



**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Thursday 20 February 2025**

**By authority of the Victorian Government Printer**



## **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 Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,

Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Thursday 20 February 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**Health services**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) presented a petition bearing 169 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the ongoing situation of the amalgamation of Seymour Health with Northern Health, Epping. There are concerns that the Health Services Plan developed on advice from an Expert Advisory Committee will result in the forced amalgamation of health services like Seymour Health. The decision to merge Seymour Health with Northern Health threatens to reduce the range of vital and lifesaving healthcare options available to communities and will mean longer waiting lists, the loss of local voices in healthcare, increased travel for treatment and local job losses. Ultimately, these plans to amalgamate the hospital will adversely impact a local community that is in need of support.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to release Expert Advisory advice to the public, and requests that genuine public consultation is undertaken about any proposed Health Services Plan, that the powers, authorities and responsibilities remain with the local Seymour Health board, and that no amalgamation takes place.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

**Hastings electorate road safety**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) presented a petition bearing 2 signatures:

**Issue:**

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support for Mornington Peninsula Shire's proposal to reduce the speed limits on the C777 between Somerville and Flinders to a maximum of 80 kph except where the road passes through the villages of Merricks and Shoreham, where the limit would be reduced from the current limit of 80kph to 60kph. This action would result in improvements to road safety and in particular significantly reduce the risk of serious accidents at the dangerous intersections with the roads to Merricks beach (Merricks beach road), Mornington (Merricks Road) and to Redhill (Shoreham Road). The C777 not only takes a high level of vehicular traffic but is also used, and crossed, by cyclists and pedestrians. It is also seeing significant road kill of native wildlife, including koalas.

**Action:**

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government to implement these speed limit reductions proposed by the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

**Southern Cross station coach terminal**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) presented a petition bearing 79 signatures:

The petition of:

***Skybus Drivers, Customer Service Officers and staff, residing within the State of Victoria***

Draws to the attention of the House

The unacceptably dangerous environment which exists at Southern Cross Bus Terminal.

Such behaviours have led to a number of our drivers and workers being physically and verbally abused by individuals expressing threatening, violent, aggressive anti social behaviour towards our drivers, staff and customers.

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### The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

Calls on the Minister for Police to ensure that the Victorian Police Force, provides hourly patrols of the Bus Terminal and ensures that a physical presence is on display at Southern Cross Bus Terminal to deter such anti social behaviour.

### **Mount Arapiles rock climbing**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) presented a petition bearing 1973 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the Allan Labor Government's devastating decision to close large portions of rock-climbing areas in Mt Arapiles (Dyurrite), and its failure to consult with the climbing community and local residents impacted by this decision.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to engage in transparent and expanded consultation with all stakeholders, and demands that established climbing routes and The Pines campground are not removed until such consultation occurs.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### **Melbourne Market**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) presented a petition bearing 229 signatures:

#### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the Melbourne Market Authority (MMA), under direction of the Victorian Government, has decided to impose significant rent increases over the next ten years on wholesalers within the Melbourne Markets, at 35 Produce Drive, Epping. The increases are unreasonable and were implemented without adequate consultation. The increases will drive up prices for fresh produce, further burdening Victorians and small businesses. The MMA Board's decision demonstrates a disregard for the financial struggles of Victorians and the sustainability of businesses operating within the market. The decision is in breach of the three objects of the Melbourne Market Authority Act 1977: (a) to provide a commercially viable wholesale facility for the efficient distribution of fresh produce; and (b) to optimise returns on land and assets controlled and managed by the Authority; and (c) to ensure a fair and competitive environment for the wholesale trading of produce. The MMA Board's failure to act in the best interests of businesses and consumers reflects a breakdown in leadership and accountability. Wholesalers at Epping have lost confidence and trust in the ability of the MMA's Board, CEO, and Management Team to discharge their responsibilities.

#### **Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly take urgent action to call for the immediate resignation of the MMA Board, CEO, and Management Team, on the grounds that their actions are in breach of the Melbourne Market Authority Act 1977. The petitioners also ask for: 1. An immediate freeze on rent increases within the Melbourne Market. 2. The appointment of a new Board, CEO and Management Team to the MMA who will make decisions in accordance with their obligations set out in the Melbourne Market Authority Act 1977. 3. An Inquiry into the decision-making process that led to these rent hikes, ensuring that future actions by the MMA are transparent and aligned with the wellbeing of all stakeholders.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### **Mornington Peninsula beaches**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 119 signatures:

#### **Issue:**

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support for greater safeguards at Mornington Peninsula back beaches. In 2023–2024, Victoria had its highest summer drowning total on record with 26 lives lost. The back beaches of the Mornington Peninsula can be dangerous and are generally unpatrolled.

#### **Action:**

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government to urgently fund upgraded warning signs in different languages to alert people of the dangerous beach conditions and rescue tubes or flotation devices to save lives.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

**Small-scale livestock farming**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) presented a petition bearing 221 signatures:

**To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria**

**The Petition of the Australia Food Sovereignty Alliance (the Petitioner) and the residents of Victoria (the Petitioners) draws to the attention of the House:**

Small-scale livestock farmers in Victoria are facing a devastating blow as Hardwicks (owned by Chinese multinational Kilcoy), has announced it will close its doors to service kills on 14 December. This will decimate small-scale livestock farming and access to local meat in Victoria.

**The petitioners therefore request the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to pay attention to the following demands:**

1. That the Victorian Government urgently implement Recommendation 27 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply:

That Agriculture Victoria work with the Victorian Farmers Federation, PrimeSafe and commercial abattoirs to negotiate small livestock producers' ongoing access to kill facilities in the short-to-medium term. The Victorian Government amend the Meat Industry Act 1993 (Vic) to specifically provide for and define micro-abattoirs and the Victorian Planning Provisions to introduce micro-abattoirs (including mobile micro-abattoirs) as a Section 1 use in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Green Wedge Zone and the Green Wedge A Zone. The Victorian Government support small scale livestock producers to establish micro-abattoirs (including mobile micro-abattoirs) in communities which can demonstrate a need for this critical shared agricultural infrastructure.

2. That the Victorian Government apply the standards set out in AS4464:2007 *the Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Wild Game Meat for Human Consumption*, which could be safely applied to domestic livestock, enabling them to be slaughtered on farm, chilled and inspected, and subsequently transferred to a licensed butcher for further processing. This would support the survival of small-scale livestock farmers.

**Ordered that petition (Coburg High School) presented by Anthony Cianflone (Pascoe Vale) on 19 February be considered tomorrow.**

***Documents***

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

Family Violence Protection Act 2008 – Report 2023–24 on the implementation of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework

Public Prosecutions, Office of – Report 2023–24

*Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017* – Review of the operation of the Act under s 116.

***Business of the house***

**Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:38): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 4 March 2025.

**Motion agreed to.**

***Members statements***

**Wirrigirri Primary School**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:39): I am very pleased to say that children in my electorate are getting the best start in life with a really great education. Last week I was at Wirrigirri

Primary School in Wollert with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll and Sonja Terpstra from the other place to officially open this new primary school. This vibrant new school is a fantastic addition to our Wollert community, which has been flourishing and expanding with time. The school was made possible by the Allan Labor government's investment, and construction has been carried out in stages.

