leader of the Opposition the member for Berwick, the new –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Dylan WIGHT: They do not like the truth, do they? How about instead of calling quorums every time things get slightly uncomfortable, you come in here and you support working Victorian families rather than dodgy builders? How about that? The glass jaw of those opposite – every time things get a little bit tough, they either call a point of order or they call a quorum. How about you support working Victorian families instead of dodgy builders?

As I was saying, the part-time Leader of the Opposition just last year shared in the chamber that he himself had been a victim of a system that unfairly penalised consumers:

In 2000 my wife and I built our first house, and we built through a builder called Warburton Homes. About halfway through that construction Warburton Homes went into liquidation. It was a challenge.

He goes on:

... it puts you in a position of saying ‘Can I or can’t I afford this ...

Well, Leader of the Opposition, I would say that so many Victorian families, like the families in Tarneit that have been caught up by these unscrupulous acts and so many Victorians, do not have the money, cannot afford this and do not have the money to get themselves out of this. Now, you may. That is a very fortunate position for the Leader of the Opposition to be in. But I implore him and I implore those opposite to side with hardworking Victorian families that have been caught up by dodgy builders instead of siding with the dodgy builders themselves.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:26): I am pleased to rise today to talk on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, and yes, from the outset, we do oppose this bill absolutely 100 per cent. What I do not like in the industry is dodgy builders. I hate it, and I have given this government solutions time and time again. Time and time again I have given the government solutions on how to get rid of dodgy builders out of the industry. It was interesting listening to the member for Tarneit, or the member for three-piece suits, as he is known, and all he talked about was ‘dodgy builders, dodgy builders, dodgy builders’. I am just wondering how much consultation those on the other side have actually done themselves. There are 50-something members over there. I am wondering if any one of those members rang a builder and explained the bill to them and what the reaction was. I doubt they did. I wonder if any member on that side of the chamber bothered to take the time to sit down with Master Builders Victoria and the Housing Industry Association (HIA). I bet not one of them, not one member of their caucus, pushed back against the minister on this bill and started to question the unintended consequences of the bill – not one; I will guarantee that. This is the problem with those opposite; they are too scared to ask questions.

I have to reference a combined statement from Master Builders Australia and the HIA. The very first line says that MBA and HIA both condemn proposed new legislation as ‘unfair and unworkable’ and:

We all understand the need to protect consumers and have a fair, reasonable and respectful dispute resolution process, but this legislation takes a potential sledgehammer to the rights of builders ...

HIA said:

Where is the logic when under these new rules, a builder could potentially be at risk of being subjected to a rectification order a decade or more after they’ve finished the job?

Another one from the HIA:

And to add insult to injury, builders have no effective right to challenge the making of an order.

This is where the problem with this bill is. You have introduced a bill while you are reforming domestic building contracts. That is number one; that is the reasoned amendment. Get the contracts done first, consult the industry and then bring the building – really, really simple.

The other problem with the bill is the definition of a defect. The definition of a defect is very important here because if you go and look at what the definition of a defect is, a minor defect is any other defect that is not structural. Any other defect that is not structural can be claimed against a builder for up to 10 years. That is ridiculous when the warranty period on a lot of items that a builder puts in a house might only be seven years. So how do you hold him to account for 10 years when the warranty is only seven years on certain products? Let me give you an example. Let us say there is an easy hooker under a sink, it has got a leak and that leak has been there for three years. There is no onus on the owner to report that to the builder. After three years of a water leak the damage is more.

There used to be a system when I was building where we had an umpire. It was a very good system. Those opposite may not be aware of this, but there is a thing called the *Guide to Standards and Tolerances* within the building industry. It is literally the bible. What would happen if you got into a dispute with a client is that you would call what is now the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) – I cannot remember what it was called back then – and a qualified person would come out. They had the contract and had the standards and tolerances guide. The client was there, the builder was there and we went through the whole list. He would say, 'Builder, you have to fix A, B, C and D,' or, 'Client, you're off the planet; that's not right.' It was a really simple thing. You paid a fee, and they came out. We got rid of dispute resolution very quickly and very easily. This is probably what the government should look towards, not this legislation. A builder can end up in VCAT, and they talk about going to mediation. That is fine, go to mediation, but consumers can do silly things too. If a builder is being held to account for something that is not his fault and he goes to VCAT, his licence can be suspended. That is not fair. That is the unintended consequence of this bill. We say we want to get more people into homes. Well, what if you got a Metricon or a Simonds that is in that exact situation and they have their licence removed? They are two of the biggest home builders in Victoria. How are you going to increase supply? Yes, there needs to be protection for consumers; I get it every day of the week. There are dodgy builders; I get that. There are dodgy accountants, dodgy solicitors, dodgy doctors.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: There are dodgy politicians, as the minister just pointed out. So, yes, I agree, get rid of the dodgy element, but this bill is not a fair bill.

This bill will increase costs by up to about \$30,000 on a domestic house. We are trying to get people into homes. We are making it less affordable again. Let us go over the 2 per cent bond on high-rises. This is a brain fade by the government. They obviously do not know how it works. You have got a developer. He engages a builder. That builder will have a 5 per cent retention on him. It is 2.5 per cent for 12 months. He gets 2.5 per cent back on practical completion and then there will be a 2.5 per cent defect liability period for 12 months. He does not get that money back if there are outstanding defects. There is already a bond, but you are going to put on another bond, which the developer will put onto the price of the unit, which will cost the consumer more. The developer is not going to wear 2 per cent for two years. He will pass that cost on, and then hopefully he gets the money back after two years and he has made an extra 2 per cent. It is actually not smart legislation.

The biggest problem we have in construction defects is water leaks. This is where the government is going to the back end. You have got to go to the front end to fix the problem. If you want to protect consumers, introduce more inspections. It is really simple. Waterproofing in Victoria is not inspected. Those over that side might be shocked that waterproofing is not inspected in this state. When you are talking high-rise, the biggest cause of defects is waterproofing. So how about you bring in legislation

to inspect the waterproofing and make sure it is done right. It is done in New South Wales and Queensland but not in Victoria. Fix the problems at the front end and you will have less defects at the back end, but you cannot hold builders liable for 10 years on minor defects. It is absolutely stupid.

Yes, consumers need to be protected. I will encourage the government to go back into *Hansard*, have a look at my contributions and maybe pick some suggestions out of there – or ring me directly. I am happy to help if you want to protect consumers, but this bill will decimate the building industry. Here is another fact for those opposite: there are 20,000 builders in Victoria. How many do you think are practising? Out of 20,000, we have 6000 practising builders. We lost over 800 last year, gone into liquidation. They already carry a burden from non rise and fall contracts. They already carry that burden. They lock into that. If you start putting this on builders, you will have builders leaving this industry – no doubt. Every builder I spoke to has said ‘Stuff it, I’m out’, because you cannot enforce a warranty period that is greater than the product warranty.

All of a sudden you are going to get a belligerent or a vexatious client – and they are out there – and you get tied up with them and you have your licence cancelled over something that is not your fault, because sometimes, and this might be a shock to those opposite, not everyone tells the truth. If a client has dug a trench beside a garage and undermined the footing next to it, it is all overgrown with vegetation and all of a sudden that footing snaps, they are not going to tell the builder or the VBA that they did it, because they know it is going to cost them \$50,000 to fix it. They will drag that builder through the process – not his fault – and he will get his licence suspended until he can prove otherwise, and that is an expensive process.

If you want dispute resolution, go back to how it used to be done, not this method. This method is going to kill this industry. I have sat down for hours and hours on this bill. I have talked to stakeholders everywhere. This is not the solution. Think of something else. If this government passes this bill through, it will prove to me they do not understand the domestic construction industry. This is telling me the minister is absolutely clueless as to how to fix it.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (15:36): I rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I would like to acknowledge the minister and his team for the tremendous work that they have done with this bill, because this is a really important bill. At its heart this bill is about protecting Victorians – ordinary Victorians who have worked hard and saved hard to buy their home. It might be their first home for their family. Those Victorians deserve the protections that are offered in this bill.

That is why I think it is so disappointing to see the opposition today say that they do not support this bill. Instead of being on the side of Victorians, they are on the side of dodgy builders – the dodgy builders that this bill will protect Victorians from. I was astounded hearing the contributions from those opposite. All I can say is that I am shocked and that they are backing dodgy builders and turning their backs on the Victorians that they represent. This is low, even for those on the other side. And this current position is astounding considering that this is a party that promised to introduce legislation that looked very similar to this bill that we are speaking to today when they were last in government. As usual though, those opposite were all talk and no follow-through, because only Labor governments actually deliver progressive reforms like this that Victorians deserve.

I will quote from none other than a former Liberal leader and the current member for Bulleen in the chamber with us today, who as Minister for Planning promised to introduce reforms that would include a one-stop shop for builder practitioner regulation and domestic building consumer protection, better and more accessible insurance cover, improved oversight and discipline of non-performing builders and better and more accessible information for consumers. It sounds pretty good to me. I do not know what my colleagues think, but I reckon that would make for some pretty good reform in the building industry. He was very articulate in his former role as minister. In what seemed like a rare moment of political bravery for the Liberals, these reforms were looking to establish a domestic building consumer protection fund, which would replace the existing insurance scheme, and allow home

owners to claim from that fund for incomplete or defective building work where it was certified that there was a rectification order that had not been complied with. That is pretty brave politics, if you ask me.

At the time the member for Bulleen and his Liberal colleagues promised that these reforms would provide fairer, quicker and cheaper resolution of disputes and that they would deliver far-reaching improvement to the building system for Victorian consumers and builders. Again, these sound like fantastic and well-needed reforms, reforms that would really back Victorians and back Victorian communities. At the last minute the Napthine Liberal government got cold feet, pulled their bill from the legislative program and simply made these reforms disappear altogether, because when push comes to shove, those opposite just cannot bring themselves to support working Victorians. History is repeating itself today in this chamber. I am shocked, but as the member for Tarneit said earlier, we should not be surprised.

The member for Tarneit spoke on the Leader of the Opposition's experiences in building a home. This must have been awful for his family. It speaks again to this need for better protections for Victorians who are building homes and who are purchasing homes. Some of the Leader of the Opposition's colleagues have been even more vocal about the need for a building industry regulator in this state. Only six months ago, the member for Mornington stood up in Parliament and called for us to take exactly the action that we are taking here today. The member for Mornington said:

Sadly, the building landscape at the moment in Victoria is akin to the Wild West, failing to protect consumers from dodgy builders and developers ...

This government does need to take action. We have situations of windows that can barely open, mouldy ceilings, no soundproofing, leaky ceilings and balconies – in fact, balconies that have collapsed. The list of faults we see in new buildings in Victoria and across Australia is seemingly endless. This Labor government needs to take action, and I am pleased to say to the member for Mornington that this is exactly what we are doing; we are taking action with this bill today.

A Liberal member for the Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place has also spoken regularly about the plight of homebuyers who have been victimised by dodgy builders, and he said:

... the Leader of the Opposition and I and many members of the coalition have spoken to victims of collapsed builders. We have heard firsthand the gut-wrenching stories, and anyone who has heard these stories knows how important it is that the government takes action to stop them from happening to other people.

To the member for Northern Metropolitan Region: I could not agree more, and members on this side of the house could not agree more. This bill allows us to take exactly that action that the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Bulleen and their colleagues have so loudly supported in this place, and yet when it is time to put their money where their mouths are, they have refused to publicly support this bill and offer any kind of meaningful support to working Victorians, those people who have fallen victim to dodgy building companies.

This bill will amend a number of pieces of legislation to bring together reform that will back Victorians who are building their homes and who are purchasing homes here in our state. This bill will amend the Building Act 1993, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Subdivision Act 1988, the Sale of Land Act 1962 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 to implement major reforms to the building regulatory framework. This bill is the first step in implementing our government's building reform program, which aims to support Victoria's housing statement, an ambitious vision for our state – because on this side of the house, we recognise that we need more homes right across Victoria. That is why, through our housing statement, we have a clear target to deliver more homes in Victoria over the next 30 years, and this bill will be a big part of ensuring that that target can succeed and ensuring that we have the provisions to make sure that we are not just building more homes, but we are building quality homes, because every Victorian deserves to live in a quality home.

The bill will create a new integrated building watchdog, it will provide enforcement powers to fix dodgy work and it will create a new building insurance scheme to protect consumers. The new integrated building watchdog will ensure that Victorians have more protections and peace of mind when they are building, buying or renovating their homes. These increased protections will ensure that Victorians can have confidence in the sector – confidence that they will be protected and supported when they are buying or building their homes. The Building and Plumbing Commission will be a powerful watchdog that can oversee domestic building and plumbing industries across the state, and this bill creates this integrated regulator, bringing together all aspects of building quality control, regulation, insurance and dispute resolution into a single agency. Currently, regulators can only order builders to rectify poor workmanship before occupancy, and this new legislation grants the regulator greater enforcement powers, allowing it to intervene even after a building is occupied. If serious defects are not addressed, the regulator can halt occupancy permits and off-the-plan sales for apartment buildings. Essentially, if it is not fixed, it will not be sold. A great measure in this legislation is that these powers extend for up to 10 years post occupancy, meaning that builders will face significant consequences for unresolved issues long after a property is sold.

With the time that I have left today I would like to speak briefly on what we are seeing in the Lara electorate. The Lara electorate and the wider Geelong region are benefiting from our government's Big Build program. Our Big Housing Build would not be possible without the support of our amazing registered housing providers in Geelong. In the Lara electorate in particular I would like to focus on the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Cooperative. I have spoken about them in this house before and the incredible work that they do delivering and managing properties for Victorians and ensuring that their clients have quality homes, because that is something that they value, like we do. Thanks to partnerships like this the Labor government has made an investment of \$87 million into 281 social housing and other capital programs in the Lara electorate.

On this side of the house we understand that more homes mean more opportunities, and as I said earlier with the housing statement, that is why we have set that clear target to deliver more homes in Geelong over the next 30 years. In the Geelong community this means 128,000 new homes, and for those people who are buying those homes, I think they deserve the protections that this bill will deliver. They deserve quality homes, they deserve not to be ripped off by dodgy builders and they certainly deserve to be respected, and that is exactly what we are doing on this side of the house: we are delivering more homes and we are delivering the protections that buyers deserve. I commend this bill to the house.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (15:46): I do not really spend time looking at other people's speeches; I am happy to make my own comments, although I really would encourage Labor MPs who have been here 2½ years to be able to learn to deliver a speech rather than read it and maybe –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Oh, here we go. Come in, spinner. Here they come. Listen to them.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Fair dinkum. If you are going to insult me, can you be wise enough not to script it? If you are going to have a go at me, maybe you do not want to have to script it. Fair dinkum.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Did you use ChatGPT to have a go at me? Fair dinkum. You are proof that even when evolution happened it took a day off. If you have to script an insult at me, I tell you what –

Luba Grigorovitch: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, if the member could bring it back to the bill.

Matthew GUY: What a wise point. I have never heard of that one before. I was actually responding to somebody who had a go at me. Bloody hell. What have we moved into? We have moved into glass jaw territory, have we? Oh, professor. There you go.

Iwan Walters: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I do not think it is fair for the member for Bulleen to impugn other members when they were merely quoting his words – not attacking, quoting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): There is no point of order, but I ask the member for Bulleen to perhaps start on making his contribution.

Matthew GUY: Glass jaw city – glass jaw.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Can we do our job, please? Can you do your job, please? Fair dinkum. The bill that is before us –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: This is a joke. Can I have my time ceased, please? Can we commence a speech?

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, can we please bring the member back to the bill, rather than time wasting? If he has got nothing to say, sit him down.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Let us start, thank you.

Matthew GUY: If I can actually commence my contribution on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, what we have in this presentation is a bill to try and amend the current system, which the government has not bothered to actually look at enforcing. We have enforcement regimes in the Victorian Building Authority today. We have the ability for the VBA to do its job under current legislation. But what we have now is a presentation on a bill before the house, with scripted Labor MPs coming into this chamber and telling us that we now need to target small builders, but when quoting the government's Big Build there is no focus whatsoever on targeting the bigger builders – those volume builders who might be committing, in many ways, the offences that the members are coming to this chamber to talk about.

But there is no focus on that. This government, yet again, comes into the chamber looking at targeting small builders and small businesses and those who are seeking to provide a contribution to the economy. This government presents legislation not to reform the current system – to put in place models that the member for Mornington, the member for Berwick, the member for Narracan and even I have come to this chamber with this term, mentioning complaints and featuring defects on building. No, the government then says, 'We're going to create an entirely new bureaucracy that is going to target small builders,' a new bureaucracy that is not necessary and not needed if the current one does its job. If we had a minister that actually focused on doing her job, she would use the current VBA to focus on its enforcement mechanisms to make sure that builders are doing what is required within current legislation.

If the government cannot enforce its own laws and the statutory authority that has been designed to do that cannot be relied on to do it, why should we have faith that a brand new authority costing tens of millions of dollars is somehow going to be any better? Why would any consumer have any faith that a building defect in a decade's time being reported will somehow be able to be fixed? No-one will have any faith in that, because it is a ridiculous concept. It is almost as stupid as some of the contributions we have been listening to – stupid. It is a stupid concept to say that someone should be able to report their builder for a paint chip – I kid you not, a paint chip – because that is what a minor defect is in the current situation and there is no definition of what it will be in the new situation or if it will be any different. So if the door creaks or, as the member for Narracan said, there are paint chips, in a decade's time you can report a small builder to a brand new authority that is going to investigate

their conduct? Under what guise is that going to be at all provable, realistic, sensible and a good use of taxpayers money? It is going to be none of the above. It is a ridiculous concept.

The reason we oppose this bill, apart from the fact that we have legislation that should be properly enforced, is that if the VBA was actually told by the minister, 'Go away and do your job, enforce the current legislation, enforce defects under the current regime,' we might actually get somewhere and this might not be necessary. It also might take on some of the unionised big builders which this legislation is seeking to avoid. The government does not want to take on unions. That is what it is all about. It is about targeting small businesses all over again – and not just targeting them under the current regime, which is six years for major defects and two years for minor. It is going out to 10 years, as I said before, in targeting small builders. Goodness me.

The government does not want to invest in making sure that its current regulatory body does its job or that the minister does her job, because clearly she does not know how to. Instead they roll out yet another press release, and that is what becomes the announceable. It has got to be an announceable. You hear of the bizarre circumstance, scripted and stupid, from many speakers, who say that somehow this is going to be related to the government's Big Build. It has got nothing to do with it. One is about enabling and one is about enforcement and regulation. The fact that members in this chamber do not even know the difference between a proponent, an enforcement regime and a regulatory regime says it all. They do not know the difference. They are given cheat sheet notes and they read them in this chamber, and somehow that is considered believable. It is not believable.