This modern facility currently features a learning neighbourhood with a presentation space, classrooms, a quiet area, student toilets and a staff planning area as well as a playground with a grassed area and play equipment. Once fully completed, because works are continuing throughout this year, the school will include an administration and library building, three learning neighbourhoods, a community hub, hard courts, a car park, a sports field and a commercial kitchen.

I was also pleased to meet with the interim president of the school council Amanda and interim school council member Eleni. They are very excited parents who are really committed to this school providing the best education for their families. We are also building a kindergarten which will be co-located with the school. That is expected to be completed this year and will take enrolments for next year. This is all about us making sure that our kids, no matter their age, have the best start in life through a wonderful education.

**Australia Day awards**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (09:40): I want to acknowledge the recipients of Order of Australia Medals on the Mornington Peninsula and in my electorate: Mrs Judith Patricia McKee OAM for her service to the community of Melbourne, Ms Deborah Rae Mellett OAM for her service to the Indigenous community of Victoria, Mrs Judith Anne Walsh OAM for her service to the community of the Mornington Peninsula and Dr Kym Jenkins AM for her significant service to psychiatry as a clinician and academic and in executive roles.

Last week I had the privilege of speaking to the students of Rye Primary about leadership, and I shared with them that leadership is not defined by titles but by the positive change one brings to their community. The work of these recipients exemplifies this kind of leadership, leading with compassion, dedication and a desire to make a difference. These individuals are true leaders in their communities, and I congratulate them for their well-deserved recognition.

**McCrae landslide**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (09:41): Finally, I want to address the landslide down in McCrae and those residents who are still out of their homes due to the landslide that happened some time ago. I want to bring to the attention of the house a letter that the Mornington Peninsula shire wrote to the Minister for Emergency Services very soon after that landslide. The minister still has not replied to the Mornington Peninsula shire regarding the assistance they are seeking. Yesterday the mayor and the acting CEO both wrote again to the minister. I think it is about time that minister started to take action to help these residents and stopped ignoring the requirements and needs of those people in McCrae.

**Gemma Boucher**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:42): I would like to acknowledge Gemma Boucher, a dear neighbour, a kind and generous friend, awesome school mum and beautiful work colleague to so many at the Department of Transport and Planning and the Level Crossing Removal Project. At just 40 years of age Gemma lost her battle with breast cancer, leaving a devoted husband and the most amazing little girl eight-year-old Chloe and her two dachshunds Scarlett and Rupert. Gemma really was the best kind of person: positive, thoughtful, friendly, compassionate. I know she will leave a really big hole in many, many hearts. I also know that our beautiful Seaford community will step in to wrap their arms around and be second and third and fourth mums to Chloe and little Lucy Gemma, who will be born by surrogacy later this year. My deepest condolences to Gem's loving husband Simon, gorgeous daughter Chloe, parents Annie and John and all of her family and friends.

**Seaford Life Saving Club**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:43): Last week I joined local families at the Seaford Life Saving Club for Friday night nippers. It was also an opportunity to take part in the club's inaugural art competition. The artwork was incredible – so many ideas, so much creativity and so much talent. A huge thank you to all the families for being part of this wonderful club and supporting their kids to be nippers, learning all about water safety, community participation and the value of volunteering. Thanks to all the age-group managers and volunteers and local mums and dads for making this special event happen and for turning up every week to keep this club so strong. The biggest thanks go to incredible individual Samone Cranston, whose energy, commitment and can-do attitude is absolutely inspiring. Thanks to the Carrum coastguard volunteers – *(Time expired)*

**Lowan electorate health services**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (09:43): I rise to condemn the Allan Labor government and the Minister for Health for their appalling handling of the Grampians Health megamerger. We were promised there would be more jobs locally, more health services locally and upgrades to our health services. Instead on Valentine's Day the laundry staff were told of the heartless decision that they would be sacked, and the reason was that the Allan Labor government will not fund upgrades to their linen service. Now we have got a situation where up to 20 jobs will be relocated to Ballarat, out of my electorate of Lowan, because Labor cannot manage Victoria's healthcare system. It is Victorians and local people who are paying the price. There are so many opportunities that would be available to keep those jobs in the local area. You could look at funding the upgrade of the linen service – you have had 10 years to do it, and you have done nothing. You could investigate using laundries at other health services in the region.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Lowan, through the Chair!

**Emma KEALY:** We could also look at investigating the use of local commercial laundries so we could keep those jobs and that income local. Instead Labor want to shut down local jobs. They never stand up for workers, and this is just another example of that.

**Minister for Emergency Services**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (09:45): I also condemn the Minister for Emergency Services for still failing to put in an application for disaster relief funding from the federal government. Our businesses are suffering. You are sitting back, doing nothing. Stand up for Victorians now.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Lowan, I ask you to direct your comments through the Chair, and I also ask you to not bang the table.

**Carole Marple**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:45): I rise today with sadness to acknowledge the passing of Carole Marple, a dedicated advocate for the people of Altona and a passionate champion of social justice, workers rights and environmental sustainability. Born in Benalla, Carole devoted her early career to education, working as a primary school teacher supporting children with learning difficulties. Her commitment to community and the environment saw her serve on numerous committees, including as chair of the conservation policy committee. She played a pivotal role in the development of Landcare, a not-for-profit organisation.

Carole then served as member for Altona between 1992 and 1996. In her inaugural speech Carole spoke of her commitment to reducing inequality and ensuring that every Victorian had a fair go. During her time in Parliament she fought for the protection of Altona's natural environment, including the wetlands, creeks and grasslands, which she knew were vital for future generations. She was a strong voice for working families, standing up for fair wages, safe workplaces and community services

to support those in need. Carole understood that true progress is measured not just by economic growth but by the wellbeing of people. She worked to ensure that government decisions put communities first and that Victoria remained a place of opportunity for everyone. Her legacy will endure in the policies she influenced, the people she empowered and the vision of fairness she never wavered from. Vale, Carole Marple.

**Malvern electorate crime****Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:46):**

Dear Michael

I have never felt compelled to write to an MP about a matter before, but the current crime situation in Malvern is at such a point that as a resident in your electorate, I feel compelled to write.

Over the last 12 months, the crime situation has reached a point where so many of us feel unsafe in our home and there appears to be a level of apathy to the situation where people try to break into homes.

So wrote Carla in an email to me yesterday, and not a day goes by when I do not receive emails from constituents of mine who are sick and tired of feeling scared in their homes because of the crime crisis. While they are being gaslit by the Labor government and the former Attorney-General has said there is no youth crime crisis, the facts show a very different story – burglaries in my electorate up 24.2 per cent in the last 12 months, aggravated burglaries up 24.1 per cent in the last 12 months and motor vehicle theft up 42 per cent in the last 12 months. What has been the response of this Allan Labor government? Closing the Malvern police station 16 hours a day and weakening bail laws. My constituents are sick of it; I am sick of it. We are all sick of a government that will not keep the community safe, will not resource our local police, will not have proper bail laws and does not give Victorians the safety to live in their own homes without fear of being broken into.