I say it again: we oppose this bill because we have a regulatory regime that is not working but must be made to work. And it can be made to work, as the shadow minister has said, by getting current enforcement agencies to do their job – by enforcing them and reinforcing them.

I have rung the VBA multiple times under this government, particularly for someone to inspect building works at a property on Thompsons Road that should have been properly done. It was a unionised job, I might add. It is now full of water in the car space. No-one from the VBA has come out in 2½ years. If the VBA had been doing their job, maybe we would not be getting to a stage where in Parliament we hear ridiculous contributions that we have to somehow wipe it all out, create a brand new authority, start again, rebadge it, get another press release and get a whole bunch of sheep with talking points to come in here and say they know what they are talking about, when it is somehow to do with a regulatory authority that is a statutory authority that has an enforcement regime and somehow it relates back to proponents of private building authorities. It is just perplexing.

I say this again: it is comical to our side of the chamber that the government wants to rewrite laws that if they were enforced could and would work. But they are not being enforced and the government is not putting in the resources to enforce them. If they did that, we would have a lot less of these defects that the government is talking about and we would not need this bill.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:56): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I will try and just take the tone down a little bit because this is a very important bill. It is a bill that is dealing with consumer protections, and it is a bill that affects many families, individuals and other people who want to get into the housing market, both within the chamber and within the community.

I am reminded that the Leader of the Opposition himself has talked about his experience when building a home and the difficulties that he faced when the builder went into liquidation. Even though he found another builder, that builder also declared himself bankrupt before finishing the job. That must have been a very difficult process for the Leader of the Opposition to go through. I reflect a little bit on my own experience. We purchased a new home from a developer builder who, thankfully, did complete the build. We purchased it midway through the build, and they finished the build. But after the build there were some true defects that we identified, and the builder had just disappeared. In this case they had not actually gone into liquidation; they were just impossible to contact. Because they had not gone

into liquidation, the builders warranty insurance did not apply and kick in, so it was with great difficulty that we tried to get anything fixed. While that particular element is not addressed in this legislation – this legislation is more about the building side and particularly those builders who are not able to complete the build – it addresses the many consumer issues that are faced through that process.

Purchasing, building or renovating home is a huge, significant financial decision. It is probably the most significant financial decision that anyone will ever make in their life. It can be a long process getting building plans approved, dealing with architects and engaging with a builder and all of the subcontractors. It can take a long time. Many things can potentially go wrong through that process. As the Leader of the Opposition has seen firsthand and as we have seen in many other examples, construction companies across Australia have gone into liquidation or administration, leaving thousands of families in limbo with their savings gone and nothing to show for them except a concrete slab and some framing. Usually this will be at fairly short notice, leaving consumers who have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars into their dream home stuck and frozen. My office has dealt with a number of local residents that have gone through this in recent times, and it really is heartbreaking.

I am sure probably every member in this place has also experienced that same story, particularly at various times when we have seen builders make the news for the wrong reasons. One particular resident was constructing a townhouse for his family and was again totally blindsided when the builder went into administration. He was left \$800,000 out of pocket and was desperately working to confirm that his builder had adequate insurance. As I was mentioning before, even in my own case we were able to take possession of a new property, but it took us several years just to try and address the defects that were part of that building, even though it had been granted an occupancy certificate.

These are the issues that the government is responding to, and they are real issues. They are issues that affect people across every electorate in the state. As we have also debated many times in this house, we want to see home ownership continue in this state. It has always been a long-held dream for many Australians to get into the property market and own their own home. Along with the many other measures that the government is taking to help promote the development and building of homes, we need to have protections in place so that those who are purchasing homes can have confidence that their property will be built and also the necessary insurance and protections are in place in case something happens to the builder along the way.

I think that this bill really sets up that consumer protection element for the domestic building industry. It facilitates the creation of a new integrated building watchdog and gives it tough new enforcement powers to fix dodgy work. The integrated regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission, will take on responsibilities which are currently managed by a number of different agencies, including the Victorian Building Authority, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria, to create a one-stop shop for homebuyers, renovators and practitioners. This integrated commission will have tough new powers, including for enforcement. If the serious defects identified by the commission are not rectified, the regulator can stop the issuing of occupancy permits or the completion of off-the-plan sales for apartment buildings. In other words, if it is not fixed, it is not for sale. This is going to be really important, particularly for builders that are specialising in the apartment market. Obviously there are more and more people who are choosing to live in apartments, but the main goal of any builder and any developer is to bring that product to market and to sell their product; there is no point having a product that is not able to be sold. I think these reforms will help in that process, because what we want the industry to sell to market is a good product, a sound product that consumers can trust will be a solid home for years to come.

Going on a bit more about the regulator, our current building regulatory system is, as mentioned before, quite disparate. In the words of the commissioner of the Victorian Building Authority Anna Cronin:

At the moment consumers get ping ponged from one entity to the other ...

Consumers have a pretty horrendous journey. Even if it works well, it's a pretty complex journey.

That is why this legislation will seek to combine some of those functions of the different organisations into the Building and Plumbing Commission to try and coordinate and consolidate all of the different regulatory authorities and to try and assist consumers to get the product that they deserve. As I mentioned at the outset, this is an expensive product. Housing is a huge investment in people's lives. The least that we can do as a government is make sure that we put in the consumer protections that are available to us to ensure that people have peace of mind – consumers have peace of mind – when it comes to making that significant investment in their life. I think that this bill does hit the right note, and I commend it to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:06): I rise today to talk on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I think one thing that we can all agree on in the chamber here is that the building industry affects every single one of us. If we are a purchaser of a new house, we need protections and a guarantee that the home that we are signing up for is going to be delivered on time and on budget. I know that might be a little bit hard in here because that does not happen a lot in here, delivering things on time and on budget, but that is the protection as a consumer that we want, knowing that our hard-earned money going into our new home has some protections and some regulations around it, which is fine.

On the flip side also, for the builders or the people that are in the building trade – whether it be the builder, a plumber, an electrician, a tiler, a waterproofer, a concreter or a bricklayer who is put along on the journey – we need to make sure that regulations and laws that are introduced in this place do not have unintended consequences further down the track. I have seen it before, since I have been here in Parliament, with the shutting of the timber industry. One of the things that was not taken into consideration was the impact on the white paper industry at Maryvale. We need to make sure if we are changing laws and regulations in our building codes and our building industry that down the track it does not affect the builders that we need to build all these houses.

The government has an agenda to build a lot of houses throughout Victoria to give the people of Victoria the opportunity to own their own home. But as your good self said before, Acting Speaker Farnham, the builders that we do have in this state – and not only the builders; I also talk about the plumbing fraternity – are at a stage where, with more regulation and more legislation, we make it a harder place to work in and to protect the consumer. It really makes it hard for them to deliver a product which is affordable but also where they know, once that house has been delivered, that they are on a sling for 10 years, wondering if somebody is going to bring up a defect against them in a house that they have built that may not be their fault. If it is their fault and they have been a dodgy builder, as we have spoken about in the chamber, well, they should face the full letter of the law and the regulations. It is the ones who are the smaller builders, not the high-volume builders, that are maybe building half a dozen houses for the year who we need to make sure still want to work in the building area, so we can supply these particular houses for every single mum and dad that wants to build and buy a house in Victoria.

There are two sides to the equation. You can see merit in protecting the consumer. As MPs on the other side have said, we all get people coming through our doors and writing emails to us who have been on the side of a collapse of a volume builder. That is no good at all, but we need to make sure if we are changing these laws to protect them that we are not pushing passionate builders and tradespeople to the point where they want to walk away from what they love and what they want to do, and that is build and provide houses for the people of Victoria. If they walk away, and I am talking about the older generation who are probably in their late 40s into their mid-50s, they are thinking to themselves and weighing up these new laws that are coming in of having to have 10 years of insurances. It just costs money to be able to do that, and they have got to weigh up whether it is still worthwhile being in the building game. This core group that I talk of in their mid-40s to mid-50s are the ones that are training and educating our next wave of tradies in the building trade to be able to move forward and gear themselves up to take over and continue to build housing for Victoria – and we do need housing. Whether it be new builds or renovating houses, we need to make sure that we are

protecting everybody – not just individuals but protecting everybody across the board – because, if we have a thousand builders walk away in the next couple of years because it all gets too hard, who is going to build our houses? Then we do have a housing crisis. So we need to make sure that we are dotting all the i's and crossing all the t's and that we are not opening up Pandora's box down the track.

I have spent a lot of time – a lifetime, as have you, Acting Speaker Farnham – in the building trade, and when you do talk to builders they have got their materials bill to pay, they pay wages for their employees, they are paying insurances and they are paying WorkCover. It just keeps mounting and mounting and mounting. The pressure on the workforce itself is extending all the time, so we need to make sure that we do not overload that part in this legislation that we are putting in, and that there are some protections that the builders, plumbers and electricians can see are worthwhile.

I will take on the point for the Victorian Building Authority, and the VBA is the plumbing part for us. I was talking to some plumbers a week ago and talking about the VBA. The VBA currently do have laws with which they can prosecute plumbers, and they have people that go out and are meant to check workmanship. If they are doing drains in the ground, your sewer drains or your stormwater drains, the VBA are meant to go out and check those drains. It is a lottery, though. You self-certify at the moment as a plumber, but you can get audited and it can be a random audit. But I think every single plumber in regional Victoria probably thinks, 'You know what, we're not going to get audited,' and that is where the issue lies. We have the body there. We need to make sure they have got the funding they need to be able to go out and make sure that plumbers are doing the right thing and that, if on the building code side the building operators are under pressure, they may have someone show up and check their workmanship. Even things like having the right insulation in your walls – once you have got the plaster up, if they come around, they do not know exactly what is in the wall. So there needs to be a set process that we follow. We are trying to churn out so many houses, but we lose that governing body to make sure that we are doing it right.

Ninety per cent of the people are doing it right and can self-regulate; it is the 10 per cent, the cowboys, that we need to pull into line, but we need to pull them into line in a way that does not affect the good guys that are doing the right thing. We need to make sure that unintended consequences do not go so far that these good people walk away from the industry. One of the big things that I saw when I was plumbing and which was a huge cost to builders and insurance was the waterproofing when you have your bathroom put in. I think everybody would have watched *The Block*, where they have that mad rush at midnight when they are trying to waterproof the bathroom so it can be tiled over the next day. That is an incredible pinch point in the building industry, and it is not being done right at the moment. A lot do it right, but a lot just do not do it to the letter of the law, and that is where it costs the building fraternity, it costs the insurers, it costs me and it costs everybody, with insurance premiums going through the roof.

We are opposing this bill, not because we do not think we need to protect people building their first home but because we need to remove that unintended consequence and be level-headed right across the bill.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:16): I am very pleased to speak on these very important reforms, and I will acknowledge that it has been a very challenging time for the building and construction industry. No-one is seeking here to cast aspersions on builders who do the right thing. My parents had a number of renos over the years, and most of the builders did a fantastic job. We only had one who did not behave in the best manner, I have to say, and my mum had to get someone else to complete the job, so that was not so satisfactory. That was certainly very disappointing for her. But I should say, thinking about buying or building a new home is a massive decision, one of the biggest decisions you could make in your life, and at a minimum everyone would want to think it would be delivered in good working order and fit for purpose, so that all that money for costs, significant or otherwise, does not go down the drain. That impact on your dreams, the delays and all the ramifications that can occur, and also the negativity that can then relay back to the building and construction industry as a consequence, are not good for anyone.

I want to also acknowledge a point that has been raised in the chamber, quite rightly, that under the current circumstances – that is, pre this bill being passed – consumers are bumped around a number of bureaucratic bodies which were built with the best intentions but nevertheless make it rather complex and onerous in terms of being able to seek rectification when works are not delivered to a satisfactory level. I should say further, in seeking to allay some of the concerns that have been raised in the chamber, the integrated Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC), which is designed to be a one-stop shop, will have tough new powers, including for enforcement, which is particularly important because the imperative for this legislation – and I am stating the obvious – is that we really must boost confidence in the industry, and therefore consumers have to see that outcomes are delivered and that there are appropriate levers that do take effect and deliver the desired outcome.

Simply sitting on our hands and hoping for a better outcome is not going to cut it obviously, which is why we are bringing about – and I think there is a risk of diminishing the significance of these reforms – rather intense reforms for all the right reasons. I would have thought that expecting a builder to be able to deliver a fair and reasonable outcome in terms of what has been put forward to them as part of a contractual arrangement – that is, a new home – should be a reasonable request, and therefore expecting them to live up to that is not unreasonable, which would be the corollary or the counterargument there. Bearing in mind that it is, pre this bill being passed, a complex journey, one would certainly hope that those opposite would see the need at a minimum to make the pathway for Victorian consumers far more straightforward and fair to ensure that all sides – that is, the builder and the consumer – get the best possible outcome.

I note that there have been concerns raised in the chamber with regard to whether this would be too onerous for builders. I am going to zone in on a specific point, which is that it is alleged that the BPC powers to suspend builders with minimal evidence are effectively creating a regulatory system where building companies are guilty until proven innocent. Can I emphasise that is absolutely the opposite of what we are seeking or what the bill will give effect to. The BPC, like all regulatory entities, will be required to act with integrity, fairness and the expertise that Victorians rightly expect of their regulatory institutions. The bill also does not mean that the BPC will be able to make rectification orders against any type of complaint. In the first instance, the regulator will check whether an attempt has been made by the owner to resolve the matter with the builder. That is a really important and fundamental element in the process. Complaints will then be triaged and the regulator will undertake an assessment, which could include site inspections to determine whether the complaint constitutes noncompliance or defective or incomplete work. Any decisions made by the regulator can be contested by the builder at VCAT. I think we have to see the purposive element here rather than cynicism. It is fair and reasonable, though, in the debate for there be rigour and for these elements be queried in the chamber. I am not patronising that particular query. I am just saying that what the bill does is to stop VCAT and other arbitration bodies from being used as a delaying tactic by bad faith operators, and you can see the delicate nuance there. It is delicate but nevertheless important. The bill does not deny anyone due process. The bill merely tips the balance of power back towards protecting consumers rather than rewarding unscrupulous operators.

The other allegation that has perhaps been put forward is that the government is transitioning to a state-managed insurance system to kill competition and raise costs for consumers, allowing BPC to become an unchecked revenue-raiser once it is established. I am just putting that claim out there. I must say that is nothing more than spin. That is absolutely not the case. What is costly for consumers is hundreds of dollars spent on legal fees. We know that any legal processes, however correct and appropriate they may be, are emotional; they are deeply stressful. No matter what, when they enter a legal process, inevitably, nine times out of 10, it is going to be a pretty strenuous process for people to go through. What is costly for consumers is hundreds of dollars spent on legal fees, repairs, relocation and all the other perils caused by dodgy building work. First-resort insurance means that a registered builder can be held accountable for any defective or noncompliant building work, rather than these costs being passed on to all policyholders through higher premiums and to individual consumers through out-of-pocket costs. We know the danger in higher and higher premiums being worn by the many. If you are

looking at builders and their longevity in the industry, these can be the more onerous elements that certainly have been considered and factored into the reforms that we are bringing about today.

Another point that I have got just enough time to speak to as well is on the alleged claim of ‘Oh, how much have you consulted with industry?’ The Department of Transport and Planning have consulted with a range of industry stakeholders. This included Master Builders Victoria – and I know there are various opinions on this matter, and that is absolutely fine; that is what debate is about – the Housing Industry Association, unions and consumers. They have engaged consistently and in good faith with industry groups, and certainly the government will continue to work with and listen to industry stakeholders as the legislative process unfolds, but no apologies are going to be made on this side for standing up for Victorian consumers. At the end of the day, is it too much to expect a reasonable build for people? They put the good money in and have a contractual relationship. Is it not reasonable to expect a fair delivery at the end of the day, which is the new build that they have probably spent many, many years saving for? I would ask the opposition, when we are looking at this legislation, to revise their current position and think about Victorian consumers and think about the imperative to deliver on tougher laws and enforcement and to make sure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place so that we do not have the disappointing – and let me say ‘disappointing’ is probably understating it – devastating consequence when people put their life savings in and have their plans and everything in place, only to find that the build is not delivered in a satisfactory way.

That is not an all-encompassing statement. There is a spectrum of course when you are talking about defects in a build, and there have been the caveats, which I have listed to date, which protect the builder; they have mechanisms that they can undertake as well. So I would hope that in good confidence the opposition would give credence to the very valuable reforms that are being brought about here today in the interests of Victorian consumers, because at the end of the day it is better for the builders as well because their reputations need to be protected, and part of that is having appropriate mechanisms in place that give confidence to Victorians that this industry is appropriately regulated.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:26): I rise to make a contribution on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I guess at the outset the importance here is protecting the buyers of homes, because we have seen a lot of things go pear-shaped, and we have seen the government act not very quickly – in fact very slowly – and let things get right out of hand. The bill before us amends the Building Act 1993, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Subdivision Act 1988, the Sale of Land Act 1962 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998. There was an amendment, and I will come back to the amendment a little bit later because it is actually quite interesting the way that this amendment came about.

We all know that the system is broken and the system needs a lot more work to fix it. We have seen consumers that have been let down, by enormous amounts really. If we think about it, as others have, buying a home is a big deal and building a home is a big deal. For most people, that will be the biggest investment they ever make. They are parting with a lot of money, and they have to typically borrow a lot of money. That in itself is quite stressful, so they would like to know – they would like to be assured – that when things do not go right there are mechanisms in place to help protect them and, sadly, that has not been the case. We know the government has failed in this area particularly and, as I said, that system is broken and does need reform. It is an aspiration of people; people grow up and want to move out of home and buy their own home. People come from overseas and also want to buy their own homes. And so, you know, there is an enormous amount of investment in new homes and new suburban developments. We have seen people have their dreams destroyed through the collapse of Porter Davis and Montego Homes. With Montego Homes, I think there were 50 homebuyers that were impacted, and we had to call on the Premier again to try and extend the liquidated builders customer support payments scheme for home builder insolvencies. We needed to call on them to extend that because people were left high and dry.

We know the regulator has failed in its duties, and the government have seen that and have to act to do something. But they also want to crack down on dodgy builders, and it is important that we get the

enforcement and the regulation right as well, as we do not want dodgy builders in the system. Now, the bill itself does not have a lot of friends in the industry, and I will touch on the bill because ultimately we are going to have the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) being rebranded to the Building and Plumbing Commission. I note that when there have been independent reports handed down the government have said they want a more powerful watchdog with greater powers to tackle substandard building work. We certainly do need to crack down on that, but equally we need to make sure that we have an enforcement and a regulatory system that actually works. We need to make sure that dodgy builders are dealt with, as well as the regulator doing the job that it should be doing, and it is important that we have good contracts in place and a balance between the consumer and supplier.