**Epalock Crescent Kindergarten****Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (09:48):** It was wonderful to join the Minister for Children to officially open the transformed and brand new buildings at Epalock Crescent Kindergarten in St Albans. What a fantastic investment it has been – close to \$4 million from our government to redevelop a very old and outdated 1980s building. The brand new centre has got more capacity, more rooms and quite frankly the ability to really transform our young little people's lives. I want to thank Deb and the team and also BPA and everybody at the kindergarten for their fantastic work, their commitment to our children and their dedication to our littlest learners and their families.**St Albans Heights Primary School****Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (09:49):** I also had the opportunity to attend, again together with the Minister for Children, St Albans Heights Primary School. This primary school has received close to \$13.4 million worth of works. It was wonderful to see the playgroup, which is hosted by the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association together with Acacia. They do fantastic work in language – storytelling in Vietnamese. It was wonderful to meet with the families and of course the cutest little children that I have seen. This shows how important it is to do in-language service.**Road maintenance****Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:49):** I rise today to express the huge frustration of communities right across Polwarth with the increasing lack of maintenance of our roadways and our highways. Not only are we talking about the road surfaces, which have been spoken of much in recent times with the potholes, the 80-kilometre-an-hour zones, the 40-kilometre-an-hour zones and the complete deterioration of the road surfaces, but there is another new crime being committed against the roadways and communities of country Victoria, and that is the upkeep and maintenance of our roadsides. It is beyond comprehension that in this day and age so much rubbish and litter can be

allowed to just continue to build up along our roadways. A drive from Colac to Melbourne now will see mattresses, piles of rubbish, rubbish dumping, wheel tyres, tyres and plastic shrapnel everywhere on the sides of the roads. Not only is it unsightly and unbefitting of a modern, First World country, but it is also a potential danger, as these things can be blown and moved around on the road surfaces. It is simply not good enough.

Communities are really rallying against this, with quite a few volunteer groups now appearing along the coast in Torquay and Anglesea and down in Apollo Bay, with people getting together and having to go and pick up and clean up the rubbish that is continually building up on our roadways. The government must restore its funding to roadside maintenance.

**Special Olympics World Games**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:51): The Special Olympics World Games is the world's largest inclusive sports event. Thousands of athletes with intellectual disabilities compete together. The Special Olympics are held every two years, and the 2023 Special Olympics were held in Berlin, Germany, for the first time. Team Australia's medal tally was 63 medals. Madeline Fox came second in the four-by-50-metre freestyle relay and the 100-metre freestyle. She also came fourth in the 100-metre backstroke. Madeline lives in Heidelberg, and I look forward to meeting her in Parliament House today to celebrate her amazing achievements.

**Austin Hospital**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:51): Can I just say that works to upgrade the emergency department of the Austin Hospital are now underway. The designs for the multimillion-dollar expansion have been released and once complete will treat 30,000 more emergency patients a year. At the Austin we already treat over 100,000 patients a year. It has been made possible by a \$275 million investment by the Allan Labor government. The three-level facility will deliver some 29 more emergency treatment spaces, an upgraded short-stay unit and improved clinical administration spaces. The works will conclude in 2028, but significant works are now underway and throughout the rest of this year. The Austin Hospital is much loved in my community. Can I say that it was those opposite under the Kennett government who sought to privatise the Austin Hospital. It was the Bracks government that built two hospitals on one site with the Austin and Mercy hospitals. It is the Labor government again that will invest some \$275 million in a new emergency department at the Austin Hospital. We love the Austin Hospital. Only Labor can be trusted to invest in the Austin Hospital.

**Boisdale and District Progress Association**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (09:52): The Boisdale Stables are run by a group of dedicated volunteers attached to the Boisdale and District Progress Association. They were restored with funding from the coalition government some time ago. Those community members put in a lot of time and effort. They are a not-for-profit group, and they are continually working to improve that facility. When they were lumbered with a new land tax bill equating to 10 per cent of the association's gross income, they thought it must have been a mistake. They were rightfully appalled and applied to the State Revenue Office for what they thought would be an obvious exemption. However, it was refused because their primary purposes are not conducting a sporting event or outdoor cultural activities – so chopped off. I have to say to the Treasurer that this needs revisiting. This is the sort of group that should not be caught up in being lumbered by a land tax. The SRO needs to be provided with the flexibility to be able to cater for organisations like the Boisdale progress association rather than having to make determinations against very rigid criteria with no flexibility. This government talks about helping volunteers. It is about time they put that ethos into action and started supporting volunteers like those in Boisdale.

**Elevation Secondary College**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:54): Congratulations to the Elevation Secondary students who participated in the inaugural David Williamson writing competition with the topic of ‘No place like home’. Outstanding short story winner Danika McNaught provided an amazing sci-fi adventure into an unknown home in the next world. Ammar Mahmoud shared the stories of Leila and Noor confronting tragedy, hope and resilience in the Middle East. Feyza Demir provided a diary entry by Dina, who is missing home and surviving as a refugee in a homeless shelter. Melody Yang shared her story of Neo as they return to public school after the safety of homeschooling. Navreet Mall tells of a 1920 Argentine army recruit, whose new home is a training centre, noting that, ‘Home is not a place but a feeling.’ Paveneet Kaur writes of an anxious mum returning home after seven years military service and the unknown ahead.

Winner of Outstanding Poem and the Williamson Prize was Shannon Jot Kaur, with some beautiful words of the anchor and home provided by sisterly love. Akshiv Mittal’s poem shared everyday activities, showing there is no place like home. Saviru Kalansuriya’s poem talks of the importance of home, albeit often not appreciated. Jasnoor Brar was the winner of Outstanding Script/Play, with a conversation on homes and houses with Private Jasper. Natalie Orsida’s script tells of nurse Diana and soldier Vera at a Russian military base, both hoping for the war to end soon. There are many more longlisted short story and poem authors and others with artwork in the booklet. I will send a note to all these wonderful creatives. Thank you all for sharing your work. I loved reading – *(Time expired)*

**Philip Brady**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (09:55): I was very sad to hear of the passing of Philip Brady OAM, radio and TV great and local Kew icon. Phil had an outstanding career in both TV and radio spanning decades, only retiring from his 3AW radio program last month. He leaves an incredible legacy, and it will be very sad not to hear his dulcet tones on air. Phil, thank you for your incredible contribution to TV and radio over the past 67 years – Australian broadcast media is all the better for it. Your compassion, integrity and ability to spread joy will be dearly missed. I will miss our coffees at Beejans bakery in Kew and your festive spirit at the Kew community carols each Christmas. My thoughts and prayers are with Phil’s family and friends during this difficult time. Vale, Philip Brady.

**Land tax**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (09:56): It is that time of year again and Victorians are receiving their ever-growing land tax bills from this financially inept government. But at least two constituents of mine have received erroneous land tax bills out of the blue. Clearly the government has directed the State Revenue Office to find revenue whenever and wherever they can, including trying to tax Victorians’ principal places of residence. In this case, years ago two titles existed but have long since consolidated into one property with one title. Yet the SRO issues two land tax bills. And their solution? Pay both bills and we will refund you later; we will get to the problem later. It is absolutely unacceptable from this financially inept – *(Time expired)*

**Jan’s Place**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (09:57): Last week I visited and opened the McAuley Community Services for Women’s new refuge in Melton, named Jan’s Place. McAuley provides safe and stable housing for women and children affected by family violence. Partnering with them, we have been able to deliver six new family units with onsite specialist support in Melton. I saw firsthand, with the member for Melton, what a welcoming place this new facility is for women and their families to be supported and safe. In line with the best practice recommendations from Victoria’s Royal Commission into Family Violence, Jan’s Place has a core and cluster design. The units face a shared outdoor space and are connected to a central hub housing

support services and a communal area. This enables women and children to live independently while having access to 24/7 onsite services.

Jan's Place is one of 16 refuges that have now been completed since the commencement of the \$250 million refuge redevelopment program, with six more refuges undergoing redevelopment for completion by 2028. This means the number of refuges across the state will grow from 30 to 35 and the household capacity of the system will increase from 124 to 197 households per night, a total increase of 73. Jan's Place is essential for women and children experiencing family violence across Melbourne's west.

**Public transport fares**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (09:58): In Queensland you can get on a train, a bus or a ferry and all it costs you is 50 cents, yet here in Victoria a single trip on public transport costs more than \$5, so that is more than 10 times what it costs in Queensland. If Queensland can have 50-cent public transport fares, why can't Victoria? There is no reason we cannot have that here too. Here in Victoria a commuter pays over \$2500 just to get to work on public transport every single year. If you are a family and you just want to get into the city for an event, it could cost you over \$40. In a cost-of-living crisis this is unacceptable. The Labor state government could do something about this and introduce 50-cent public transport fares now. It would be a great relief to people with cost-of-living pressures. It would also reduce our emissions; transport is our fastest growing source of emissions here in Victoria.

Public transport usage has not actually rebounded since COVID here in Victoria, so we need to do something to encourage people to get back on public transport, reduce our emissions, get cars off the road and ease family budgets. In Queensland these 50-cent public transport fares have led to a 20 per cent increase in public transport use. We could have the same here in Victoria if this state Labor government adopted the Greens' plan for 50-cent public transport fares here in Victoria.

**Mackie Cricket Club**

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:00): In the 1950s residents of Tudor Street in East Bentleigh, although it was probably called South Oakleigh back then, organised a beach outing and played some cricket on the sand. It sounds pretty unremarkable, but from that game of beach cricket Mackie Cricket Club was born. I send my congratulations to the club on their 70th anniversary.

Arthur Roberts was the first president, and the newly formed club entered into what was then the City of Moorabbin Cricket Association, with Fred Graham as the inaugural captain. The club recently marked their milestone with a celebration at Yarra Yarra Golf Club, where committee members John Tantram, Ross Henderson, Marcus Middleton and Trudee Simpson reflected upon the club's humble beginnings and the inaugural team in 1955. On the night Tony Evans and John Park were the first members to be inducted into the hall of fame, with immediate elevation to legend status.

The club is now planning its next 70 years, and I am playing a small part in that. It was my pleasure to be able to secure \$3 million from the state government to rebuild their pavilion, and I am really excited that Glen Eira council will this year be appointing a builder to complete this important work. Why does the club need a new pavilion? Because it is not the size that it was back in 1955 – it now consists of five senior men's teams, three senior women's teams and 14 junior teams, including four girls teams. Finally, I want to thank my friend Ryan Fishlock for the information for this statement.

**Land tax**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (10:01): I rise today, along with other people, to talk about land tax assessment notices. Since I did an adjournment last sitting week I have been inundated by local constituents who have been receiving these bills. One such constituent has given me their last four years: 2022, \$4900; 2023, \$5100; 2024, \$6700; and the big one this year, 2025, over \$11,000. This government and the State Revenue Office (SRO) are riding through this state like the Sheriff of

Nottingham and robbing Victorians blind; they are absolutely robbing them blind. On those assessment notices between 2024 and 2025 that property value went up 50 per cent. There is no property that has gone up 50 per cent in 12 months in this state.

What is happening now is the government is driving investment out of Victoria. It is going to go west, and the investment is going to go south. The government and the SRO need to do valuations that are appropriate. They do not need to overinflate valuations to get more tax dollars into this government. It is absolutely criminal what they are doing to hardworking Victorians at the moment. They need to readjust the valuations, and they need to get them right. This is affecting small businesses and small investors all around the state, and the government needs to stop.

**Bellarine electorate projects**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:03): It was terrific to recently visit Wallington Primary School to celebrate construction commencing on their new building upgrades. School captains – and I am going to call them junior project managers – Nathan, Lily and Brianna gave me a tour of the site that will soon become new classrooms, and they gave a big tick of approval. The students and the school community, as well as the Wallington community, are all very excited to see this \$2.1 million investment take place for an incredible local school that has served the community since 1868.

This is not the only exciting project currently underway on the Bellarine as we work to make our community facilities and road infrastructure as safe and accessible as possible. Just last week I visited Queenscliff's coastguard to celebrate a rollout of new digital radios for the marine search and rescue units, to improve their communication on the water and give them the ability to speak to all emergency services when responding to rescue operations.

There will be more projects to celebrate throughout the year, with Collendina Reserve progressing in its road safety upgrades, which will make it safer for the Collendina cricket and footy club, as well as families and opponents coming to that ground, to move around the reserve safely, and next month we will see the beginning of an important intersection just outside Barwon Heads, with a new roundabout, dedicated bike lanes, pedestrian paths and improved safety at a bus stop at the Barwon Heads and Staceys roads intersection. And that is just the start of 2025. I look forward to celebrating more milestones throughout the year with the wonderful Bellarine community.

**Woorrangalook Victorian Koori Surfing Titles**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:04): I recently had the pleasure of welcoming Koori surfers at the opening ceremony of the Victorian Koori surfing titles, supported by the Allan government, VicHealth and Surfing Victoria. As well as a showcase of surfing, the titles are an important celebration of culture and bring together communities from across the state and the nation. The titles set the stage for beginners to advanced surfers to test their wave and board skills in a range of activities, from come-and-try to surfing lessons to competition. It is also about building pathways for young Koori surfers to take their surfing to the next level at competitions like the Victorian Koori surfing titles. I want to acknowledge and thank Jordie Campbell, Indigenous aquatics manager with Surfing Victoria, for his passion and commitment, which ensure that culture and surfing come together at these events.