There are a lot of disputes with building homes and renovating or all sorts of things that happen. We will all know of them. We have seen them, and we have probably been subject to them. Some of them are large and some of them are small. I think we just have to have a look at the annex to see some of the recurring issues that need to be dealt with out there – the constant leaks and the carpets that are just rotting because there have been some building defects. It is seeming to take a very long time to have those rectified. I am not privy to the discussions at the higher levels that may be looking at that, but I know that we have something at a larger scale. We could have something with blocks of flats that could be even bigger. In fact I have had something with a block of flats one time – one of the cupboards did not open because the design was poor and the workmanship was poor. But sometimes things can be small-scale as well.

I want to mention a few of the VBA failures, which must be addressed. There was an independent review. In 2023 the CEO thought things were not going quite right. She was new and she commissioned an independent review of the VBA, which was quite damning, by Weir Legal and Consulting. The complaints handling process by the VBA was exceptionally poor, and they found that there was unethical conduct. This is dreadfully stressful when you have people that are looking at losing significant savings, whether they are their life savings or not. We and they need to know that an institution, a regulator like the VBA, is there to help them. The concern that was uncovered was that they lacked empathy and they let people down over a long period of time. I do worry that with the rebranding, the rebadging, of the VBA there needs to be a huge cultural shift in the way they do business happening at the same time. I think the members opposite, whilst they might be saying that they are concerned about victims now, at the time let regulations slide and they were silent about that. So I think they need to take a good look at themselves as well, because when you have got a regulator not doing the job to support those that have been victims of shoddy workmanship, for example, or somebody becoming insolvent or even dying, it leaves them a bit high and dry. They need to have that protection in place.

I want to just mention the developer bond scheme. The second-reading speech referred to the new financial protection for consumers through the developer bond scheme for apartments with a rise in storeys of more than three. It is interesting that the second-reading speech had a different figure to what was in the bill, so we had to have the minister put an amendment today to match the two up. I have heard the members of the government saying that it was a printing error. You do not make a printing error like that. You send something off to be printed and it does not miraculously change a 3 to a 2 or a 2 to a 3. That does not happen; it is an error. The government obviously wanted to have 3 per cent, and they have been haggled down to 2 per cent. They have not done their homework, their due diligence, or dotted all the i's and crossed the t's. We know that they wanted it to be higher, but it is 2 per cent now. There are concerns that this is going to add 2 per cent to the sale price of properties, and there is concern that it has to be paid prior to occupancy certificates being issued.

I want to mention the defects and the warranty. It is pretty extraordinary to have 10 years. Ten years is a long time in anyone's book for somebody to come back about cracked grout, a door rub or a squeaky floor. Currently 'minor defects' is defined, but it should be defined here as well and it is not. I do not think that is good enough. We have heard earlier from speakers that warranties on products are not for 10 years. Warranties on products are for seven years, and really that should align, because

you are going to have unnecessary disputes about something that may be related to a product. We need to encourage and keep small builders in the business. We need do not want them to exit, because we rely on the small builders. These are small businesses as well. We do not want the dodgy ones, but we absolutely want to have those that are quite reputable.

I want to mention also what is going to be rolled into the new Building and Plumbing Commission. We will have the VBA and eventually the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and the domestic building dispute resolution. We have got a few issues with the VMIA, and I hope this all gets sorted out because essentially they were trading while insolvent a few years ago. They are currently in negative equity, and at 30 June their insurance funding ratio was 99.8 per cent. They need to be in the range of 100 to 144. They have had to have a capital management plan designed to help them get back into the preferred range. So whether or not they pull out the domestic building insurance operations as part of that capital management plan, that will help get them back on their feet. But there is a real concern here with the VBA. We have had a growth in domestic building insurance claims, and the premium itself went up in 2023–24 by 53 per cent. That is \$1500 on a \$500,000 home. That is on top of the previous year's 43 per cent increase. This is ultimately passed on to the insurers, and I am very concerned about the current rates by which these have gone up. I know that a year ago the operations of the VMIA had 1300 to deal with. They had 465 claims issued on the day Porter Davis went into liquidation. The Ombudsman and the Auditor-General have been involved as well, which is a concern.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:36): I am very pleased to stand here and make a contribution in support of the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. As the name suggests, this is actually about providing buyer protection, particularly for in most cases those that are buying new homes, who are often first home buyers and young people in our society. I am really very, very strongly in support of making sure that consumers – home owners – get the protection that they need in order to purchase a house, which is often the biggest investment anyone will make in their life. Also when we are talking at the moment of the sad state of affairs where there is not enough home affordability, we have many people who have been locked out of home ownership and are required to continue to rent, and of course rents are also going up at a rapid rate.

This legislation really is about providing protection for homebuyers, and it is about tipping the scales just that little bit further into the area where there is greater protection for those purchasing a house. I am a little bit confused, because I believe the Liberals are actually opposing these laws. There is talk about, 'There hasn't been consultation.' I listened to a lot of first home buyers and people that are buying new homes, because in the electorate of Thomastown we have got lots of new estates – Lyndarum, Ellery, Rathdowne and Amber estates – and those people are the ones telling me how terrible the experience is that they have had when purchasing homes because of the lack of strong protections around their purchases and their houses when they have a whole lot of different defects. They are not able to pursue builders and developers properly in order to have those defects rectified. As well, particularly when it comes to timely rectification, most of the power is with the builder or developer, who can drag out the complaints and concerns of consumers and home owners for years in the courts seeking reviews and not actually doing what the right thing is, and that is making good the errors and the problems and the faults that are in people's homes. So this legislation is about protecting the consumer and it is giving just that little bit more back to the consumer, where really in the past all the power has been with the builder and the developer, and the consumer has not been able to get many of the things fixed in their home that need to be fixed.

I know from talking to the local SES members in the area at a recent community event, they were telling me about when there are things like strong winds and flooding and rain, often when they are being called out to homes to help secure, for example, roofs that are not on properly or flooding because of drainage that is not working, it is actually a fault with the building of that house that is causing the consequential damage to that property. It is not just the weather event that may have started it, but the damage has really been caused by a lot of faulty workmanship and building.

This legislation is about trying to strengthen protections, and in a way the responsibilities and obligations are not changing for builders and developers under this legislation. It is more about ensuring that they have to follow through and carry through with those obligations and responsibilities that they sign up to when they are building a house for a homebuyer. This is what this legislation is about. There are four areas that I want to talk about that this legislation is changing, as I said, not so much to change the obligations of builders and developers but more about ensuring that they carry through on those responsibilities and obligations – for example, integrated regulation. Instead of having different areas and categories where people have to go to have developers or builders make good on the property that they have purchased – rather than having to go to, say, Consumer Affairs Victoria or to the Victorian Building Authority or to the plumbing commission – the idea of this legislation is to have an integrated regulator so the consumer is not being bounced between one authority and another. They go to one place, and it is that place that addresses their concerns and tries to assist and help with whatever the dispute is or whatever requirement the consumer has in terms of having faults and defects fixed within the property that they have purchased.

As I said before, it seems a little bit confusing that on one hand I believe the Liberal–National Party opposition are opposing this legislation, but when you hear, for example, the speaker just before me, it almost sounded like they were supporting the registration and strengthening of protections for consumers who are purchasing their home. While saying that they support that, they are also opposing and nitpicking at areas to look as if they are not letting down consumers, which we believe they are by not supporting this legislation, and using that as an excuse in their support for builders and developers. I know, for example, Acting Speaker Farnham, you raised concern about the building industry going under or crashing because of this legislation. If a builder is doing the right thing and wanting to build a good quality home before the person that has purchased off them, then they should not be afraid of this legislative change.

As I said, the integrated regulator is to ensure that people are not being moved from one place to another in order to get their problem dealt with and sorted out. The other issue is the rectification orders. The legislation we are discussing here is about giving more power to the regulator to issue rectification orders so that any problems, faults and defects have to be fixed. They could be made whether the person has already moved into the home or before then. There ought not to be a difference in terms of making sure that a builder or developer has to fix the problem of a new house, and that is not going to be a problem that happens just because a person has moved in for a day or two, but rather it is about making sure that the time a person moves in does not then mean that the obligations of the builder or developer are no longer there just because of that point in time.

When looking at other parts of the legislation, for example, there is the bond scheme. This is about ensuring that developers provide a bond of up to 2 per cent of the total construction cost, and that is there as a surety, just like a renter. If you move into a home and you are renting, you pay a bond to ensure that you look after that property, and any damage caused by you can be subtracted from that bond to have it fixed. It is the same thing with the developer bond scheme. If you build a house, you put a bond there so that if, after the home owner moves in, there is an issue and it cannot be sorted in other ways, the bond scheme will provide cover for rectifying that problem or that fault. Again, it is not a huge issue. It happens in other industries and in other areas of the housing industry, such as when renting. I understand that while there is not a time limit put into the legislation, that of course will happen within the regulations, which is the right place to develop things around timelines and the smaller bits and pieces that are required, whereas the legislation provides the overarching amount.

For too long there have been, and we have seen it over the last few years, too many things happen and go wrong in the housing industry that have caused heartache and distress for home owners. Whether it was the collapse of Porter Davis or whether it was the cladding that had to be rectified because it was a fire risk, those are all things that we need to make sure do not happen again.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:46): I too rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I note from the outset that this is a bill that supposedly looks to improve

consumer protection when it comes to the building of new homes. We have seen over recent times in Victoria, and particularly over recent years when I held the portfolio of Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability, the collapse of some major home builders here in Victoria, leaving many Victorians without their home and without their deposit which they had saved for for many, many years and had worked very hard to save for – aspirational Victorians looking to buy their own home – and left stranded, as a result of the collapse of these major home builders.

We have heard discussions today in particular about the collapse of Porter Davis, at the time leaving thousands of Victorians without their deposit or with half-built homes. This bill from those opposite appears to be the consequence of dodgy builders, not just Porter Davis but of course Hallbury Homes and Apex Homes at the time. Whilst we need to stamp out the practices undertaken by dodgy builders, what is often missed in the debate is that it has actually been a regulatory requirement and a legislative requirement for many, many years that these builders take out domestic building insurance when new home buyers looking to build their own homes sign contracts. That was not happening under the previous scheme. That was not happening under the watch of the Victorian Building Authority (VBA). That is because that organisation was a toothless tiger. It was not doing its job. It was failing to make sure that it was enforcing the laws that were already in place, laws that the previous coalition government put in place, in terms of making sure that home builders – those family companies and those large builders – made sure that they took out domestic building insurance when homebuyers were signing contracts.

As a result of the fact that the VBA was not doing its job under the watch of this government, thousands of Victorians were left with half-built homes, stranded in terms of how those homes would be completed and unsure of whether those homes would ever be completed. Increasingly what we saw was that many of those aspiring home owners were left with their deposits lost. There was no ability for them to claim back their deposits. It was only as a result of working with those families and working with those consumers that were left stranded without their deposits that the opposition was able to place pressure on the government to deliver a redress scheme for those homebuyers. Over that period I spoke to many, many families that had been affected by the collapse of these major builders – the collapse of Porter Davis, Hallbury Homes and Apex Homes – and the common theme throughout was the fact that the VBA and of course the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, which are the subject of the bill before us today, were not capable of doing their job. Time and time again we heard the fact that the VMIA was not processing the claims – that these claims were being drawn out and drawn out – and they could not even get a response from the state insurer.

This bill today looks to transfer the domestic building insurance operations of the VMIA and the operations related to that under Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria to the new Victorian Building Authority. The VMIA is an agency that has been in financial strife for many, many years. It is the agency that we have seen time and time again fail to deliver claims for Victorians. But it should come as no surprise that this is the case, because we have seen time and time again the fact that the VMIA has reported an operating loss – an operating loss last year of \$98.7 million – and on top of that the agency now has \$476 million in negative equity.

We on this side of the house know that that operating loss in particular is a direct result of the number of claims that have been put in to the VMIA as the result of the collapse of these major home builders, Porter Davis in particular. What does that mean for Victorians? What does that mean for consumers – consumers that, we are hearing from those opposite, are the people who should be the focus of this bill? It means that they are now facing higher premiums as a result of the VMIA being in the financial position that it is. We saw last year that in 2023 domestic building insurance premiums rose by an average of 53 per cent. On a \$500,000 home that is more than a \$1500 increase in the DBI premium. That is off the back of, just 11 months earlier, the government putting in place a 43 per cent increase to DBI premiums. So year on year, at a time when we have seen domestic building insurance be so, so important because of the collapse of these major home builders, the government under this Premier

is not able to manage the finances of this agency, and the direct consequence of that is we are going to put it back onto aspiring home owners.

Let us be very clear about the fact that these major home builders have collapsed largely as a consequence of this state's Big Build and the inflationary impact of that Big Build. When you have a situation of \$50 billion of cost blowouts on these major projects, the flowthrough consequences to the home building industry are on stark display. We hear regularly from builders trying to build homes about the fact that they cannot access affordable supplies and affordable labour. What does that mean? That means that it pushes up the cost of housing. Add on top of that that 40 per cent of the cost of a new house and land package in Victoria is taxes, fees and charges – 40 per cent, as a direct result of the government imposing taxes, fees and charges on new home and land packages on aspiring home owners here in Victoria.

This government likes to talk a big game when it comes to housing in Victoria. We saw their housing statement, released about 18 months ago, with its big target of building 80,000 new homes each and every year, 800,000 over the decade. Well, they have had to walk back that commitment. They have had to walk back the fact that they were going to build 80,000 more homes each and every year for aspiring home owners. But what was very, very clear in that housing statement at the time was that it mentioned housing affordability and home ownership once. This is not a government that actually believes in home ownership. In fact the former Premier, as we all know, said that he thinks that Victorians prefer to rent – that young people in this state do not want to own their own home.

What we know is that young Victorians do want to own a piece of this great state. They do want to own their own home, but they simply do not think it will ever be possible. We know the dream of home ownership is getting further and further out of reach because of this government. This government's answer to the housing problem is to put more taxes in place and to make it harder by increasing DBI premiums. Instead of actually enforcing the law, making sure that builders are doing what is required under legislation, under regulation, they mismanage it. They mismanage it to the point that it becomes the problem for Victorians, and insurance premiums go up.

It is no different when it comes to the enforcement of the VBA, and we have seen the terrible things that have occurred under the VBA's watch. Just a couple of years ago the VBA were doing inspections via iPhones. That was how they were making sure that the defects in Victorian homes were being managed and being enforced – through iPhones. This is an agency that is not delivering for Victorians and has not delivered for Victorians, and the answer from this government once again is to just change the name.

Victorians have absolutely lost any hope under this government of ever being able to own their own homes. Under the housing statement and under the various pieces of legislation that come into this place week after week there is nothing that is actually driving down the cost of housing in this state. In fact in the piece of legislation before us we see a 2 per cent bond on high-rise. That is the only thing this government actually intends to build, and yet again they are pushing up the cost. This government cannot deliver for young Victorians that want to own their own homes. The dream of home ownership in this state is absolutely failing under the Allan Labor government.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:56): As I said in my contribution on the government business program this morning, I have been looking forward to speaking on this bill, because in very stark contrast to the member for Kew in her contribution, I think it is a bill which addresses some of the profound concerns that residents in my community have about failures within the domestic construction sector, which many residents have shared with me. It is always interesting to see how many mothers and fathers success in this place has, and it is a revelation to me to find that the member for Kew and others are responsible for the work that this government undertook to ensure that people affected by the collapse of Porter Davis were able to get recourse through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) to ensure that they were covered and were able to access that insurance recourse. I think it is credit to the hard work of the then Assistant Treasurer and other ministers who

listened to advocacy from those on this side of the house and sought to implement reforms and changes which make a real difference to people's lives.

This bill I think is a good bill, because it will establish a stronger regulatory model to protect consumers. In doing so it will transfer oversight of domestic building dispute resolution to the Victorian Building Authority, transfer domestic building insurance arrangements from the VMIA to the VBA and equip the VBA with enforcement powers to order the rectification of noncompliant, defective or incomplete building work, including after the point at which an occupancy permit has been issued.

Acting Speaker Farnham, when you had your member for Narracan hat on I listened very carefully to your contribution, and I value the perspective that people like you and the member for Morwell who have worked in the construction industry bring to this place and the wealth of experience you have got. I disagree with your characterisation of the bill in both its design and its likely effects, but I think it is important that we have a profusion of perspectives in any debate, and I think it is valuable to have that. But I think your contribution, as many others did, spoke to the importance of the construction sector within our state, particularly in the context of a growing state where the vast majority of builders are doing the right thing. In fact it is those builders who suffer as a consequence of the shonks, the cowboys and the crims, perhaps as much as the consumers who are left high and dry as a consequence of those nefarious actions. Cumulatively it does really undermine confidence and trust in the housing market. To the extent that housing is like any other market, the confidence of actors and the de-risking of decisions that they make and the confidence and the trust that they have in other agents within that market is paramount.

We have had instances of market failure within the housing sector. I have seen that firsthand when I have been supporting, frankly, far too many of my constituents who have suffered loss and hardship as a consequence of very unethical and unscrupulous conduct by dodgy contractors as they have tried to build a home for their family. I have seen and I have heard their feedback and their really heart-rending accounts of having dreams destroyed and having lost hundreds of thousands of dollars through no fault of their own.

The member for Ovens Valley earlier talked about this legislation making it harder for Victorians to get a home. Other members on the other side have done similarly. I would invite those members to speak with my constituents and to understand that what has made it harder for them to get a home is not having recourse when dodgy builders have shafted them, have taken their money and not delivered and not bought insurance as required. The member for Kew talked about that being a legal obligation; it has been, but it has not been happening and there has been no adequate recourse for consumers in the market to get redress for that or when those builders have done a botched job that they have been refused to rectify, because what good is a home that you have paid for if it is not watertight, if it is not structurally sound, if it is not safe to live in?

These are the most expensive decisions that consumers will make in their lives, but the problems that we are seeking to address in this bill I do think at a certain level completely undermine the entire housing market. The Leader of the Opposition has spoken about his personal experience of when this happened to him and his family, and I do not bring this up to make light of it in any sense – I think it speaks to how profound and broad-based this issue can be – but when there is an opportunity for those opposite to do something about those problems, they oppose it. I think that is a profound shame, because if we do not get to the heart of these challenges, if we do not increase or rectify the erosion of trust and the heightened risk that purchasers and participants in the housing market carry as a result of uncertainty about the quality of the work that is being done or their capacity to get recourse if there are issues that require rectification, then what we will see is exactly what has been playing out in the apartment sector in Melbourne: collapsing values, fewer starts, fewer completions and, ultimately, fewer houses. These are not abstract issues.