**Geelong Cricket Club**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:05): We recently celebrated the completion of the new facilities for the Geelong Cricket Club at Kardinia Park. Geelong Cricket Club president Jenny Decker and the member for Bellarine joined me in unveiling not a plaque but a cricket bat to commemorate the day. Located within the Joel Selwood Stand, the Geelong Cricket Club now have elite facilities to thrive both on and off the field. Looking outside through the magnificent windows we now have a perfect view of the action on the pitch. With state-of-the-art change rooms – *(Time expired)*

**Wilandra Rise Primary School**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:06): I was so pleased to be at Wilandra Rise to hand over the school captains badges a couple of weeks ago, and I want to pay credit to Tina Clydesdale, the principal, for running a topnotch school and thank Mr Baltas as well for the work he does with the school captains. I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Aston, Jett, Valentina, Sashini, Gabriel and Ryen on the extraordinary role they play running those assemblies. This leadership in Cranbourne is amazing. Enara, Pari, Sid, Indiana and Aarushi are all extraordinary young people. I also had the opportunity to congratulate the house captains: Phoenix captains Kyrie and Raphaelle, Unicorn captains Katrina and Alexander, Pegasus captains Charlie and Zara and Dragons captains Nicolas and Shelly. These students from Wilandra Rise are amazing.

**St Josephine Bakhita Primary School**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:07): I was also very fortunate to join Mr Tarlamis in the other place at the opening of St Josephine Bakhita, a new primary school in Clyde North. Thank you to the Sale diocese education office, particularly Paul Veltin for the work he did and Bishop Greg Bennet, but extraordinary congratulations go to the new principal Kathryn Pepper. It was wonderful to be there with the Honourable James Merlino, the chair of the Victorian Catholic Education Authority, and Dr Elizabeth Labone. These are amazing schools. We are so very fortunate to have such topnotch educators.

**Lunar New Year**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:07): We celebrated Lunar New Year with the Nillumbik Chinese senior citizens association and the Eltham Lions Club. We had a fantastic day of welcome to the Year of the Snake. These are two wonderful local community groups who know how to bring community together and have fun. We saw many fantastic cultural performances, including ba duan jin exercises, a fan dancing performance, the singing of Lunar New Year songs and great ukulele playing. We had marquees for brush calligraphy, face painting and Chinese zodiac symbol artwork. I thank everyone for their hard work in creating such a fantastic day, with extra thanks to Veronica Lee, Hong and Peter Talbot for all the work they put into making the day such a success. I am very grateful to live in a community where we can come together to celebrate and appreciate the diverse cultures that make Victoria such a vibrant, inclusive and fun place to live.

**Greenhills Primary School**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:08): Last week I had the opportunity to join Greenhills Primary School in Greensborough for their welcome to country and smoking ceremony. The ceremony was led by Uncle Colin Hunter Jr, who engaged with students regarding the importance of smoking ceremonies to culture and their inclusive nature. Greenhills is one of the many schools in my electorate investing time in understanding respect for all cultures and the importance to us as Victorians and Australians of recognising and respecting the history and culture of First Peoples. I love seeing the enjoyment these children have in embracing First Peoples culture and how much they already know. And it is impossible to visit Greenhills without going past the amazing new \$6.82 million gym that has been created at the school.

***Business of the house*****Notices of motion**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:09): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

**Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (10:09): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. May I first thank the minister and his office for arranging a briefing on this bill. Given the extent of the amendments included in this bill, the briefing was useful to answer a couple of our questions, but unfortunately there are still questions that we do not yet have answers to. In the minister's second-reading speech the minister said that the bill is:

... the unglamorous, but ultimately vital work of ongoing regulatory reform.

I regret to inform the house that I respectfully disagree with the minister for a couple of reasons. The first is that none of us in this place should really be concerned about whether the work we do is unglamorous or not, because our principal focus should really be on making the lives of Victorians easier, not harder. If achieving that goal means that the work is unglamorous, then I am all in. At the end of the day we are here to serve our communities and ensure that they receive the best possible outcomes.

My second reason for disagreeing with the minister is because this bill does not actually represent regulatory reform in any way, shape or form. While the government seeks to introduce this bill under the guise of regulatory reform, it is anything but. Apart from a couple of amendments that are worthy, such as those relating to the Adoption Act 1984 and the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, most of the amendments are intended to correct sloppy drafting errors from previous legislation, and the minister's department conceded and confirmed that. Indeed that became clear through the bill briefing. As I mentioned, the department themselves conceded that most of these amendments were really intended to fix previous mistakes that were the result of careless drafting, so it is not really regulatory reform.

Most of the amendments will do nothing to make the lives of Victorians easier; in fact the opposite is true. Many of the amendments will see Victorians paying more for services from the government that they actually need. At a time when Victorians are doing it tough through the cost-of-living crisis with increased state government taxes, increased fuel prices, increased energy prices and crime increasing every single day, I think this bill is really telling in terms of where this government's priorities lie.

I am also not convinced that the minister has actually read the bill. In his second-reading speech he said:

This Bill includes almost forty proposals across 14 different Acts ...

For a finance minister I think he needs to do some work on his maths. There are actually 16 acts, not 14, that will be amended by this bill and 60 proposals contained in this bill. If you take away some of the normal machinery provisions, there are 60 different and distinct clauses of this bill that seek to amend 16 different acts. All I can say to the minister is I think that he and his department should perhaps buy a new calculator, and it is absolutely no wonder that the state budget is in such disarray when they cannot even work out the number of acts that they are changing with this bill.

The minister also said:

The Bill has many more benefits which can be found across the four main objectives of the Bill.

There are no objectives in this bill, no objectives contained in the bill; in fact the word 'objective' is not used in the bill once. Whilst there are fleeting references and claims in the second-reading speech that the bill will contribute to increased economic productivity and make it easier to do business in Victoria,

there is not a shred of evidence to substantiate these claims whatsoever by the government or of what savings there will be for ordinary Victorians. When we sought further information from the department in relation to the economic productivity improvements that Victorians could expect to receive from this bill and whether there were any dollar savings that Victorians could expect to receive from this bill, the Labor government representatives were unable to provide a response of any substance at that time. They have subsequently come back and confirmed that there was no cost modelling done, no modelling whatsoever, and they could not quantify any cost savings at all in relation to the changes in this bill. All it does seem to do is make changes to make work for bureaucrats easier. So the fact is that the majority of the amendments in this bill are doing no more than giving effect to a wish list of requests from various bureaucrats and various departments. It is kind of like a sweep has been done of the public service to identify where some errors and problems might have occurred in legislation and 'Let's do a bit of a clean-up.'

Regulatory reform is not about fixing errors and mistakes in legislation. Regulatory reform is about changing how governments operate and how governments better serve the Victorian people and our communities. The vast majority of the amendments in this bill do nothing to achieve that. Whilst the opposition does have a couple of concerns about a number of the 60-odd amendments contained in this bill, we will not be opposing the bill. As I mentioned previously, there are a couple of worthy and important amendments contained in the bill and we should not be doing anything to delay their progression. They have already been delayed enough by the inaction of this Labor government.

The primary amendment that the government has been slow to act on is changes to the Adoption Act 1984. Part 2 of the bill concerns amendments to the Adoption Act. In his second-reading speech the minister said that some of the proposed amendments were in response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria. Members may recall that on 25 October 2012 a former Premier of Victoria, the Honourable Ted Baillieu MP, delivered the Victorian parliamentary apology for past adoption practices and acknowledged that these past practices were unethical, immoral and unconscionable. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the brave mothers who had the courage to once again share their experiences to assist the committee to further expose the abuse that they suffered, the ongoing injustice and the trauma that has never left them. As a mother myself, I cannot imagine their anguish. It is an episode in our history that I hope is never repeated.

The committee made 56 recommendations as a result of its inquiry, with its final report delivered to Parliament on 8 September 2021. It is now 3½ years since the committee delivered its report and still Parliament has yet to give full effect to the recommendations of the committee. I think it is incredibly sad and disrespectful that after three years this Labor government has yet to implement all of those 56 incredibly important recommendations. The principal intent of the amendments in this bill is to assist the reunification of families that were separated as a result of forced adoptions, yet it has taken the government, as I say, more than three years to implement these changes, meaning separated families have continued to suffer delays in reuniting with loved ones, and that is an incredibly sad situation. I would ask the government to review whether there are any other recommendations of the committee that remain outstanding and ask that they introduce legislation to give effect to them as soon as possible. We should do everything that we can together to ensure that these families do not suffer any more pain.

The amendments in part 2 of the bill focus on making it easier for family members to access information, specifically allowing brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents to access identifying information about an adopted person in order to reunite with them, provided the adopted person is over the age of 18. Chapter 10 of the committee's report focused on accessing information and family reunification. The committee noted at page 269 of its report:

Accessing adoption records and searching for and reconnecting with family were significant themes raised by inquiry participants. The Committee heard from mothers and people who are adopted about the challenges of accessing their records –

and –

... the overwhelming need to fill in the missing pieces.

It is a positive step that the government is now finally helping these families fill in those missing pieces and making it easier for separated families to have access to this information to allow the process of reunification to occur.

Part 2 of the bill also seeks to provide new powers to the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety to obtain access to certain adoption-related records from Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria. As the committee noted in its report at page 300, births, deaths and marriages is arguably the most important source of information for people searching for a family member. However, the committee also queried at page 302, as a result of evidence received from the Victorian Law Reform Commission, whether the information-gathering powers of the secretary included the power to ask the registrar for any information on the BDM register about adopted persons.

It seems there was still some doubt about whether the secretary could access this information. An issue was also identified as to whether the secretary was required to obtain the consent of the adopted person before releasing the identifying information. It appears that the current amendments in this bill now go some way to clarifying the situation by allowing the secretary to obtain this information from births, deaths and marriages and providing the secretary with the discretion to disclose the information without a person's consent. However, there are important safeguards included as well, and these amendments provide the secretary with a discretion not to disclose information if, in their opinion, they consider doing so would cause harm to the person who may be identified or increase the risk to their safety. We consider these amendments achieve an appropriate balance between attempting to help families reunite and protecting a person's privacy. Importantly, to help give effect to these important measures, the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 will also be amended to ensure the functions of the registrar include performing the functions given to the registrar by the amendments to the Adoption Act.

Part 3 of the bill contains amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The amendments seek to allow the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to authorise principal officers of Aboriginal agencies to exercise various powers in relation to protective intervention or protective orders with respect to Aboriginal children as well as any of their non-Aboriginal siblings. The intention of these amendments is to clarify that non-Aboriginal siblings may form part of the same class of children, along with their Aboriginal siblings, pursuant to authorisations made by the secretary, which will allow the principal officers of the Aboriginal agency to exercise their protective powers with respect to these children. We consider these amendments are appropriate and will assist with the protection of these children.

Part 4 of the bill seeks to make amendments to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. The specific amendments here seek to amend nine different sections in that act to convert them into civil penalty provisions, which allows a court to impose financial penalties on a person who contravenes these provisions. Apparently these amendments relate to earlier amendments introduced by the Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Act 2022. Whilst I already had my own suspicions, it soon became clear in the bill briefing that these amendments were seeking to correct previous drafting errors in the 2022 act, which failed to prescribe these provisions as civil penalty provisions. This is a clear example of some very sloppy drafting on behalf of this Labor government. The government is quick to talk about imposing new requirements and new obligations on operators in relation to waste reduction and recycling, but it fails to give the provisions any teeth, leaving them unenforceable.

It is an embarrassment that since the circular economy act came into operation on 1 July 2022 it has been amended no less than 10 times in two years. This clearly demonstrates this government is pretty much making it up as they go along when it comes to recycling and waste reduction. It should also be noted that these amendments will result in individuals facing penalties between \$23,710 and \$197,590,

and for corporations between \$118,554 and \$987,950. These are significant penalties for stakeholders in the industry, and I certainly hope that the government and the EPA will educate stakeholders and business owners about these changes, because as we were told in the bill briefing and as was confirmed by the minister's department, there has been no consultation – absolutely zero consultation – with industry stakeholders about these new penalty provisions, which I find quite astonishing. Again, this is another indication that this bill has been put together in a very hasty and unprofessional fashion – as I said, 10 different amendments to this bill in the last two years, clearly demonstrating that they have failed to get it right. Perhaps there are still more to go.

Part 5 of this bill, the amendment to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003, seeks to allow the commissioner for environmental sustainability to undertake paid work outside of their role as commissioner, with the approval of the minister. It is difficult to conceive of how this amendment could on any basis be considered as pressing or urgent regulatory reform. The fact that this government thinks it should be a priority of the highest order to ensure that paid bureaucrats – the highest paid bureaucrats – seek paid work outside of their statutory duties tells you everything that you need to know about the priorities of this government.

This is a government that has completely lost touch with the Victorian community and has its priorities all wrong. How on earth can this Labor government think that in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis it would be a good idea to allow bureaucrats to undertake work outside of the government? How could this possibly improve economic productivity?

In his second-reading speech the minister said this measure was needed so that the government could:

... attract and retain quality candidates for the role of Commissioner ...

Seriously? According to the 2023–24 annual report of the commissioner for environmental sustainability, the commissioner receives an annual salary of between \$290,000 to \$299,000, so let us just call it a 300K gig. Is this Labor government taking Victorians for absolute fools? Is this Labor government really saying that it cannot attract quality people to jobs that pay \$300,000 a year? I thought the Labor Party was meant to represent workers, not highly paid fat cat government bureaucrats.

There are so many things wrong with this amendment. It is basically saying the role of the commissioner for environmental sustainability should be converted into a part-time gig. The commissioner obviously thinks that there are better things to do with their time, and that pay more, than ensuring Victoria's environment is protected. Let there be no mistake, the commissioner's role is a full-time position. The commissioner leads an agency that has a \$2.75 million budget. There would hardly be the time for the commissioner to sit around and twiddle their thumbs, let alone taking on outside paid work, which also would invite significant conflict-of-interest considerations. The paid work the commissioner may seek will likely be directly relevant to their role. It does not make any sense for a senior bureaucrat who leads an agency on a full-time basis to potentially be creating conflicts of interest for their agency by taking on paid work in the private sector in the same field. We think this amendment fails the pub test and does not on any measure represent regulatory reform. It represents a misguided government that has its priorities all wrong.