There is a significant erosion of capital value, particularly in off-the-plan apartments which have been built in Melbourne over the last decade or so, in significant part because second and subsequent purchasers of those apartments within those buildings can have no confidence that the buildings into which they are buying are safe, are watertight and are structurally sound. That is a profound hindrance to our capacity as a state and as a market to deliver the homes which are required. We need to ensure a functioning market with appropriate levels of regulation that neither unduly hinder construction activity nor expose participants to excessive levels of risk, because it is de-risking and it is taking appropriate regulatory action such as that contained within this bill that will inject confidence into the market and assure consumers and indeed my constituents before they make the most expensive purchase of their lives.

There has also been a lot of commentary – I think misleading commentary – about the current state of the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority, whose name will change as a consequence of this bill. There have been very significant reforms to the culture and the leadership of the VBA across the last year or so. I think the new leader of the VBA Anna Cronin has led a significant body of work to improve the culture and the operational effectiveness of the VBA. She is a leader who is respected and very well known across the political spectrum and indeed the industry more broadly.

The point that I wish to turn to now goes to that point about the apartment sector in Victoria and the issues that we have with taller buildings in Melbourne. At present, for buildings of four storeys and above, consumers currently have no financial protection for defective building work. This bill is important because it takes the first steps to making the system fairer by introducing the developer bond scheme. We have seen in too many instances, in both this jurisdiction and others, issues around cladding which have undermined the value and the trust and the confidence that residents have and that subsequent purchasers of those buildings can have in their apartments and in their dwellings. There have been instances in Sydney as well – in the context of the Opal building, for example, where buildings which have been clearly defective both in their construction and subsequently have led owners of apartments in those buildings to be significantly out of cost financially. These multifarious issues are undermining trust and confidence in newer apartment construction. As I said, I do think it is an issue that points towards market failure where there is unknown and in a sense unquantifiable risk pertaining to the design, the safety and the integrity of buildings.

There are profound information asymmetries here as well. Whether it is low-rise developments in my own electorate or high-rise developments in areas like the city and in the activity precincts across suburban Melbourne, there are information asymmetries between what the developer knows and what the purchaser knows. The manifestation of that information asymmetry comes through in the fact that there are significant losses being borne by purchasers who in good faith bought properties or bought dwellings off the plan and are now subsequently making losses when they seek to sell those.

If we are going to have a functioning housing market, one where we optimise the number of starts, the number of completions and ultimately the number of homes to cater to a growing population, consumers need to have confidence in what they are buying. We need to have a regulatory framework that balances the risk being borne by consumers and indeed those who are building homes. As I say, it is the vast majority of hardworking builders who are carrying the can for the actions of a few. It is why this bill, I think, is important. I commend it to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:06): I rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. It is another example of this government trying to lead but trying to lead from behind. We are talking in this bill about a risk management system. That is really what we are trying to deal with. We are trying to deal with the problem of risk in the residential construction industry. But no-one, not the minister in the second-reading speech and not any of the speakers on behalf of the government, has actually addressed the key issue in this debate. We are talking about an industry that is on its knees.

The residential construction industry is on its knees. And the evidence for that? Here is one piece of evidence. Victoria has acceded to the dubious honour of being that jurisdiction with the highest number of residential construction insolvencies in the country. In the year to February 2024, we saw 475 construction insolvencies in Victoria. That was in the year to February 2024. In the year to February 2025, that went up to – wait for it – 700. So over 1 100 residential construction firms went under over a two-year period. That is 1 100. We have got an industry on its knees. We have an industry on its knees because it cannot find the workers it needs. According to the ABS, the Productivity Commission and so many others, residential construction and construction generally face such chronic shortages that by the end of the decade we will need nationally no less than 130,000 construction workers to deliver basic housing targets. That is nationally, so in Victoria we need something like 40,000 extra construction workers between now and the end of the decade. Where are we going to get them?

When we hear about insolvencies, when we hear about workforce issues, where is that featuring in this debate? Because I tell you, you cannot protect consumers. And in fairness to everybody in this chamber, I think we all share that goal. Genuinely, we all share the goal of wanting to protect consumers. But the underlying principle, which is undeniable, is you cannot protect consumers if you do not have an industry that sits on solid foundations, that is vibrant and that is growing. We see that in the number of insolvencies. We see that in the chronic workforce shortages. We saw in the recent year a 21 per cent drop in the number of completed apprenticeships, and those starting also saw a drop. So whether it is people finishing apprenticeships in the construction sector or starting, we are seeing significant drop-offs. That is not a good or healthy sign. In Victoria over the period December–January, we saw a reduction in approvals for private sector dwellings of 1.2 per cent, and in terms of units we saw a 1.5 per cent drop. Now, that is just in a one-month period. What does that tell us about the health of the very industry this bill is trying to regulate?

Sure, on behalf of consumers it is something we support in principle; of course we do. But this bill comes at a time when there is a complete absence of any kind of leadership or work by this government on how it is going to address those underlying risks. I have heard mentioned in the debate how we address risk, but those are the greatest risks which pose significant financial and consequential harm to home owners who face difficulties when their builders go bust or when they have the misfortune to learn that they have engaged a dodgy builder, which is rarer than it is more common.

The other problem is the bill is being prosecuted in the absence of any discussion about why it costs so much to build a house or a unit in Victoria. We know that every house or unit will comprise in its cost to the tune of about 40 to 45 per cent property taxes and other taxes. The Business Council of Australia has pointed this out. The National Australia Bank, the Commonwealth Bank in its concept report, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ai Group all talk about the comparative high costs of construction in Victoria. You see figures bandied about. The rule of thumb which has attracted a general consensus across this area of debate is that it costs about 30 per cent more to build in Victoria than it does in other jurisdictions. That is a risk. It also takes far too long to build houses and units in Victoria. It can take 18 months, two years or sometimes even longer to deliver a completed product to a home owner so that they can move in and occupy the place they have been dreaming about. It takes too long. Why is that? Too much red tape. That has been noted in report after report. It takes too long.

What has this government, which has been in office for over a decade now, done to reduce the costs of building homes in this state? We saw an interesting report from the Productivity Commission in February, which talked about opportunities to reduce red tape and, interestingly, how innovation can play a role. Prefabricated homes and modular homes, which are built to a high quality these days, can reduce the time it takes to deliver a completed product from 1½ to two years to a matter of weeks and even a short number of months. But where is that in the debate? I tell you all of these things feed into the issue of risk. Many builders will tell you they do their best, but it takes too long. For one reason or another – regulation, taxes, holding costs and the financing costs that builders have to wear – it can

take too long. I am not advocating for a particular position on, for example, fixed-price contracts, but they are a challenge when it takes a long time. If only there were a way to address that so we could protect consumers obviously but also recognise that builders often go under if it takes too long to deliver a product, and that represents a significant risk.

I start with those propositions because I do firmly believe you cannot protect consumers if the foundations of the industry we are trying to regulate better have been corroded by these issues – delays, taxes, workforce issues. They can all be addressed, but there are no solutions being offered up in the debate from the government or its speakers today. It is all about unfairly and pejoratively depicting the industry as full of dodgy builders, and that is just wrong. It is unfair. We want to build this industry up, because then you can deal with the regulation that is best placed to address those risks. I support the reasoned amendment that has been moved. I say further that in the government briefing I particularly asked those speaking on behalf of the government about the actuarial impacts of these changes for consumers. What are the additional costs? How much is it going to add? We know organisations like Master Builders Victoria estimate that these changes cumulatively will add about \$30,000 to the price of a home. That is a lot of money, yet we have not been advised about other actuarial impacts on housing costs and building costs because of this bill. It will cost a lot of money. If the statutory scheme is to be run anything like WorkCover has been run, watch out because we will see sizeable and often for builders intolerable increases in premiums from year to year. So we think it is very fair to be sceptical about how well this system will be run.

Also, as others have pointed out – and I certainly firmly believe this and have said this on many occasions over the last year or so – both the Victorian Building Authority and the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority have as part of their fundamental statutory mandates obligations to manage risk, assess risk and come up with measures to deal with risk. That has always been there. So why have there been such catastrophic failures? Porter Davis Homes and all of the other insolvencies that we have seen over the last 18 months or so could have been avoided if the existing institutions under existing laws had simply discharged their basic responsibilities to manage risk. We have seen them hopelessly run, running cumulative operating losses where governments have to bail them out effectively.

I should point out in concluding that the government was on notice about the precarious financial position and failure to discharge basic obligations by both bodies for nearly two years and did nothing about it. So I support the amendments which have been moved by the member for Polwarth, and I say to the government: whilst we all share, I think, the ultimate goal of protecting consumers, you cannot achieve that if you do not address the underlying risks which are seriously threatening the viability of residential construction.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (17:16): It is great to rise and speak to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, and it is great to talk again in this place around building legislation. I have spoken a couple of times on this topic, and that is because we have done some significant reforms in this space. We are undertaking these reforms to put consumers at the centre and to enhance protections for them when they are embarking on their building journey or renovating their homes. By introducing this bill today we do mark another pivotal step towards ensuring that those home owners receive the protections that they need, deserve and rightly expect when they are building or renovating.

It is a significant milestone for anyone to undertake to build or renovate. I myself have renovated a couple of renovator's delights that we have bought. I have done them up, put new kitchens in them and really enjoyed the process actually. Luckily I have a hubby that is quite handy at doing renovations, but we have also just embarked on the first time we have ever built. We had a private builder – an incredible builder that talked us through the whole process from start to finish – and it was a really seamless and not a stressful process at all. Everyone said, 'Oh my goodness you're building, it will be the worst time of your life.' It was actually the most enjoyable, having a terrific builder who stepped us through the process but also created a beautiful and wonderful home for us. I do not think anyone

on this side has actually classified the whole industry as being full of dodgy builders. That is not what we have said on this side. This bill is about targeting dodgy builders, but we know that the majority of the builders here in Victoria do build wonderful homes for families. However, that is not to say that there are not challenges. When construction does fall short there need to be those protections and avenues that consumers can access to make sure that they have the end product that they were rightly expecting.

I would like to talk a little bit about what the bill will do. We as a government announced that we would establish the Building and Plumbing Commission. This would be a robust regulatory body designed to oversee the building and plumbing industry across the whole state. A new commission is about consolidating the regulation, the insurance and the disputes into a single agency and streamlining that. By centralising these aspects the commission aims to provide a more cohesive and efficient approach to safeguarding home owners and their interests. Why did we need to do this? This is about implementing reforms to put consumers at the heart and uphold their rights. We wanted to ensure accountability. It was about holding builders and developers to stringent standards and enforcing a culture of accountability. We also wanted to give consumers peace of mind that home owners can embark on a building or renovation project with confidence. When there are disputes, we need to consolidate those functions into a single commission where consumers can go for a really straightforward process, reducing all those bureaucratic hurdles that home owners may face.

This is more than just a policy. We do in this place debate policy and debate bills all the time, but this actually has real-life consequences for Victorians. It is about ensuring that when you have that excitement of building a new home it is not overshadowed with all those challenges. It gives people that peace of mind. As I have said, this is about building a watchdog, and it gives enforcement powers to the Building and Plumbing Commission. Currently that is all managed by other authorities, including the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority; there are also other responsibilities under the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, and then we have Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria. By creating this one-stop shop for consumers this will be a lot easier for homebuyers and renovators. It will even be easier for practitioners and builders to have one commission. It is about enforcement as well. If serious defects identified by this commission are not rectified, then the regulator can stop the issuing of occupancy permits or the completion of off-plan sales. It is about ensuring that they have teeth and that they are able to help consumers navigate those complaints that may occur.

The bill also establishes two different types of financial safety net. First will be the first-resort domestic building warranty – that is for buildings three storeys and below – and then the developer bond scheme for buildings more than three storeys high. The first-resort domestic building warranty will allow homebuyers to make a claim when building issues are first identified. Then of course they are not there for consumers to face huge out-of-pocket costs for fixing defects later on. For buildings four storeys or above this bill is about taking the first steps to introduce a fair system. It introduces a developer bond scheme, which is very similar to a rental bond. Under the scheme the developer pays a bond, which is held by the regulator. If serious building issues are not addressed by the developer or the builder, that money can be released to pay for rectification works.

We have all read about, had constituents come to us about or seen in the public media or in the public sphere horrible experiences with builders. I have had constituents who have spoken to me about their experiences. One in their email stated to me that when going through a really difficult time with their builder not only was there the financial pressure that that put on that family but he said the emotional stress was even worse. He felt not just that he had lost his money but that he had lost his dream – that dream to own a home, and a new home. We have seen it before when, after months of searching – it is a process – families or an individual will find a builder who promises to build their dream home. Contracts are signed, foundations are poured and frames are put up. The process starts, and it is the beginning of something very exciting and wonderful for families, but that can turn very quickly. A builder can miss a deadline; work sites can be deserted. If you can get in touch with a dodgy builder,

you might hear all the excuses under the sun about what they are doing. You have a home that then has defects all through it – I do not know; roofs may leak and doors might not close – and families are left with nowhere to go and their dream has been absolutely shattered.

We are talking about dodgy builders who deliberately try to cut corners. I am not sure of the reasons why – probably cost cutting. This is why we need consumer protections. This bill is the first step in sweeping an overhaul over the building regulation system – one that, like I said at the start, puts consumers at the centre, not dodgy operators. It does also lay the foundation for a modern, accountable industry where builders who cut corners have nowhere to hide.

This very much supports an industry that we know is growing in Victoria, and we know we are committed to more housing across the state. We have a big housing agenda. We know most builders do the right thing, and we are very much in support of them. But in the industry there are bad apples. There is always a bad apple in the industry, and they tarnish the profession. They leave families to pay the price, and this is about having protections for our consumers.

This new Building and Plumbing Commission really will consolidate, as I said, the regulation, insurance and disputes into a single entity. This is really to address where consumers are having to navigate so many different systems, so many different agencies. This will put everything together in a one-stop shop, so it will be absolutely more efficient for consumers when they are on that journey if there are challenges that they face. We want people to be able to go on that journey of building their new home with excitement, with protections but also with an understanding that they will get the house that they are expecting and that they have paid for. But if there are issues, then they have a place to go to support them. I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (17:26): I rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. Some of the main changes being brought forth in this bill include the establishment of a new Building and Plumbing Commission; the shifting of Victoria's insurance scheme from last resort to first resort, allowing home owners to claim insurance for defects even if their builder is still active; the introduction of rectification orders enforceable for up to 10 years; the requirement of developers of buildings over three storeys to lodge a mandatory bond of 2 per cent; and centralising the roles of insurers, regulators and dispute-resolvers into one bureaucracy, the BPC, giving it unmatched power to penalise builders, issue orders and recover costs.

Overall there are more consumer protections needed in the building industry. One example is at Culcairn Drive in Frankston South, as Acting Speaker Edbrooke would be well aware of, where the developer, the surveyor and the builder were all known to each other and basically signed off on each other's work and where the residents there have had ongoing issues that have really impacted them to a significant extent. But this Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, while introducing consumer protections, also needs to be done right.

I want to go firstly into some of Labor's record when it comes to housing and the housing crisis we have at the moment, which will relate to this bill. If we look at the entire housing ecosystem, it is crumbling in terms of both public housing and private housing. In public housing the Victorian Housing Register has ballooned to 65,526 families, a 65 per cent increase in just eight years. We also have families who are escaping domestic violence now needing to wait nearly 20 months, or even more sometimes, for housing. Public housing has declined, with 487 fewer dwellings in the last 12 months alone. In private housing only 61,260 new homes were built in the last year, 34 per cent below Labor's promise of 80,000 homes annually. Private sector building approvals are now 16 per cent lower than during the peak of the pandemic, and rental availability has collapsed, with 15,600 rental homes lost across Victoria and 10,000 gone in the first three months of this year. Indeed affordable rentals have also halved, from 10.8 per cent in 2018 to just 5.1 per cent in September 2024. This has not been helped by land tax increases, which have seen rental providers going out of the market.

So we do have a situation of increased taxes and sometimes improper or increased regulation that is making it harder for builders to get into the market and stay in the market. At the same time, though, we do need those consumer protections in place, but they need to be balanced and fair for consumers, builders and developers, particularly to encourage and help those builders and developers who are trying to do the right thing. The majority are actually trying to do the right thing, and they are undermined by those builders and developers doing the wrong thing, who are in the minority. But those in the minority can undercut the good builders and the good developers on price, and it can often lead to those good ones going out of the market.

If we look at this bill, we see a centralisation of power and to some extent too much of a loss of builder rights. We have unprecedented reform which centralises, concentrates and consolidates power in the hands of one unelected super-regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission. This body is purported to be able to regulate the sector, issue penalties, act as the sole insurer, investigate complaints, issue rectification orders and oversee dispute resolution all at once. The separation of powers is gone, with a lack of independent oversight. Under this bill, builders can be issued rectification orders even years after a build is completed; orders can be made without judicial findings, without due process and without a fair opportunity to challenge; and builders cannot sign new contracts while under a rectification order, freezing business. The fourth point is that names are published publicly even before any findings are made or the complaint is withdrawn and disproven. Builders cannot pause a rectification order while appealing to VCAT, and an order still stands and damages are done. Minor complaints can destroy a business overnight, and builders are very scared. While we do need to have these consumer protections in place, we cannot over-regulate to the point where good builders are scared of getting involved and staying in the market altogether. We must protect home owners, but this has to be balanced and grounded in natural justice.

If we look at the impact on builders and housing supply, this bill will potentially push up even further the cost of construction, drive small builders out of the market and make housing even less affordable. This may lead to an environment where risk is high, process is uncertain and builders are guilty until proven innocent. Industry figures are sounding the alarm. Zeher Khalil the TikTok building inspector said:

A lot of builders will go bust because there'll be a lot of claims ...

Scott Challen, a leading voice in the sector, warned:

This regulation will push the price of housing up and it won't deliver homes faster for people ...

Builders are being taxed and blamed in part because of the minority of builders and developers who are, as I mentioned, doing the wrong thing and who are undercutting the good builders and developers on price and more. The 2 per cent developer bond scheme may also be a blow to liquidity and confidence. This bond scheme is a non-refundable cost which may then be passed on to the buyer. Builders may go broke because insolvencies are already predicted to rise by 63 per cent.

The other point I want to raise is the flawed insurance model and bureaucracy under this bill. Under the current system, insurance claims are triggered online in serious cases – when a builder dies, disappears or becomes insolvent. Now a home owner will be able to lodge a claim simply because they allege a defect exists, even if the builder is still trading and willing to rectify the issue. This means that insurance can be triggered before complaint resolution, before VCAT hears a matter and before the builder has a chance to respond. This may be a recipe for systematic abuse, flooding the system with claims and overwhelming the regulator. Who decides whether a builder is liable? The same body that wrote the insurance policy and the same body that investigates complaints, issues penalties, suspends licences and approves payouts. This is a potential textbook conflict of interest with little to no independent oversight or accountability mechanism to prevent bias. The builder will have two choices: accept liability and pay or spend thousands fighting the regulator in VCAT.