Part 6 of the bill seeks to make amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994. Among the amendments is an amendment to require owners of dangerous, menacing or restricted dog breeds to notify their local council if a dog has moved residence or has died. This amendment is intended to enable local councils to better manage the potential risks posed by these dog breeds by having accurate and current information to assist with compliance activities. Another amendment seeks to reinstate a penalty provision in relation to dogs and cats which have been seized. If a person other than the authorised officer seizes a cat or dog, they must deliver the animal to the local authority as soon as possible or face a penalty of nearly \$1000. The government states this amendment reinstates the penalty that had applied previously to this provision, which was removed by the Domestic Animals

Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Act 2022. This is not an example of regulatory reform; it is just another example of fixing a previous stuff-up.

Part 7 of the bill seeks to make amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000. Specifically, the amendment seeks to allow the Essential Services Commission to make the minimum solar feed-in tariff determination for the upcoming financial year by 28 May in the preceding financial year rather than 28 February. The government argues that by providing the ESC the ability to make a determination later in the year it will allow the ESC more current data when making a determination. It is interesting to ask why the ESC actually needs more time, because on 10 January this year the ESC released its draft decision on the minimum feed-in tariffs that electricity retailers must pay solar power customers for the electricity they export into the grid. The ESC proposed to set the feed-in tariff at – wait for it – 0.04 cents per kilowatt hour from 1 July this year. This is a reduction from the 3.3 cents that it pays to customers currently. Basically, there is no longer any incentive for households to install solar panels under this Labor government, because the feed-in tariff is effectively zero. That means the savings that Victorian households thought they would recover from installing solar power have now been wiped away.

This then comes back to my question: if the feed-in tariffs are effectively sitting at zero, why does the ESC need any more time to make a determination? Is there any suggestion that they might increase the feed-in tariffs in the future? Of course there is not under this Labor government. Again, how is this a regulatory reform? When feed-in tariffs have now fallen through the floor, why does the ESC need any more time to tell Victorians they will no longer receive any compensation for helping to generate power from renewables for Victoria? It makes absolutely no sense.

Another very curious amendment to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 is the proposal to remove the requirement of licensees who are authorised to sell electricity to report on how many small renewable energy generation facilities sold electricity to them and how much electricity the licensee purchased from these facilities. Currently these energy retailers are required to report on a quarterly basis how much electricity they have purchased from small renewable energy generation facilities and how much of it they have sold. The government stated that the removal of this reporting requirement will reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on businesses and that much of this data is publicly available through other sources.

Nowhere in the material relating to the bill were these other sources identified. We did have to ask this of the department, and they finally did come through with some information, but I am not sure that it covers it all off. The amendment will also remove the requirement for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to report on this information. This amendment does nothing more than diminish transparency in reporting on how much renewable electricity is being purchased and sold in Victoria's energy system. I find it incredibly hypocritical that at a time when the government claims to be producing record amounts of renewable energy it is seeking to remove any obligation to report how retailers are buying and selling renewable energy. Why does this Labor government want to keep this information hidden from public view?

I took the time to check the annual report of the department for the last financial year. At pages 333 to 335 the department, in compliance with the current legislative obligation, provides a report about the amounts of renewable electricity that are being purchased and sold. Interestingly, the sources of this renewable electricity remain fairly constant, ranging between 601,000 and 628,000 sources over the course of the year. However, there is a big difference in the amount of renewable electricity purchased and sold through the course of the year, from a high of 904 million kilowatts at the end of the March quarter, being the summer months, to a low of 418 million kilowatts at the end of the September quarter, being the winter months. Clearly what this data demonstrates is that the supply of renewable energy drops by more than half during the winter months, which should come as no surprise to anyone. This data is incredibly important because it demonstrates the fragility of renewable energy in the winter months with the lack of sunlight and why there needs to be a constant supply of base load energy to meet Victoria's energy demand.

We see no reason why these reporting requirements should be removed when the government has been unable to identify where else, in a fulsome way, this exact information can be obtained. This is again yet another example of a measure being dressed up as regulatory reform when in fact the measure is designed purely to diminish transparency and keep critical information secret. We think that these reporting requirements should continue unchanged. We see no benefit from their removal.

Part 8 of the bill seeks to make various amendments to the Environment Protection Act 2017. One amendment will require the EPA or local council when issuing notices to revoke the registration of a licence or permit to include the date from which the revocation will take effect. Another more substantive amendment will allow the EPA to charge a business or a business owner with an offence where a vehicle registered to that business has been used to illegally dump waste. This amendment seeks to remove the current restriction placed on the EPA, which only allows it to charge a business or business owner where they are unable to identify the driver of the vehicle. The amendment will provide the EPA with discretion on who should be charged with the offence and who should be held responsible for the illegal dumping of waste. This government argues that this amendment is intended to target those companies that seek to deliberately and systematically dump waste as part of their operating practices – the current provision was originally only concerned with small-scale littering from a vehicle.

The coalition welcomes any measure aimed at protecting our environment from illegal dumping of waste. It would be well known by all members in this place that it is this Labor government that has presided over a waste crisis in Victoria, with more than 390,000 tonnes of recyclables being sent to landfill, toxic waste fires exploding across Melbourne's western and northern suburbs, the illegal stockpiling of waste and a regulator that was hopelessly ill equipped to respond, all under this Labor government. However, we are concerned there was not any consultation with interested stakeholders about this particular change. When we asked about consultation at the bill briefing, we were told there was none. The amendment will have the impact of broadening the coverage of people or entities that can possibly be charged with this offence, and we think the government should have at least given stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback on this amendment, instead of simply seeking to slip it through with 60 other changes in the bill. Again, it is hard to call this regulatory reform when the Labor government has not even consulted with those that they are seeking to regulate.

Part 9 of this bill deals with amendments to the Essential Services Commission Act 2001. Specifically, the amendment seeks to insert an explicit limitation period of six years. This means the Essential Services Commission will have six years to commence civil penalty proceedings from the date the contravention occurred. Currently there is no express limitation period specified in the act, and in these situations the Limitation of Actions Act 1958 will apply, which imposes a two-year limitation period for the commencement of civil penalty proceedings. This amendment is also retrospective, meaning that the six-year limitation period will apply to contraventions whether they occurred before or after the commencement of this new amendment. It does seem this amendment is yet another case of sloppy legislative drafting. Back in 2021 the ESC was given new enforcement powers to prosecute contraventions of the act. It has since been amended several more times through previous regulatory reform bills making various changes to these enforcement positions, and it seems that this is yet another example of legislation being rushed through this Parliament without proper consideration, review or drafting.

The government also argues that increasing the limitation period is consistent with other regulatory frameworks; however, this is not strictly correct, because WorkSafe Victoria, under section 132 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, must bring a prosecution within two years of an offence occurring. The most stunning example of this was when we saw the Office of Public Prosecutions drop charges against this Labor government's Department of Health and Human Services for their widespread failure to keep people safe in the hotel quarantine debacle because the two-year limitation, guess what, had expired and prevented further evidence from being obtained. It was a complete and utter disgrace that no-one in this Labor government was held accountable for such a disastrous Labor

government policy that resulted in the deaths of 800 innocent Victorians. If the government were really serious about ensuring consistency, they would ensure all regulators have the same powers and limitation periods instead of rushing legislation without proper consideration.