Overall the opposition will be opposing this legislation, but with the reasoned amendment from the member for Polwarth, which he spoke on earlier:

That ... this house refuses to read this bill a second time until details of the consultation on the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, along with any proposed reforms, have been released to the industry.

This is very important because we need to get this bill right. We need to get the balance right. We need to have smart regulation to encourage good builders and developers to build more houses and to do the right thing while at the same time undercutting those who are doing the wrong thing. We cannot have a situation where those doing the right thing are pushed out of the marketplace and then potentially we only have those doing the wrong thing left in the marketplace.

The government has failed to address some of these key underlying issues that I have mentioned in my speech. There is no or little clarity around the contents and obligations in a building contract that are often the root cause of a dispute. VCAT is still the ultimate umpire, which is poorly funded and under-resourced, leading to issues with claims.

The future renaming of the Victorian Building Authority to the Building and Plumbing Commission may equal changing the process that essentially leaves all processes and personnel who currently oversee the management of the construction industry in place, and the 10-year defect liability responsibility on builders is too long.

As I mentioned before and as I am sure the member for Sandringham and many of my other colleagues will agree, we do need to get this bill right and we do need to protect consumers. I know that in your Frankston electorate, Acting Speaker Edbrooke, there are major building issues. There are major issues in my electorate of Mornington, but there are also builders who are doing the right thing and who are trying to get into the market and stay in the market. We cannot over-regulate; we need smart regulation that discourages the minority from doing the wrong thing while encouraging the majority to do the right thing, and this bill as it stands has not quite got the balance right. We need to go with the reasoned amendment that has been put forward by the member for Polwarth. We need to listen to all the stakeholders who have raised concerns about this bill as it stands.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (17:36): I am delighted to rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I have been listening to contributions from both sides of the house for some time now, and I just want to raise one thing with those opposite. The clue is in the name of this bill. It includes the words ‘buyer protections’. This bill is about protecting Victorian homebuyers. I have heard lots from the other side about their concerns for builders. They seem to want to support dodgy builders. I was disturbed to hear many times the quotes from the Housing Industry Association. Can I do a quote of my own? This is a quote from a constituent who came to see me a while ago, and he said to me that his daughter is terrified of entering into a contract to build her first home, because of what has gone on in the building industry. I know that those of us on this side of the house will listen to those voices, the voices of our community that want to build their homes and want to have confidence that the system will be there to support them.

The other thing I would like to raise on the contributions from the other side is that they seem determined to talk down Victoria. At every turn they will tell us how terrible things are in Victoria. The member for Hawthorn was telling us that this legislation is not important and that we need to address the root causes. There were some not-quite-right facts –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: standing order 118.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I do not have the standing orders book on me, but I will draw the member back to the bill.

Michaela SETTLE: Indeed I am speaking on the bill. I am speaking on the contribution from the member for Hawthorn, and as I understand the nature of debate, it is okay to address something that has been said by others. The member for Hawthorn was telling us that this bill did not go anywhere to

address the underlying issues in the industry. Can I first of all say that, rather than talk down Victoria and rather than trash us, perhaps the opposition would like to acknowledge that Victoria continues to be number one in home approvals –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): The shadow minister has another point of order, possibly on standing order 118, which is imputations on members.

Brad Rowswell: Acting Speaker, it is in reference to standing order 118, and perhaps I should have been more expansive in my previous point of order. I believe the member on her feet is casting imputations, perhaps with improper motives, on the member for Hawthorn, and that must only be done by substantive motion.

Danny Pearson: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I listened to the member for Hawthorn's contribution, and the member for Hawthorn was very clear in his contribution and was being quite negative in relation to the way in which this policy has been regulated over the last 10 years. That was the proposition that he put to this chamber. No member on this side of the house took exception to that; we let the member for Hawthorn make his contribution in the way in which he chose to make it. My good friend the member for Eureka is simply rebutting what was put forward by the member for Hawthorn, and I would ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): There is no point of order. Members are allowed to argue the point, but I will again draw the member back to the bill.

Michaela SETTLE: What I was trying to get out there is that Victoria continues to be number one in home approvals in this country, number one in home starts, number one in home completion and, best of all, number one in first home buyers. We have done an enormous amount in this space. The member for Hawthorn talked about the risk factors, including red tape. Can I point him to Plan Victoria? Plan Victoria is focused on making sure that building homes is an easier process. There has been an enormous amount of work and consultation that has gone into Plan Victoria from our wonderful Minister for Planning and the Attorney-General, and there has been a lot of work done to reduce the red tape.

The other thing that the member for Hawthorn tried to suggest was that it is more expensive to build in Victoria than anywhere else. I would like to bring the member for Hawthorn's attention to the fact that the average cost of building a house in Victoria is less than in New South Wales, the Northern Territory and the ACT. There are some facts that are important to acknowledge when we look at this bill. The other thing that the member for Hawthorn raised was that the risks for builders were around workforce issues. I am delighted to let him know that our wonderful Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place has done extraordinary work in free TAFE, and part of free TAFE – the whole focus of free TAFE – has been about looking at industries that need a stronger workforce and making free TAFE courses for them. So I hope that this brings some comfort to the member for Hawthorn that in fact those risk issues that he highlighted, being red tape, cost and workforce, are all being addressed firmly and squarely by this government, and this piece of legislation before us is now bringing forward protections for homebuyers.

As I said, we hear a lot from the other side quoting the opinion of the Housing Industry Association – I want to hear the opinion of the people in my constituency. In Maddingley we have a growing community. The buildings there go up at a fast rate, and I want those people to know that when they are entering into what is the biggest commitment of their lives they have the Victorian government's support in making sure that the protections and the regulations are there for them. I never want to hear a constituent come to me again and tell me that his daughter is too terrified to enter into a building contract because she feels that the regulation is not there. Those on the other side seem determined to block this, and I do not understand why. In 2013 they brought very similar legislation to this house, and then, you know what, they chose to listen to the voices of the lobbyists. When their communities

were asking for this legislation, they brought it here and then they buckled. They buckled to the voices of the lobbying groups and the large peak bodies of the industries.

Then in 2024, just last year, we heard them talk again and again about the need for stronger protections. The member for Brighton put out a press release demanding decisive action to protect Victorian homebuyers. Well, come on guys, get on board. We are bringing this regulation forward to protect Victorians. You asked for it in 2024; you toyed with the idea in 2013. It is now time for the opposition to come to the table and support this vital legislation that is about protecting the people in our community. When they go out to build their forever home, they need to know that the government is backing them; at the moment, there is only one side of the house that has got their backs.

It is only this side of the house that has put forward legislation that in its title says that it is for homebuyer protection, and yet all I have heard from the other side in this debate is about the protection of their big mates in the building industry. This bill is about protecting homebuyers. I think that those on the other side would do well to look at the legislation and understand what security and comfort it would give their constituents and perhaps withdraw the amendment and indeed support this strong bill that makes regulation easier under one body, that makes that journey for consumers safer and that makes sure that they are not left with phoenix builders and big bills and nowhere to call home.

This legislation is probably one of the most important pieces to come forward for my constituents in Maddingley. I look at the houses going up there, and I want them to know that we have got their backs. I would ask people on the other side not to stand with dodgy builders. Stand with Victorian families; say yes to consumer protection.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:46): I rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. It is a bill that we cannot support. The bill's general aim is to address ongoing challenges that new home buyers have when it comes to unresolved defects on their properties. This is something that does require urgent attention – there is no arguing that – but serious questions do remain about whether this piece of legislation is the right way to do it.

The main purpose of this bill involves transferring the domestic building insurance operations of the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and the operations of Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria to the Victorian Building Authority; granting the VBA a monopoly on the provision of domestic building insurance for homes, including those with buildings of up to three storeys; creating a statutory insurance scheme for homes, including those with buildings of up to three storeys, to be administered by the VBA; empowering the VBA with stronger authority to mandate the rectification of defective, noncompliant or incomplete building work; and introducing a system of developer bonds for residential apartment buildings over three storeys, set at 2 per cent of construction costs, to be held for up to two years. These changes will be primarily done by a series of amendments to existing legislation, including the Building Act 1993, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Sale of Land Act 1962, the Subdivision Act 1988 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998.

While both the construction industry and consumers acknowledge the issues surrounding building quality rectifications, and while the builders warranty insurance system has been poorly managed for some time, the bill fails to properly address fundamental problems. I will go into those details.

There is a total lack of clarity around the contents and obligations within building contracts, which are often at the absolute heart of these disputes. VCAT remains the ultimate decision-maker, and it continues to be underfunded and under-resourced. The proposed renaming of the VBA to the Building and Plumbing Commission is typical of Labor's approach to name changes, and it essentially leaves all the existing processes and personnel who currently oversee the construction industry absolutely unchanged. The 10-year defect liability period for builders is too long and not clearly defined; the legislation is not supported by the industry, importantly, which is something you have to consider; and consultation must be improved.

We have already seen that the VBA has consistently failed in its licensing inspections and enforcement duties, including allowing unqualified, unlicensed builders and inadequate inspections and ignoring consumer complaints. The VBA has also failed to properly manage the insurance payments of builders, with catastrophic failure, particularly during the Porter Davis collapse. We cannot expect different outcomes just by dressing up the VBA with a new name. They do say that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I feel like that is where we are at. This is what Labor does. Sadly, the issues are compounded by the government's inability to manage other areas of housing, particularly through their so-called big build.

Housing waitlists continue to grow under Labor, with the Victorian housing register seeing a staggering increase of 65 per cent over the last eight years. Since the launch of the Big Housing Build in 2020 we have seen a 23 per cent increase alone. It now means as of December more than 65,000 families are on that waitlist, many of whom are facing nearly two years of waiting before they can secure a home. This waitlist number is a new record, but it is a record that this government should be absolutely ashamed of. For families escaping domestic violence the situation is dire: waitlists of nearly 20 months. It represents an alarming and heartbreaking increase of more than 120 per cent since 2018. We have to face the fact that the current approach is not enough to meet the needs of our community and those who are most vulnerable.

The statistics point to broader concerns to be had with this government's legislative ability when it comes to managing housing policy. Much like this piece of legislation before us today, we have seen insufficient investment, poor planning and a lack of effective solutions to tackle the housing crisis in Victoria. These issues have carried over into the big build, with public housing and general housing construction numbers failing to hit their mark despite promises made by the government. Between June 2015 and June 2024 Victoria added just 4000 new social and community dwellings, less than half of what New South Wales delivered during the same period. The overall number of public housing bedrooms has also shrunk. In June 2018 there were over 160,000 public housing bedrooms. In June last year that number had dropped to less than 156,000. Public housing initiatives like the Benalla West project in my electorate have completely stalled and gone ridiculously over budget – something very on brand for Labor – resulting in the displacement of so many families and so many households and leaving countless on housing waitlists and moving out of our region.

How can we trust a government to manage their building authorities and protect new home buyers from dodgy builders when they are unable to manage the basics of building homes and even the government's own budget targets are falling well, well short? They have failed to reach their housing targets and are building fewer homes on land they own. That is 440 fewer homes on Homes Victoria land and more than 1100 less on land owned by other government departments. These are huge numbers. When we look at the housing crisis, this is where legislation has to look. Since 2018 a total of 3085 public housing homes have been demolished, 741 sold and nearly a thousand properties disposed of. These statistics speak for themselves. The government is failing to deliver the social and public housing Victoria so desperately needs. The targets are missed, homes are being sold off or demolished and the shortage is growing astronomically.

Another area within housing that needs desperate attention revolves around the ongoing and persistent delays relating to housing and building permits. In Seymour we have seen a 365-day turnaround for basic building permits, with councils ill equipped to handle them. Areas like Seymour are trying to deal with complicated flood overlays, insurance challenges and delays, making it hard for builders and housing industries to succeed. And it is having a harmful impact on buyers and renters. We have got less than 3 per cent rental availability in our communities – 1 per cent in some. It is impossible to get a roof over your head. And we have seen this government backtrack already when it comes to planning flying squads, recently reintroducing a trial after previously cancelling the cost-effective and successful initiative. This is something we have been calling on for years, particularly as the housing crisis under the government continues to get worse. Labor's planning failures are the reason we have a housing affordability crisis.

A member interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I have just listed it all. Now they are scrambling to catch up with yet another plan and yet another piece of legislation that will not deliver results and again continues to miss the mark. I look forward to seeing a day where effective housing legislation is introduced in these chambers, but this bill does not hit the mark.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (17:55): I rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I may be biased, but I truly think rural and regional Victoria is the best place to call home. Over recent years we have seen more people flock to our regions, and it is no wonder why. We have the best state parks, sunsets, walking trails, reservoirs, lakes, cafes, restaurants, history and more, not to mention the kindest, most decent people. It is important, though, that we as a government make sure that those people have affordable, quality homes to live in, both locals and those who want to move to the regions as well. This bill does just that. It creates a new, integrated building watchdog and gives it tough new enforcement powers to fix dodgy home-building work. It also delivers new building insurance schemes to make things fairer for consumers.

The new regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission, will take on responsibilities that are currently managed by the Victorian Building Authority, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria. It will create a one-stop shop for homebuyers, renovators and practitioners to make things easier for Victorians and place consumer protection at its heart. We know that most builders do the right thing by their customers, but sadly there are some cowboys out there that do not have the best interests of families seeking to purchase their forever home at heart. It is these cowboys that we want to crack down on and that this bill will help weed out. We want to establish a new, more powerful building watchdog to oversee the actions of builders across the state as well as to provide a safety net for consumers when things go wrong. We are trying to make it easier for homebuyers. The claims of those opposite that it is just a changed name and nothing is different here are completely false. We are simplifying the process for homebuyers and doing good by homebuyers and prospective homebuyers as well.

Buying or building a home is one of the biggest things anyone can do in their life. My husband Sam and I became home owners for the very first time just 18 months ago, and it was a real journey to navigate. Luckily, things went well, and we did not buy a place with building defects or major structural issues, but many Victorians, including constituents of mine in Ripon, do not have such luck. They put their life savings into building a home and then they get caught out by shonky developers promising them the world and delivering substandard or incomplete homes. Too often many families struggle to recover money from building companies, causing immense stress.

This bill will help bring justice and peace of mind to Victorian homebuyers. It will beef up the powers of the regulator, including by issuing rectification orders to compel builders to fix or finish defective work up to 10 years after an occupancy permit has been issued. Noncompliance with these orders will be grounds for immediate suspension of practitioner registration and will also trigger the ability of homebuyers to access our new first-resort domestic building warranty so that families are not left high and dry when work has been left unfinished.

The bill also creates a new developer bond scheme, forcing developers to pay a bond of 2 per cent of the total construction costs for a housing development, which will be held by the regulator. This will help to make sure developers do the right thing. As part of this scheme, developers must notify the regulator prior to applying for an occupancy permit. The regulator may then undertake an inspection at their discretion. Within 18 months of the issuing of the occupancy permit an assessor will conduct a preliminary inspection and provide the developer with the opportunity to rectify any defective or incomplete work. If this preliminary report does not identify any defects, the bond can be released back to the developer. This is brilliant, and it will be a game changer for so many housing developments and so many families.

I very much hope that those opposite support this bill and its changes to our building industry. They have already shown their hand – that they want to block more homes rather than actually build them, like we do on this side of the house. It will be a huge backflip if they do not support this bill, especially considering that the member for Mornington just six months ago called for exactly the action that we are taking here today. But who knows what the mob opposite will do on any given day. They like to change tactics, and they leave working Victorians behind in the process. But not on our side – we support Victorians at every stage of their lives, including when they need us most.

We have paid almost \$600 million in dodgy building work rectification costs since 2018, including to victims of the collapse of Porter Davis Homes. This bill will help us avoid such sagas in future, putting money back into Victorian pockets and boosting consumer confidence in the building industry.

Our record on building more homes speaks for itself, and reforms like the ones proposed in this bill will make sure that we keep delivering the high-quality homes Victorians deserve. We have not just delivered for homebuyers, we have delivered for renters too, including \$6.3 billion to build more than 12,000 social housing properties, including 3000 homes in rural and regional Victoria and more than 100 in Ripon to date. More than 130 rental reforms have gone through this place since 2021, including strong new rental protections to stop all types of rental bidding, changing the notice period from 60 to 90 days, allowing renters to have pets in their homes and put pictures on the walls and so much more. We have also changed the rules so that people no longer require a planning permit to put a granny flat on their property, making it easier for families to build a small second home and address the housing shortage. We are also building new housing for workers in the regions, including 10 new properties with 24 bedrooms in Beaufort, which I know the Pyrenees Shire Council are so excited about, and so am I, and local businesses are very rapt about it. We have built student accommodation like the amazing accommodation for nursing, midwifery and medical students that we completed in Maryborough in my electorate back in 2023. All of these improvements for home owners, renters, public housing residents and those in need are exactly why I am so proud to be Labor and why I wanted to run for politics in the first place.

But we know more is needed, and I want to see even more investments in affordable homes across Ripon, including by developing sewerage systems in Talbot and Newbridge, better power, water and internet connections in Maryborough, more housing options for older residents in Wedderburn and Dunolly, key worker housing in St Arnaud, Ararat and Maryborough and public housing across the board. I have every confidence that we will achieve much of this, as we are a government of getting things done and genuinely delivering for rural and regional Victoria, not just talking about it.

I want to set the record straight, because those opposite have been using all different types of claims and fake facts really. I want to put on the record that Victoria continues to be number one in home approvals, number one in home starts, number one in home completions and, best of all, number one in first home buyers. We know that those opposite are the blockers and we are the builders. We will continue to do what is needed for Victorian homebuyers and for Victorian renters, public housing tenants and more. We aim to build 800,000 homes over the next decade, making it easier for builders, buyers and renovators to get permits and create cheaper housing, including in country Victoria.

This bill will help do just that. It is all part of us delivering for Victorians, no matter where you live. It will restore confidence in the building industry, especially after evidence of dangerously built homes, cladding fires and building insolvencies in recent years. It is time for us to better regulate the building industry and weed out the bad guys that are ruining it for the rest. I very much look forward to seeing even more reforms to the building regulator system in this place soon, and I very much hope that those opposite do the right thing by Victorians and support this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Kim O'KEEFE (Shepparton) (18:04): I rise to make a contribution to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. The bill is to amend the Building Act 1993, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Sale of Land Act 1962, the Subdivision Act 1988 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and for other purposes. Some of the amendments the bill

seeks to make include integrating domestic building regulatory functions into the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), conferring the function of administering part 4 of the Domestic Building Contracts Act on the Victorian Building Authority instead of the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria and to enhance financial protections for Victorian consumers through the establishment of a statutory insurance scheme that will be administered by the Victorian Building Authority in providing domestic building insurance on a first-resort basis for domestic buildings with a rise in storeys of three or less and further make miscellaneous consequential and technical amendments.

On this side of the house we agree that we do need to ensure that there are the right structures in place to support and protect the consumer as well as the builder. We want consumer protections and certainty that when purchasing or building a home, we are getting what we have paid for. We want people to be able to own their own home and to get more people into homes, and we know at the moment we are facing a housing crisis. There has never been a more important time to try and support the building industry to get that, to make more houses and to build more homes. We have heard the horror stories of people who have had devastating experiences when things do go wrong and the significant impact when a company collapses or a builder has done the wrong thing. We know that the building industry is already struggling with ongoing financial pressures, material costs, staff shortages and the restraints and frustration of bureaucracy and red tape. That is why it is so important to ensure that we do get this right and that we are not adding yet another barrier to the industry or to building a house.

We do need to hear from the very industries that are impacted by these changes. The feedback that we have had on this side of the house is that there are many questions that are not answered, and it is no surprise that the government has failed to adequately consult and inform industry stakeholders about the proposed amendments that are contained in the bill, which will have a direct impact on the building and construction industry. Since the bill's introduction to the house, there have been numerous stakeholders who have expressed their disappointment and frustration with the government, claiming that the bill has been rushed and the amendments contained in the bill are heavily consumer focused. So why hasn't there been meaningful consultation with the industry before implementing such drastic reforms? Builders and developers need certainty, not further costs, regulations or red tape. The Housing Industry Association have raised their concerns, highlighting that the bill, while focused on consumer protection, may have severe consequences for home builders. The rushed nature of these reforms, combined with the excessive powers granted to the new regulator, could make it more difficult for builders to operate within a fair and predictable environment.

The Property Council of Australia, the Urban Development Institute of Australia (Victoria) and the Housing Industry Association are just three of the many groups that have criticised the government over this bill. Both the Property Council of Australia and the Urban Development Institute of Australia (Victoria) in a media release on 5 March called on the government to withdraw the bill from the house in order to allow for adequate industry consultation, which you would think is a reasonable request. In the media release, both organisations stated that they believe the speed at which the bill was developed and introduced in the house is concerning and it delivers a reform package that is both unclear and unworkable. The Housing Industry Association also share the same concerns. They are concerned about the lack of progress on the related domestic building contracts legislation. The HIA are also concerned that the amendments contained in the bill are heavily consumer focused, and whilst in theory consumers will receive support from the new regulator, the impact on home builders could be devastating and the rushed and ill-considered nature of this bill as it stands poses a significant threat to the future of the Victorian housing market and the livelihoods of those within the building and construction industry. These peak bodies representing thousands of professionals and businesses across the state have also called for the government to withdraw this bill until proper and adequate consultation takes place with industry. They have also pointed out the bill's development leaves little time for meaningful feedback or scrutiny from those who will be affected by these changes.

The Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 also seeks to establish a new regulatory body, the Building and Plumbing Commission. This new watchdog would oversee several

aspects of the state's building and construction process, including a new developer bond scheme, the introduction of warranty insurance and expanded powers for the commission to issue rectification orders for up to 10 years. Whilst consumer protections are a vital part of any functioning market, these reforms have been introduced without sufficient thought or consultation with the wider industry.

The bill proposes to merge several assisting bodies, including the Victorian Building Authority, Domestic Building Disputes Resolution Victoria and domestic building insurance functions into the new Building and Plumbing Commission. The industry is concerned about the lack of clarity surrounding the commission's new powers and their responsibilities. As such, the rushed nature of this bill has established this commission without clear understanding of its scope, and it could lead to confusion and a fragmented approach to consumer protection. With the aggregation of existing personnel from VBA, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and Consumer Affairs Victoria and without reform to initial contracts there seems to be no guarantee that dispute resolution, quality management of projects and enforcement will be enhanced. No extra monitoring or management of building quality has been identified as part of the solution.

There are also concerns with the first warranty insurance scheme, the introduction of this scheme and its intent to provide greater protection to consumers. Industry is concerned about its viability. As with other state government insurers like the TAC and WorkCover, there is strong concern within industry that bureaucratic costs will not be capped; premiums will steadily increase; compliance costs, especially for small builders, will be burdensome; and premiums will be at risk of becoming a new tax impost on construction costs.

On top of this the new Building and Plumbing Commission will be able to use the need for their insurance as a lever to insist on certain actions and behaviours from builders. That could be unfair or unreasonable, especially during an unresolved dispute. The addition of yet another layer of insurance, particularly one that does not offer sufficient clarity or detail, could lead to increased costs for consumers and businesses alike. The proposed scheme could create a situation where well-meaning developers and builders who are already doing the right thing by their clients could find themselves penalised for factors that are beyond their control.

Another concern of this bill's amendments is the power invested in the Building and Plumbing Commission to issue rectification orders for up to 10 years following the completion of building work. This provision does raise numerous considerable concerns held within the industry once again, such as the definition of defective work, which the HIA have expressed is now so broad that it could encompass a wide range of issues, like minor delays or unmet expectations rather than substantive defects. The uncertainty around what constitutes defective work will undoubtedly lead to disputes between consumers and builders, potentially resulting in significant financial and operational strain on businesses. Under the bill consumers will be able to lodge defect claims against builders for up to 10 years without clear definitions of what the word 'defect' can mean and without obligations for consumers to raise concerns and issues in a prompt and timely manner. As the member for Narracan pointed out, the life span of some of the things that could be classed as a defect may already have a short warranty. I note the member for Narracan's contribution and the matters that he raised as a former builder, and the valid concerns that he shared with his knowledge and experience as a former builder with an in-depth understanding of the impact and negative consequences this bill will have on the building industry.

The requirement for builders to comply with rectification orders even during review processes places an unreasonable burden on small and medium-sized builders. These builders, often operating on tight budgets, could face severe financial penalties if they are unable to meet the regulatory demands, even if they are in the process, as we said, of challenging the order, which is a significant concern. Builders could be held liable for work completed many years ago despite changes in ownership, building standards or market conditions. This level of uncertainty could have a chilling effect on the willingness of businesses to take on new projects, especially in an already uncertain market.

The bill also proposes a mandatory developer bond for multi-unit home building projects over three storeys. While the intention of the scheme is to ensure consumer protection, the lack of detail once again on how the scheme will be implemented is a major point of contention held by industry. Industry in particular is concerned about the financial burden that this scheme will impose on developers in an already challenging economic market, particularly the fact that the 2 per cent bond scheme as proposed will just add 2 per cent to the costs of building.

The speed with which these reforms have been introduced without sufficient consultation is concerning. The industry requires adequate time to understand, to comply with and to integrate these new requirements into their ongoing and future projects. What costs are going to be associated with these changes?

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:14): I rise to support the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. The great Australian dream of owning your own home is being preserved by the Allan Labor government. Clear targets to deliver more homes over the next 30 years will keep that dream alive for the next generation of home owners and also make sure there are enough rental properties available for those who need them. The \$6.3 billion Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund when completed will deliver over a 10 per cent uplift in the total number of social housing properties in Victoria – over 13,300 social and affordable homes. Labor is building more homes for Victorians who need them, and reforms like the one proposed in this bill will make sure the homes that are being built are of high quality.

Unfortunately, most of us here know of cases of drawn-out disputes on inferior work or builders going insolvent and leaving home owners with an uncertain future. I know of a young family whose house was all the way to fixing stage – so close to moving in – when their builder went into liquidation. They had no choice but to sign another contract with another builder to get completion and their occupancy certificate, but this cost them an extra \$70,000. They were forced to borrow money from friends and family to get the keys to their new home, starting their dream owing far more than they could imagine and afford. Another case saw a home owner camping in his half-built house after the collapse of a building company to stop the subcontractors, who knew they were not going to get paid either, from returning to the property and pulling out fixtures, plasterboard and timber – anything – during the middle of the night. This is what the bill seeks to stop.

The Allan Labor government listens and acts. The bill lays the groundwork for much-needed reforms to the building regulatory system, and subsequent bills will only strengthen the framework for building regulation moving forward. The bill introduces the creation of a new integrated building watchdog – bringing the responsibilities of three different authorities into one – greater enforcement powers for the integrated watchdog and a new building insurance scheme to make things fairer and also establishes a developer bond scheme and supporting measures for high-rise construction.

The integrated building watchdog is a welcome reform. The current system is notoriously difficult to navigate, with people getting handballed from one place to another in a time of potentially great financial and emotional distress. Currently the Victorian Building Authority has the responsibility for penalising builders for defective or incomplete building work. The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority manages insurance claims when things go wrong. Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria manages complaints and disputes. You can see how many consumers would potentially need to engage separately with all three of these bodies for the one issue with a property. This will now be managed all in the one place – a significant saving of time, stress and financial pressure. The integrated regulator, to be formally named the Building and Plumbing Commission in subsequent legislation, will take on the responsibilities of existing bodies, to oversee the building and plumbing industries across Victoria, as well as tough new enforcement powers. If serious defects identified by the Building and Plumbing Commission are not rectified, the regulator can stop the issuing of occupancy permits or the completion of off-the-plan sales for apartment buildings. In other words, if it is not fixed, it is not for sale and they cannot get their completion stage payment.

Under existing laws, builders are liable to fix defective and noncompliant work up to 10 years after the issue of an occupancy permit. This bill does not seek to change this law. What it does do is give the Building and Plumbing Commission the power to issue rectification orders, giving it the strength to address seriously defective or incomplete building work by those builders out there that are not doing the right thing by their clients. I have the definition of the defects. The definition of 'defective' is based on the definition of 'defective' that has been in the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 since 1995. This definition is being used in this bill as well as it sufficiently captures the type of work that should be considered for rectification orders, so it has not even changed.

Rectification orders will compel a builder to fix or finish work which the regulator's expert building inspectors deem to be seriously defective. Rectification orders will be issued on the builder who carried out the work or, in the case of buildings four storeys and above, on a developer. Noncompliance with a rectification order will be an offence and grounds for immediate suspension of registration. A builder issued a rectification order will have this published on the register of building practitioners, which is publicly available and will allow visibility for future clients to review. The regulator will also be able to recover costs for monitoring and enforcing compliance with a rectification order. An order which is not fixed by a developer on a building four storeys and above will prevent the building from being subdivided, and a building surveyor will be prohibited from issuing an occupancy permit for the building. This will present a major financial deterrent for developers to do the wrong thing by consumers – as it should. The regulator will issue suitable operational policies to ensure rectification orders are issued in a commonsense and consistent manner, considering things like the nature of the problem, time elapsed since the build, usage and maintenance. The rectification orders are not a first step in rectifying a defect. Homebuyers will need to show that they have attempted to resolve the issue which they believe to meet the threshold of seriously defective or incomplete work with their builder before the regulator can begin actioning a request to issue a rectification order.

These protections are there for the rare occasion that the builder does not simply address any identified defects before a handover. Noncompliance with a rectification order will be a trigger for homebuyers to access our new first-resort domestic building warranty for buildings under three storeys. In addition to currently having to navigate between regulatory bodies when something goes wrong with their home build, Victorians are too often being left out of pocket to the tune of tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars by dodgy builders. I point out that there are so many good builders doing the right thing by consumers and building homes in a tight-margin market. Without good builders we will never get the homes we need, and I thank them for the important work they do across Victoria. This legislation is designed to protect people from the builders that do the wrong thing, like half finishing jobs and then disappearing off the face of the earth, as happened in the case mentioned by the member for Box Hill.

Currently the process for accessing insurance payments when things go wrong can be yet another hurdle after already having endured months or years of distress as people fight to have their serious building defects addressed. The current system is not in their favour. Homebuyers must go through a lengthy dispute resolution process with Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria, with the possibility that their case will be rejected. Even if Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria finds that the homebuyer's complaint requires rectification work, the builder can then dispute the case in VCAT, dragging out the process for two years. If Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria upholds the complaint and it still is not fixed by the builder, the home owner then needs to apply for domestic building insurance compensation. It can be years later with the work still not fixed and only then do they get to lodge an insurance claim. It is not good enough. Victorians deserve to have the confidence that if things go wrong, there will be adequate protections to prevent them from being burdened with devastating levels of debt by rogue builders. That is why this bill makes provisions for a first-resort domestic building warranty, improving access to insurance by ensuring consumers can make a claim without needing to undergo a formal dispute resolution process, regardless of whether the builder is active in the industry or not.

The first-resort domestic building warranty allows homebuyers to make a claim when a building issue is first identified so they will not have to face huge out-of-pocket costs for fixing defects. The warranty will eventually be solely offered and administered by the Building and Plumbing Commission, making it much less stressful for homebuyers and renovators to access the help they need when they need it. This means that in the rare cases where a builder does not comply with a rectification order, an insurance claim will be triggered directly through the Building and Plumbing Commission. The warranty will cover lost deposits, including instances where the builder has not obtained domestic building insurance, incomplete building work and noncompliant or defective building work. For buildings four storeys and above, consumers currently have no financial protection for defective building work. As apartment living grows as a choice, the bill takes the first steps to making the system fairer by introducing the developer bond scheme. Under the scheme, developers pay a bond which is held by the regulator, and if serious building issues are not addressed by the developer or builder, this money can be released to pay for rectification works.

I could go through all of that and how it works, but instead I will say that we know the vast majority of builders do the right thing by consumers. With these new protections, consumers can be confident that the Building and Plumbing Commission will weed out the industry cowboys and that they will be in safe hands whenever they are dealing with a builder in Victoria. The bill paves the way for further building legislation to ensure Victorians are confident in their new home and that their new home, apartment, rental property or social or affordable home will have been built to the greatest quality. I commend the bill to the house.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (18:24): It is my great pleasure to get up and have a bit of a chat about the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. I will put you all out of your suspense: I am going to be supporting this bill. Because these reforms are urgent, I will not be supporting the reasoned amendment from the member for Polwarth, though I do have some reservations about the content of the bill and some reservations about the operation of the bill. I will spend a little bit of time talking about that over the course of the next 9½ minutes.

Victorians are simultaneously in a housing availability crisis, a housing affordability crisis, a construction industry crisis and a homelessness crisis. I have spent today at the Property Council of Australia's national housing solutions summit – hence the ridiculous get-up. It was a great event, and I got to speak with a large number of stakeholders about the many, many challenges facing Australia as it tries to remedy these crises. At the summit we heard from the federal housing minister Labor's Clare O'Neil as well as the shadow housing minister and my local member Liberal Michael Sukkar. It is clear that housing will be front and centre in the federal campaign that is currently underway – front and centre – and I think that is a very, very good thing. How terrific to actually have the housing debate at the centre of a national campaign, certainly for the first time in my lifetime and perhaps the first time ever. It is a terrific thing to have that debate going on. But the contrast between federal Labor's approach and the federal coalition's approach is stark, and indeed the contrast between state Labor and the state coalition is stark as well. Fundamentally, I think it boils down to whether you believe that private ownership of rental housing is part of the problem or part of the solution, whether you believe the government has a role in providing permanent housing to the most vulnerable Victorians or whether you believe that market-based solutions will deliver the housing stock we so desperately need.

To put some context around this I want to tell a couple of local stories first. The first story is one of regulation and compliance and new builds. It goes to the very heart of the bill before this chamber. I have firsthand experience through my constituents who live in an apartment building in New Street in Ringwood, and they have had some substantial issues: major defects to essential safety measures and leaks in their roofs, leading to frequent mould that residents have been told apparently is something to be expected. One apartment has been declared uninhabitable and has been that way for eight months, along with a whole bunch of other structural issues with regard to fire safety, mobility, access, health and safety. The absolutely appalling aspect of this particular example is that the developer retains

enough apartments in the block that he controls the owners corporation and is viciously, mendaciously, shamelessly exercising those numbers – not that we know anything about that in this place – in furtherance of his commercial objectives and in stark contrast to the moral imperative and the legal obligations he has to bring the building up to code. It is not good enough, and that is why you need a decent regulatory framework and – I will come to this a little bit later – a decent regulator, which we do not have at the moment. We have had exiting owners in that circumstance crystallise losses of some \$100,000 on these apartments. The issue of course is the developers look forward; they do not look backwards. They are always interested in the next project, not the last project. It is very easy to forget.

Members might not realise that the Brumby government brought up some reforms reasonably similar to some of these ones back in about 2012 or 2013, and those reforms ultimately were lobbied out of existence by the Master Builders and by the Housing Industry Association and ultimately never saw the light of day. There are powerful, powerful advocates in this industry – no doubt about it. There are powerful advocates in various parts of these debates. There is a powerful advocate in the CFMEU – less powerful than they used to be, but nonetheless a powerful advocate. The sort of rank conduct that they have gotten up to has made it increasingly difficult to be able to take the views of construction workers seriously, as represented by those people. The views of construction workers of course ought to be taken very seriously, but their role in this debate has been poisoned by the corrupt leadership of the CFMEU.

We had the circumstance in New Street where apartment owners were just left high and dry by a scheme that has failed and is failing. Of course that is unacceptable. The question is: to what extent does this bill cure that ill? It actually does not of course, because it is not retroactive. That is the challenge we have. I appreciate the general premise about retroactivity of bills and how Parliament should always take great care when thinking about that. The reality is that the government has already acted as insurer of last resort in relation to Porter Davis, but that was only when the weight of numbers got scary and became a political problem. It was only when the number of home owners left in the lurch reached the hundreds, not the dozens. There are examples of builders falling over prior to Porter Davis, and they were not necessarily picked up by the government doing as it frankly always does and probably always should, and that is acting as insurer of last resort. Well, what we have here is a bill that makes the government insurer of first resort, and that is a good thing, that is an appropriate thing. Whether the Victorian Building Authority is the regulator to do it or not, I have to say, is an open question. The VBA has failed on just about every metric for a substantial period of time. I think in my 6½ years in this place I have had more VBA complaints than I have had about any other single regulator. They have failed and failed again, and it is no surprise that there have been various clean-outs of the management, the board and the management again. It has been a failed regulator. I am not sure that they are the regulator ultimately to bring this bill to life, but nonetheless the bill has my support because the principles are the right principles.

The second example I want to talk about is a very upsetting example, where a woman came into my office this week. She had a two-year-old and a five-month-old. Her mother had died. Her mother got evicted from her apartment one day after she died. As a result this woman, who had been living with her mother as her carer – her former partner has choofed off – is left facing the prospect of homelessness with a two-year-old and a five-month-old. We – my office, I and my staff – rang every single homelessness support agency and provider right across the eastern suburbs. We were able to secure, ultimately, a bit of a piecemeal solution with some funding for motel rooms for a few additional nights, and we are continuing to work on a solution that is a permanent solution for this woman. But every single agency we spoke to said, ‘We don’t have any more money. We need the government to give us more money.’ Could you think of a circumstance more wanting of public intervention, more deserving of public intervention, than a single mother with a two-year-old and a five-month-old facing the very real prospect, were it not for our intervention, of sleeping in her car that night? This is the very real coalface of this crisis. That circumstance is a heartbreaking circumstance. No MP in this place wants to have to tell a woman with a two-year-old and a five-month-old, ‘Hey, sorry; we’ve tried, but there’s nothing out there for you.’ This is a crisis that simply must be addressed.

This bill goes part of the way by making sure the apartment stock that goes into the market is actually fit for purpose, and so it should. I appreciate the coalition's criticisms about the efficacy of the regulator, and I understand them. I disagree with the coalition's assessment of the 2 per cent bond, however. You need to have a bond system in place. Yes, it is going to get factored into the pricing, of course it is, but effectively it is a compulsory insurance scheme that is paid for by the beneficiary of the scheme. Well, we do that all the time. We do it with transport accidents, we do it with workplaces and we do it with emergency services. There are all sorts of compulsory insurance schemes, and I see no reason for the coalition to stand opposed to this particular compulsory insurance scheme, especially given the fundamental importance of that which we are trying to insure. Apartment owners have been ridden over roughshod by regulators and by governments right around the nation for years. These protections go some of the way to ensuring that those apartment owners do have access to some protections.

This bill does nothing for my constituents in New Street, because the die has already been cast there. As I say, people have exited that building at losses of \$100,000 for apartments between about \$600,000 or \$700,000. These are massive losses, life-alteringly bad losses, and this bill does not look backwards. My urging to the government is to give proper consideration. Yes, I understand the government is looking at the 10-year defects period and to what extent that will be retrospective. I would encourage them to consider extending that insurance scheme backwards as well. I have got so much more to say on this topic and related topics, but I do commend this bill to the house and I am glad to support it.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (18:34): I am really proud to be able to rise in this place today and support this bill. This bill, as previous speakers have said, takes the first step in establishing a framework where we have the transferring of the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority's domestic building insurance business to the Victorian Building Authority, transferring responsibility for domestic building dispute resolution services provided by Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria to the VBA, establishing a first-resort domestic building warranty scheme which will be operated by the VBA for domestic homes up to three levels high, providing the VBA with stronger enforcement powers and establishing a developer bond system for residential apartment buildings over three levels, as well as a few other things in relation to VCAT.

I want to say that this is a really important piece of legislative reform and one that has been a long time coming, and I am really proud that we have got to a position where this government is introducing this legislation for debate in the Parliament. As many speakers have said, building a home or an extension is one of the biggest financial outlays that most people will make in their entire life. It is also a complex industry. Because most people make usually just the one purchase, and certainly with a first purchase, it is not something they are accustomed to. Those people are not as sophisticated as people in the sector are at knowing how the system works, and unfortunately we have seen examples of people doing the wrong thing – shoddy builders and people who dupe people through that process. The term 'dodgy builder' has been used in this debate, but it is important to distinguish the vast majority of people in the building sector, who are reputable and do good work, from those that do poor work and to say that it is this cohort that this bill seeks to address.

I want to acknowledge industry feedback on this bill. This government consults closely with industry on its housing reforms. We listen carefully to those views. On many occasions we will take those views on board and deliver them and at other times we will disagree, and in some cases, in some of the stakeholder feedback, this bill differs from the feedback of the industry. But this is important reform for the reasons that I have just mentioned: bringing the regulatory insurance and dispute functions together and tilting the balance back in favour of consumers. Many members on this side of the house have spoken today about examples of the life-changing consequences poor building work can have for people. It can cause a whole range of further problems for people as well.

I am absolutely gobsmacked that the opposition both are opposing the bill and have moved a reasoned amendment – their opposition could not be stronger – and, further to that, at the lack of a coherent

argument against it. There have been a whole range of scattered arguments against this particular piece of legislation but not a coherent argument. I think that has been the biggest disappointment, that those opposing this legislation have not actually been able to put together a coherent argument as to why they are opposing this particular piece of legislation.

Of some of the speakers opposite I have heard today, one was in here shrieking much earlier on that builders would have to go back and fix defects. Well, yes, that is the point of the legislation. If a build is done and paid for and there is a defect, minor or major, we would expect the builder to go back and fix that defect. I think every Victorian would expect that a job that is done with minor or major defects is rectified. I think most good builders, if their attention is drawn even to a minor defect, will go back and fix that minor defect. That is not a reason to vote against this legislation.

We heard the former Leader of the Opposition talk about workforce shortages as a contributing factor to the pressure on the housing industry here in Victoria. I find it quite staggering that those who padlocked TAFEs – those who shut TAFE campuses down – would come in here and seek to lecture the government about workforce shortages. The member for Hawthorn came in here and was complaining about red tape and how it is hard for builders to build homes because of red tape. This is the same guy who stood on the back of a ute in his own electorate opposing housing development. The Liberal Party has had protests in Brighton against the government's plans to make it easier to build more housing where people want to live, closer to the people that they want to live near. This is an amazing experience of hypocrisy writ large from those opposite.

There has been discussion about social housing. Social housing is so important for the reasons we have heard many people talk about. We acknowledge that there are absolute pressures on social housing here and right around the country, particularly for those people who need it the most. This government is investing \$6.3 billion in the Big Housing Build to deliver more social housing. We always look to our national government to do more. We saw over the period of the Liberal–National parties in Canberra absolutely nothing done in terms of investment in social and affordable housing in this country. It was a shameful period of housing policy neglect in our country's history. When the Albanese government came in and brought their housing package to the Senate we saw those opposite – the Liberals, the Nationals and the Greens – oppose that package in the Senate for months if not over a year. I cannot remember the exact amount of time, but it was a long period of time. I remember it quite well because I was housing minister at the time. For those opposite now to seek to complain about the lack of social housing when for a period of many, many months they refused to lift their voices and ask their colleagues in Canberra to pass that package reeks of hypocrisy. As I say, the arguments offered by those opposite in relation to their opposition to this bill are cynical and duplicitous.

The reforms outlined in this bill today help to build confidence in the building sector here in Victoria. They say to consumers that they can go ahead and sign a contract for some building work for a new home with confidence that the government has their back in terms of the quality of the work that will be done. This is part of a package of broader reforms; this reform sits as part of the broader housing package that the government is taking forward, and this work is having a real impact. We have seen the most recent figures that have been released by the ABS showing that Victoria is building more homes than any other state in the country. We saw in this data, which was released in January and is relevant to the year ending September last year, that Victoria built 61,260 homes in that period, 15,600 more than New South Wales and 28,000 more than Queensland. A significant amount of housing is being built here in Victoria, and the government is acting to make sure that the policy settings are right to continue delivering more housing for Victorians. This is not just in terms of housing completions – the data also shows that our housing approvals are leading the country, so there is a pipeline of housing coming down for Victorians. There is the work that the wonderful Minister for Planning is doing in terms of rolling out activity centres, providing for small second homes on residential lots, progressing key precincts like Fishermans Bend and Arden and freeing up surplus government land to ensure that more housing is built when government does not need that land – all of these measures lend themselves

to providing confidence in the housing sector, and these reforms are a key part of that. I commend this bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (18:42): I rise today to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025. While you might not believe it given the contributions by those opposite, there is a housing crisis in regional Victoria as well as in Melbourne. I have heard very, very little from the government in terms of what they are doing to improve housing access and affordability in rural and regional Victoria. It is not just about private housing – about houses that are being built and privately purchased – this is about the government's failure to build more public housing and to make sure that there is sufficient emergency housing.

I have heard very compelling and moving stories from those on both sides of the chamber about people that we speak to on a regular basis who come to their local member of Parliament's office in tears, stressed, unsure where to turn to and unable to find a roof to sleep under that night, a safe place for them to take their family, their children. It does not matter what their scenario is – it does not matter whether they are new to the country or new to the region – there is no emergency housing available. It does not matter if it is a woman who is fleeing an extraordinarily violent relationship, with young children. We all recall and have heard the stories ourselves of women fleeing family violence who are offered a swag or a tent to sleep in because this government, after 10 years, simply has neglected to build the housing stock that so many Victorians desperately need when they cannot afford and cannot pull together the resources to be able to do it themselves.

The hidden crisis in Victoria is women who are sleeping on their friends' couches or pulling up a swag in the back shed. They are doing whatever they can. They are sleeping at friends' places, they are sleeping at their sister's place or they are sleeping at their parents' places. They are going wherever they can and moving frequently. They have been given up on by the Allan Labor government, and they do not know where else to turn. They so rarely turn up in the statistics, but they are there. I wish that the Allan Labor government would deliver on just a few of the words that they commit to women who are seeking refuge from family violence and to a few of those people who are homeless and tonight will be wondering where they are going to sleep and whether they will be safe. There are far too many Victorians in that situation, and that number is just increasing. In fact when we look at the scenario we have got in Victoria it is no wonder we have got a housing crisis. This is of the government's own doing.

These are Labor's policies, which sound good on paper – they love to announce the big numbers and all they are investing – but let us look at the outcomes for just a moment and what the impact has been after 10 years of Labor in Victoria. When it comes to housing, we had a promise of 80,000 homes each and every year, but in its first year of delivering on this promise the government only delivered about 75 per cent of that target, or about 61,000 homes. We are already way, way, way behind what the government promised voters at the last election where we would be in Victoria. There are more than 60,000 Victorians on the public housing waitlist. They are the people that are homeless. They are the people that are couch surfing. They are the people who are just trying to find somewhere safe for their kids and themselves overnight. In Victoria there are 15,600 fewer rentals available this year alone. This year there have been so many properties withdrawn from the rental market that there are nearly 16,000 fewer rental properties.

I have heard a lot from speakers from the Labor government during this debate around what Labor are doing to build housing. Well, that is the outcome of its policies that it has so far taken through this place and through various budgets. It is failing. Jacinta Allan is failing to ensure that we have safe, affordable and accessible housing in this state. The Premier has done an insufficient job in making sure that the levers that government have available to them promote the building of more housing. For goodness sake, start delivering on budgets that actually build more emergency housing and public housing for those Victorians who need our support more than any others. They are the people we should be fighting for.

There are many impacts on the shortage of housing in Victoria. I would like to refer to the Real Estate Institute of Victoria's report, which only just bounced into my inbox probably half an hour ago, so it is hot off the press. This is the REIV's submission to the inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria, so it is specific to the area that I represent and the member for South-West Coast represents. It is the area that we are passionate about, and we bring the voice of these people to the Parliament because they are so often forgotten by a city-centric Labor government. Seventy-seven per cent of REIV members know that it is property taxation that is impacting on regional housing supply. This is of no surprise. Again, this is a number, but let us look at where that comes from. Labor have increased the amount that you spend on government fees, charges and taxes on a new home build to just over 40 per cent. If you buy a house and land package – or perhaps it is a house and tax package – in Lucas, just outside of Ballarat, 42 per cent of that is just putting money into the government's pocket. That sounds bad on its own because there are a lot of people who when they build their dream home put the niceties aside. They put the silver lining of their dream to the side. They might not have money to go and do the landscaping straightaway. They cannot afford new furniture. It is the furniture that they may have had from the time they were at uni or hand-me-downs from their parents or other family members. They might not be able afford curtains. You see in some of those new homes there are blankets or sheets or something that are put up in the windows. So through these massive taxes not only is the Allan Labor government stealing the dream that Victorians have about what they want their home to look like –

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: It is outrageous, because it is exactly what the Labor government is doing.

Nick Staikos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the bill before us is about developer bonds and about first-resort insurance and about the rectification of defects; it is not about the matters that the member is speaking to, and I ask that you bring her back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I ask the member for Lowan to come back to the bill.

Emma KEALY: It has been a wideranging debate, which does include the housing crisis, which I have heard mentioned by those opposite. My concern is that 42 per cent of value of a new home build is something that adds to everybody's mortgage. It is extra money that people are having to find every single month when they pay back the banks. It is impacting on the cost of living and it is impacting on the affordability of homes for every Victorian in this state. Labor must do better. We need to listen to places like the REIV and to property developers. I know that seems a bad thing, but, do you know what, these are people who want to invest in more homes. We need to hear the voices of people who are homeless and facing homelessness who can find public housing –

Nick Staikos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is defying your ruling. I ask that you bring her back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I ask the member for Lowan to come back to the bill.

Emma KEALY: It does not even go to touching the sides of what we need to see from government. We need to see serious investment in public housing and emergency housing. We need government to not look at just dipping their hand in pockets through more and more and more taxes, which is having a massive impact on housing availability and cost of living. We need to support more tradies in the industry.

I spoke to Jeremy Forbes from HALT last week; he is doing an amazing amount of work in advocating for better mental health outcomes for tradies, because too many take their own lives, too many are turning to drugs and alcohol, and it is impacting on their lives in a terribly negative way. I urge the government to fund organisations like HALT, like Lets Talk in the south-west of Victoria, like the rural outreach worker program and support the mental health of our most vulnerable. But most importantly, I think, in this budget I want to see Labor review the taxes on property; let us cut it back.

Let us unlock some of those barriers to having people building more homes in regional Victoria to make sure those people who live in country Victoria are not paying more and more and more, that we are not seeing massive increases in the values of homes and that anyone who wants to live in regional Victoria can afford somewhere.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (18:52): I am absolutely so pleased to rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, and from the previous member's contribution I thought I had actually read the wrong bill, but I tell you I am going to be talking about this bill. This bill is going to be so popular in my community. The aim, member for Lowan, of this bill is to deliver on our government's landmark reforms to the building industry, making it easier to build more homes for Victorians. We know that by 2051 Victoria will need an additional – get this, member for South-West Coast – 2.24 million homes. That is 2.24 million homes so that our kids, your kids, your grandkids, your great-grandkids and their kids and so on can achieve the dream of home ownership or to find, most importantly – remember, not everyone wants to own their own home – an affordable rental to live in.

I have stood here in this place before and I have talked about the importance of recognising the rights of renters. I spent quite a few years over the past decade renting, and I can tell you some of the rental reforms here in this place have been outstanding to protect renters, but it is why our government is absolutely determined to get more folks into homes in places, most importantly – let us face it – where they want to live, because by increasing the supply of housing we make it more affordable; it is simple. It means that more people can afford to live in the inner and middle-ring suburbs that are well established and well connected to public transport and amenities. That is something I feel really strongly about as the member for Laverton, because I toggle inner, middle and outer western suburbs. It means that there is less of a reliance on outer-suburban growth areas like in my electorate of Laverton, like Truganina and Williams Landing, and like the folks that are living in the many, many suburbs that make up the Wyndham municipality. It means that there is less reliance on those outer-suburban growth areas to carry all the heavy lifting. That is what folks in the outer west are doing – they are carrying the heavy lifting for Victoria's population growth. The City of Wyndham is bigger than Greater Geelong and still growing.

What this bill is also about is ensuring our kids can afford a place to themselves, close to their parents, in the communities they grew up in. That is something that people on this side of the house are out talking to folks about every day in their electorates. Parents do want their children to live close to home. I openly say I never want my children to leave home. I think the best I can hope for is that they will live down the street or, if I am extra hopeful, they might be able to afford the house next door, but we need to make sure they can afford a home or a rental property.

I remember when the Premier began two weeks of incredible landmark housing reforms last year. I remember when those opposite, led by the member for Brighton – we all remember that – protested out the front of the Premier's press conference. I am sure the member for Brighton thought that was a really smart thing to do, but time and time again it has come back to haunt him. 'The blocker from Brighton,' I think he is now known as here in this place. They were absolutely out of their minds with anger at the prospect of more homes being built in their leafy inner suburban areas, with ample amounts of train stations, tram and bus connections and schools – the sort of stuff that people in Truganina and Williams Landing and other folks in Wyndham can only dream of. If those opposite and their protesters had their way, every single one of them looking for a place to live would just be pushed out into the outer burbs. I think, and I am pretty sure I am correct on this one – wait for it – that I even heard one of them say in the news coverage, 'Just send them to the outer burbs.' Can you believe the audacity of those opposite? Send them to the outer burbs. What an anthem that is for the 2026 election, let me tell you that. Suburbs like ours in Melbourne's outer west grow faster than our ability to service them with the infrastructure they need.

Members interjecting.

Sarah CONNOLLY: You can think that it is a laughing matter when you want to send people into the outer west. Believe me, I applaud what we are doing here in this space in reorienting this growth. We are getting more apartments, townhouses and units in those established inner- and middle-ring suburbs. But of course it is not just important that we build more homes; we need to ensure that these homes are well built, because God forbid if someone wanting to build a home or move into a newly built home should possibly ask for a quality build. That is what we are going to give them: you get what you pay for.

We need to ensure that the building activity – and there is going to be a hell of a lot going on in the next couple of decades – that goes on in these areas is up to scratch. It is why we announced a new building watchdog, the Building and Plumbing Commission, which will be a one-stop shop for all things related to building work here in Victoria for builders, for homebuyers and for renovators alike. If you go out and talk to people on the streets, this makes sense to them. It does not make sense to those opposite, but it makes sense to the punters out on the street when we talk about this. It will replace the existing Victorian Building Authority, Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria and the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, enforcing building laws and regulations and building insurance and providing a space for resolving disputes between home builders and their contracted buyers, because as much as those opposite would like to think it does not happen, these disputes are happening before us right now and there will be those in the future.

More importantly, this new integrated Building and Plumbing Commission will have greater enforcement powers. It will have the teeth it needs to go after builders who do the wrong thing. Those opposite time and time again only talk about builders doing the right thing. The majority do the right thing, but what we know is there are situations where builders are not doing the right thing, and we need to do something to make it fairer. What we are saying is that if serious defects are identified by the commission and they are not rectified, it will be able to stop the issuing of occupancy permits or the completion of off-the-plan sales for apartments. Let me be clear: if it is not fixed, it is not for sale. I cannot tell the chamber how much this will mean for families living in my electorate who have had constant issues dealing with building defects, where builders have all the power and the homebuyers have absolutely none.

This bill will be absolutely transformative for the domestic building industry. It will make things so much easier for the folks in my electorate looking to build and buy new homes. We need to build more homes right across the state, and we need to make sure that those homes are built to the quality that Victorians rightly expect.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Be Well in the Ranges

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:00): (1091) I have a matter for the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is for the minister to commit to ongoing funding for the Be Well in the Ranges program running across the Kinglake Ranges. This is a valuable program that needs to be continued. It was initiated in 2019 to support the community around the 10th anniversary of Black Saturday. There has been a growing demand around long-term PTSD, complex intergenerational trauma and many other serious mental health issues relating to surviving the disaster. Since its inception over 1470 people have participated in the program, with 215 referrals made to other services. Between September 2023 and August 2024, a 10-month snapshot reveals that 726 sessions were conducted. During this period 207 people attended psychology, music therapy or counselling sessions, 94 new clients engaged with the service and 1078 sessions were attended by returning clients.

It was originally funded by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, but for the last 4½ years it has been supported by the state government on a year-to-year basis. The program offers two psychologists for 8 hours a week and a counsellor for 8 hours a week, as well as a provisional psychologist for 16 hours a week. It provides group music therapy programs in local kindergartens and primary schools. It emerged that the Kinglake Ranges community are still very affected by the Black Saturday bushfire that devastated the area. In the last six months there has been an increase in community members seeking help for the first time and accessing psychology and counselling services. This includes a school having requested help for its students.

It is getting towards the end of the financial year, and there is a lot of uncertainty around whether or not this program will continue to receive funding. There is a risk of losing the team of subcontracted mental health staff, who have invaluable experience within the community. Without this funding, the community will be left without accessible or affordable mental health support. With the nearest acute care mental health hospital located in Melbourne, the police in the ranges act as the crisis assessment and treatment team.

Representatives from the program took the initiative to email the Minister for Health and the Minister for Mental Health separately, pleading for ongoing funding. The Minister for Health forwarded the email to the Minister for Mental Health, but they have not received a response yet. They have also emailed the Premier. It is not a lot of money – about \$150,000 will help them, and when you look at the amount of money that is wasted on so many other projects, this amount is less than one ghost worker on a Big Build site. I strongly urge the minister to action this request.

Wendouree electorate ministerial visit

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:03): (1092) My adjournment is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that I seek is for him to see firsthand the work being done to protect consumers by local community organisations as well as meet with relevant stakeholders in his portfolio areas of consumer affairs and local government. I believe that it would be worthwhile for the minister to visit our GovHub in Mair Street to meet with the Consumer Affairs Victoria employees working in the call centre and experience firsthand the important work that they are doing. Consumer Affairs Victoria employees directly engage with the public, answering questions about law and supporting resolution of issues where possible. Consumer Affairs Victoria also provides specific phone services for specialist or priority issues.

It would also be beneficial for the minister to meet with CAFS – Child and Family Services – in Ballarat, which provides important services for locals experiencing financial hardship. CAFS was successful in obtaining funding under the government's recent financial counselling funding round. The grant is enabling CAFS to create an innovative financial wellness hub for people living within the central highlands and beyond, increasing access to support services and building financial independence and capability with an integrated service approach. This meeting would provide an opportunity for the minister to learn more about how CAFS will assist my community with increased access to support when experiencing financial hardship where rental or mortgage stress is a factor. Significantly the hub will also be available to neighbouring areas across the western region via the online hub, comprising a further 90,000 people.

I would also like the minister, in his capacity as Minister for Local Government, to meet with representatives from the City of Ballarat. My electorate of Wendouree falls entirely in the City of Ballarat local government area, and it is an important partner to the Victorian government in the delivery of community infrastructure projects, including lake lighting, the construction of new kindergarten rooms in Alfredton and Sebastopol, upgrades to recreational facilities across Ballarat, the bike path to Delacombe and the provision of community services. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Wendouree and having meaningful engagements with key stakeholders in my community.

State Emergency Service

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:05): (1093) My adjournment matter for this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to initiate a genuine, independent inquiry into allegations of bullying and harassment of volunteers in the Victoria State Emergency Service.

The minister will be aware of this because I know it has been examined in quite a lot of detail by a journalist, Ben Silvester, in ACM newspapers and by a number of other very passionate and interested SES volunteers who have raised these concerns. There are concerns that there is a culture of bullying, gaslighting and belittling within parts of the organisation, particularly for volunteers who raise particular issues or make complaints, some of them stemming originally from complaints about SES trucks that had to be taken out of service, and that is allegedly still continuing.

According to Mr Silvester's articles earlier in the year, more than a dozen volunteers had come forward after the first stories revealed internal concerns about mental health support and blacklisting of members within the organisation. There have been a series of articles, including one today, that highlighted that the Lismore unit, which is now down to apparently only two members, was unable to actually turn out to a car accident last week involving an elderly man because there is literally just the two of them there, and this is a concern.

I want to read out a couple of paragraphs from one of Ben Silvester's articles earlier in the year:

A Melbourne-based volunteer also said they had been subjected to a campaign of "passive bullying" so destructive they had lost their job and been driven to the brink of homelessness.

Others described "horrific" verbal abuse and manipulation that left them no choice but to leave a service they had dedicated most, if not all, of their adult lives to. All of these volunteers said management – some of the more than 150 paid staff within the SES – either didn't investigate and take the issues seriously, or were an active participant in the bullying.

This came from a number of volunteers right around the state, in regional and in metropolitan areas, and all of the ones that were quoted in that particular article are at least 15-year veterans.

I cannot provide any veracity to the statements, but clearly people are feeling this way. I have met with some of the volunteers, who are very concerned about the culture in the SES. That is why I think it is important that the minister undertake an inquiry of some sort that is not simply her asking the SES for an explanation or a response, which I know she has done, but actually getting an independent inquiry going into whether these allegations are true, and more particularly, if they are, to address them and make sure that this does not continue to occur for our volunteers.

Lipoedema

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:08): (1094) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to visit the Kororoit electorate to engage with local women about what the government is doing to improve women's health in Victoria, particularly in relation to lipoedema. Recently two wonderful local women, Ruth and Roslyn, visited me to share their personal experiences about living with lipoedema, a chronic and progressive condition that is vastly under-recognised. I truly want to thank Ruth and Ros for the time that they afforded me to educate me about lipoedema.

Lipoedema is a disorder of fat metabolism that predominantly affects women and leads to disproportionate fat accumulation, pain and mobility challenges. Despite its significant impact on quality of life, it remains poorly understood by many health professionals, leaving those affected struggling to access appropriate care. Ruth and Roslyn spoke passionately about the difficulties that they face in finding general practitioners who are knowledgeable about lipoedema and can provide appropriate medical advice and treatment pathways. Many women experience years of misdiagnosis or are simply told that weight loss is the only solution, despite evidence that lipoedema is not a condition that responds to diet and exercise alone. This lack of awareness among healthcare providers

is a barrier to timely and effective management of this condition, exacerbating the physical and emotional toll on those living with lipoedema.

Another major concern raised by both Ruth and Ros is the financial burden of compression garments, which are a critical part of managing lipoedema by improving circulation and reducing pain and swelling. In New South Wales there is fairer access to government-funded support for compression garments, yet Victorian women face significant out-of-pocket costs. These garments are not a luxury; they are a medical necessity, and the inequity in access between states is something that must be addressed. Women's health has long been an area where conditions affecting predominantly the female population are underfunded, undertreated and under-researched. Lipoedema is yet another example of a condition that deserves greater attention and policy action. Addressing the gaps in healthcare provider education, improving access to specialists and ensuring financial support for necessary medical garments would make a tangible difference in the lives of women who are affected by this condition.

I have spoken to our very passionate health minister about lipoedema, and I thank her for her true commitment to women's health. She truly does care. I therefore ask the Minister for Health to visit Kororoit to hear firsthand from women like the wonderful Ruth and Roslyn who can speak to the real challenges that they face in accessing care and support. By taking the time to listen, the minister will have the opportunity to ensure that women's health, particularly conditions like lipoedema, receives the attention and investment that it deserves. I look forward to the minister's response and action on this important and serious issue.

South-West Coast electorate projects

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:11): (1095) My adjournment is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the Treasurer to commit funding to the crucial projects required in South-West Coast in the upcoming budget. In the upcoming May budget I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding for the Warrnambool Surf Lifesaving Club. It urgently needs a rebuild. The club provides emergency services to the community. Over the Labour Day long weekend the club hosted the Victorian junior state championships, with over 1000 junior lifesavers competing. During the event the clubhouse lost water and then power. This shows just how desperately a new facility is needed. The Allan Labor government need to fund the rebuild of the surf lifesaving club.

I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding for the multipurpose indoor sport and recreation facility which is needed in Portland. After years of planning, Glenelg Shire Council and local sporting clubs had scoped it out to cater for a range of sporting and recreational activities, including basketball, table tennis, volleyball, dance and martial arts. The government's funding announcement in 2022 to support the renovation of the gymnastics club at a different site scuppered plans for a shared multipurpose centre. The government now needs to get the funding underway to support all the clubs and build the multipurpose centre which is planned and scoped for Otway Street.

The Allan Labor government need to provide funding for a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre for the south-west. This is the only region in Victoria still waiting. It is needed to provide life-changing support for people in recovery near their families. The business case for this is clear. It is nine years since the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre, WRAD, formed the Lookout committee and jumped through every government hoop. They have fulfilled every government request. The government keeps promising but has not delivered. The time for excuses is over. I call on the Allan Labor government to fund the Lookout in the next budget. They have been waiting for years.

I call on the government to provide funding to fix regional and rural roads properly. Patching potholes here and there is not working. We need a concerted, thorough effort to resurface the roads. Currently the road degradation is a massive risk to drivers and standard vehicles as well as trucks. South-west Victorians have had enough. We have had the driest spring, summer and autumn, and the government could have done a ton of work on our roads, but we have not seen the expenditure or the road crews. The budget needs a substantial uplift in roads funding. The government cannot continue to deny that

they have significantly cut road funding in the regions. Resurfacing-of-roads spend is down 82 per cent, and 91 per cent of roads are in poor or very poor condition, according to the government's own survey.

Newlands Primary School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (19:14): (1096) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Newlands Primary School to officially open the school's new gym, administration building and learning spaces. We have been lucky to have the Minister for Education up our way quite often recently, and I do want to just quickly touch first on his recent visit to Reservoir East Primary School. We are lucky enough to have a lot of fantastic schools in Preston and Reservoir, but Reservoir East Primary is a real standout in terms of its innovative educational approaches and its very strong and positive school culture. I think that is very much to the credit of principal James Cumming, assistant principal Linda Lavelle and all of the team they have put together.

One thing that is very striking to me whenever I visit that school, as I did with the minister, is the way that they really go to great lengths to get the best outcomes, both educational outcomes and life outcomes, for their students. They squeeze the most out of any program or opportunity that comes their way. They are quite creative in the way they put different programs together to support their students, and they go out into our community and work with other organisations to support their students. That shines through in all of their work but notably in their work around inclusion and also their work in Koori education, which is very well regarded across the northern suburbs. We had the opportunity to discuss that with James, Linda, Auntie Rikki, Josie, Dani, Nikol, the school council president Susan Arnall and a range of others during our visit. As is often the case, when you talk to people who are getting the most out of programs in order to support their students, you get the best feedback, and we appreciated that.

It would be fantastic to have the minister back to do a very similar thing at Newlands Primary School to get feedback on some of their great programs. Notably they run the only bilingual Spanish primary school program in the state, and they partner with some Indigenous teachers from the bilingual Yirrkala School in north-east Arnhem Land. We would also have the minister along to officially open the new facilities, which are the product of a very significant five-year rebuild that did take place across the challenging COVID period, and I would like to recognise the work on that project of the former member for Pascoe Vale Lizzie Blandthorn, the former member for Preston Robin Scott and long-serving school council president Adam Palmer, who is perhaps one of the few parents left from the original Help Newlands Now campaign.

It has been a transformational project, so it will be great to celebrate its impact on the school and the broader community, and as with any large project, it would be great to get some feedback as well on how it has been working out. I think students and staff have been in those new buildings for a couple of terms now, so we can get some feedback to support not only the ongoing work there but the fantastic ongoing work of this government in our nation-leading school building program. I thank the minister very much for his recent visit to Reservoir East Primary and thank him for his consideration of this adjournment matter.

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (19:17): (1097) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide the Victorian Fisheries Authority with the funds that they need to retain all existing fisheries officers and fishery enforcement stations. While today may be April Fools' Day, this is certainly not a laughing matter. Earlier this year news leaked that the Allan Labor government was sneakily attempting to gut the Victorian Fisheries Authority. It has now been revealed that, due to the Allan Labor government's poor budget management, some 35 Victorian workers at the authority will lose their jobs and five crucial fisheries enforcement stations will be closed. This loss of these frontline jobs will mean fewer

inspections, less oversight and more illegal fishing and environmental damage. It is a slap in the face to responsible fishers who do the right thing and expect the rules to be enforced fairly. According to a 2020 report by Ernst & Young, over 1.1 million Victorians participate in recreational fishing. Recreational fishing contributes over \$7.5 billion to the state's economy and helps support over 27,000 jobs.

At a local level I am deeply concerned about the impact of these changes on our Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary. I think of organisations in my community – the Friends of Ricketts Point, the Friends of Ricketts Point Landside, the Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron, the Bayside Earth Sciences Society Inc, the Beaumaris Conservation Society, the Black Rock and Sandringham Conservation Association and Marine Care Ricketts Point. All of these organisations, which have invested literally thousands of hours into the protection of our marine parks and our marine sanctuary, are being duded by this government. Without enough fisheries officers, illegal fishing can run rampant. Poachers will be able to deplete fishing stocks. Without enough fisheries officers, our natural environment is put at risk. Without enough fisheries officers, illegal fishing operators will be able to undercut legitimate operators. Without enough fisheries officers, reckless boating, speeding and noncompliance will endanger lives.

Earlier this month VRFish, the peak body representing recreational fishing in Victoria, carried out a survey. Ninety-five per cent of respondents and over 2000 responses did not support sacking vital fisheries officers. At the same time the Allan Labor government is cutting frontline services in Victoria they are bizarrely hiring more highly paid spin doctors to work on the Premier's pet project, the Suburban Rail Loop. We know that there are 54 highly paid staff working in strategic communications and engagement, with one being paid \$490,000 a year.

Victorians should not be punished because the Allan Labor government has got their priorities all wrong. The Liberals and Nationals will always stand with recreational fishers and boaters to ensure sustainable fishing stocks, responsible management of our marine environments and safe waterways. The minister should immediately reverse these damaging cuts and ensure these vital fisheries officers can keep working in the future.

Laverton electorate road safety

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:20): (1098) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is that the minister join me to visit my electorate of Laverton to speak with locals from Laverton about their road safety issues in our local community. It was just a month or so ago that I held the first of what I am calling listening tours, a series of tours across my electorate of Laverton, across the different suburbs, to talk to locals about the issues, the challenges and the opportunities and what matters to them locally.

I kicked off the first in this series of tours in Laverton, and I had about 40 awesome locals of all different backgrounds, all different ages, who, most importantly, lived in Laverton, from some who had lived there their entire lives to those that had moved in a couple of months ago. These folks and I came together at the Laverton Community Hub, and we just had a really open, honest and transparent conversation about what locals love about their community and also, most importantly, what they want to see improved in their local community. We had a lot of conversations about traffic on the local roads, and we also had a lot of conversations about the exit off the freeway and then the entry onto the freeway that goes through local streets in Laverton. Locals had some great ideas on how we can better improve access and also basically beautify these local streets despite the heavy traffic coming through them.

I really look forward to the minister visiting my electorate of Laverton and taking the time to speak with these awesome locals and also to come out and see firsthand what they would like improved on local roads in their community.

VicTrack

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:22): (1099) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister instruct VicTrack to work with developers rather than being obstructive, belligerent and just plain uncooperative. I brought this up in a constituency question last sitting week. I have got an issue with VicTrack. A developer wanted to do a \$20 million development, a hotel in Drouin, that was going to employ 200 people, and he wanted access to VicTrack land to his car park, and they knocked it back. That is 200 jobs gone out of my area. Now this is happening again. I have another development group. Acuity Development Group are going to invest \$300 million into Warragul. That is more than what this government has invested in my area over the last decade. But the common thread is VicTrack. VicTrack are belligerent. They will not sit down.

One development they are doing is worth \$110 million. Every other department likes it – Regional Development Victoria, Development Victoria, the development facilitation program, the local council and Invest Victoria all support this project – except VicTrack. VicTrack will not even come to the table to have a conversation. This project puts into the local economy \$90 million a year, creating 1000 indirect jobs and 700 direct jobs. That is a massive boost to this local economy, and I am getting sick and tired of how this government works or how the department works.

When I was in business, the dog wagged the tail – the tail did not wag the dog. I need the minister to intervene with VicTrack – drag them, kicking and screaming if she has to, to the table to start to talk to developers. They are trying to do the right thing. Local councils are on board and every other department is on board, but VicTrack is absolutely belligerent in the way it deals with the community and developers. To see this amount of investment sitting on the table but not being done in my community is heartbreaking. At some point in time these investors will walk away. They will go to Queensland or they will go somewhere else. VicTrack needs to get on board so I can create jobs in my local community or the developers can create jobs and create \$90 million of economic impact into my local community. It is not too much to ask.

Narre Warren South electorate school breakfast clubs

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:24): (1100) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and concerns the school breakfast club program. The action I seek is that the minister provide an update on the program's impact on families in my electorate of Narre Warren South. We know that families need support to ease cost-of-living pressures, and the Allan Labor government's school breakfast club program is giving them one less thing to worry about by serving free, fresh and healthy breakfasts to students. This program is really important in my community. It makes sure that no matter where a child lives or goes to school, they have got the food they need to start off the day right and to continue to learn and to grow. I know for working families in Narre South this program means students who need a bit of extra support have a meal available to them. This leads to improved student engagement and concentration, enhanced social skills and better academic performance. Over 100 new schools have opted in during the past year, bringing the number of schools taking part in the program to 1100, with this number set to grow by June of this year. I would like to thank our delivery partner Foodbank, as well as the staff and teachers at local schools in my area who help support the program. The school breakfast club program builds on other cost-of-living supports, including the \$400 school saving bonus and free dental check-ups in school provided through the Smile Squad program. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Responses

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:26): The member for Eildon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health, and the action the member seeks is clarification on funding matters for the Be Well program. The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member in the

Wendouree electorate and meet with key stakeholders. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action the member seeks relates to the support and management of SES volunteers. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to meet with local women in Kororoit and discuss women's health, particularly in relation to lipoedema.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer, and the action the member seeks relates to budget funding across the South-West Coast region. The member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is for the Minister for Education to join the member at Newlands Primary School to officially open the brand new gym and also the admin building and learning spaces, a fantastic delivery for families in the Preston electorate. The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and the action the member seeks relates to the Victorian Fisheries Authority.

The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member for Laverton at a listening tour and speak to locals about their experiences in relation to road safety and road issues in her electorate. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action the member seeks is for VicTrack to work more cohesively with his local community. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is an update on the school breakfast program and how it is supporting local students and families in the Narre Warren South community – absolutely a very important initiative in our local communities.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:29 pm.