Now to part 12 of the bill, which seeks to amend the Service Victoria Act 2018: these amendments are specifically directed to provide the Service Victoria CEO with the power to require fees and charges to be paid by Victorians using the services and products of Service Victoria. It is clear that these amendments are a device for the government to raise further fees and charges for various government services. Parts 13 and 14 of the bill also seek to increase various fees and charges under the Subdivision Act 1988 and the Transfer of Land Act 1958. During the bill briefing, when we sought further details about the proposed fee increase, we were assured by the government representatives that there were no plans to increase fees. Why then would they need to give the head the power to increase fees? Any increase in fees absolutely must be subject to public consultation, but in a cost-of-living crisis I would suggest that there should not be any for things that Victorians already pay their taxes to deliver. Members may recall that similar assurances have been made by our former Premier Daniel Andrews, who on the eve of the 2014 election made a promise that there would be no new taxes under this government. Well, we all have seen how that has panned out – 60 new or increased taxes under this Labor government.

Despite what the government may say, there is very little tangible benefit for ordinary Victorians in this bill. Rather than providing any cost-of-living relief, this bill is more concerned about allowing bureaucrats to perform their work for private contractors or preventing them from disclosing critical information and diminishing transparency. You would think that a bona fide regulatory form bill would identify savings in monetary terms for the taxpayer, but when asked again in the bill briefing from the government what savings would be realised as a result of these measures, we were told quite expressly that no work had been done to quantify any dollar savings. In fact they could not identify any dollar savings for government or industry; rather, this bill was meant to achieve internal efficiencies. It is clear the real objectives of this bill are correcting the sloppy drafting errors, making the jobs of bureaucrats easier and charging Victorians more for government services during a cost-of-living crisis.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:40): I too rise to speak on this Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. I do have to say, I have been listening closely to the member for Evelyn's contribution to this bill as the lead speaker, and I do have to smile, because if you listened to any of that contribution you would be thinking, holy moly, we should just round up all the legislative drafters in this state, lock them up and throw away the key, right?

I do want to start my contribution by giving a big shout-out to the very hardworking staff who spend hours and hours and hours when it comes to legislative reform in this state. Writing and amending legislation takes true skill and expertise and a lot of patience, and as someone who went on and did a law degree, graduated from law and spent a lot of time actually amending and redrafting the National Electricity Rules, which is a really big piece of Commonwealth legislation, it is a real skill. It is an art to be able to reform legislation, and yes, time and time again, usually on a yearly basis, or every two years, we need to go through legislation and make changes. I would not call that sloppy drafting. I would call it just a need to clean up some of these bills and legislation. It is just part of the job.

This bill is not monumental in scope. We have had quite a few before the house in the almost seven years since I have been here. They do come through and they need to be done; they need to be passed here in this place. This bill does not make the kind of profound legislative changes that make members in this place want to get up in this chamber and scream from the rooftops about them. But we are here, nonetheless, on this side of the house, and we will debate this bill and pass this bill through the house, because they are important, because our legislation is always in need of constant improvement. That is really important. That is what governments should be doing – looking for ways in which to constantly improve and make things fairer, to make Victoria a fairer state and a more equitable state for everyone in it.

Definitions that no longer fit need to be updated and must be updated, and this is the way we have to do it. Provisions dependent on a section of another act that has been repealed need to be updated. This is the kind of work that goes into regulatory reform bills like this one, and I certainly will not be talking down this bill and the work that lawyers have done in this space. I do want to acknowledge their work. I know it takes hours and hours in the office in front of a computer and probably with a red pen and a highlighter, redrafting and fixing up this kind of legislation within the departments, and yes, within the minister's office. The work is dry, and it is thankless, but I do say to the staff: you deserve recognition, and I thank you, not only for writing these bills but for all of the time you have spent poring over legislation to find those that are outdated. Overall, this bill amends a total of 14 acts of Parliament, providing simple, straightforward and uncontroversial improvements to these acts that I am sure we can all accept are needed. We need to do it.

When it comes to regulatory reform, our government has delivered in spades over the last decade. We have reviewed and we have improved regulations in liquor, environmental protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, health, planning, consumer affairs, fee pricing, owners corps and so much more. On top of this, we have legislated regulatory improvements to things like cladding safety – remember that? – wage theft, gender equality, casino and gambling laws, worker screening processes and so much more. We have done all of this whilst actually reducing the state's regulatory burden by about 25 per cent. And we know that businesses have benefited immeasurably from these regulatory changes. Those opposite go around constantly claiming that regulations are killing small businesses in Victoria. I might direct them to look at the Business Acceleration Fund, which previously featured in different iterations. It has funded projects that have collectively grown the Victorian economy by about \$450 million each and every single year, saving Victorians about 330,000 days a year in saved time. We have saved businesses about 40,000 days per year in preparing and managing food safety programs by simplifying the state's food safety requirements. We have streamlined Heritage Victoria permits for low- and no-harm applications, saving about 6000 businesses about 91,000 days a year. This has also had the effect of getting houses built quicker and boosting supply.

These are just some of the ways in which regulatory reform is delivering for Victorians, including importantly, small businesses. And we will not be stopping there. We are currently working on and examining unnecessary red tape. We are looking at ways we can simplify and streamline things to make things more effective and efficient so that Victoria can remain a state where it is easy to do business and where businesses want to come and do business. This includes goals like halving the number of business regulators from 37 to 18 by 2030; speeding up environment effects statements processes by giving answers in 18 months or less, making the system faster, cheaper and more predictable; and driving up investment in things like wind farms, water projects and road and rail infrastructure projects, which we all know are so vital to our state's economy and our environment. It includes new priority assessment teams –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this bill does not refer to wind turbines or wind whatsoever –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The point of order is?

**Bridget Vallence:** so on relevance, I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the narrow confines of the bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask the member to stick to the bill and please continue.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** It includes new priority assessment teams within key regulators to fast-track the assessment of priority projects and streamlining liquor and planning approvals for hospitality businesses so that they only need a liquor licence to go ahead and serve alcohol – to do business – saving businesses up to \$7000 and allowing them to open up six months earlier.

Overall, we are hoping that by 2030 the regulatory burden for businesses in Victoria can be reduced by about \$500 million through streamlining regulations and reducing duplication and digitisation where we can. That is what our economic statement is all about, supporting local and small businesses and the incredible people who work within them, because when they succeed we know that Victoria succeeds.

As I have looked through this bill and taken a quick look at some of the minor technical changes in here, there are actually some really interesting and positive changes that this bill makes through regulatory amendment. A good example is the amendments to the Adoption Act 1984 to remove barriers to help families who have experienced forced adoption to reunite. The work that that parliamentary committee did a couple of years ago in relation to forced adoptions was absolutely incredible. It was a really difficult inquiry, and having spoken to the members, the stories that came through that were absolutely heartbreakingly tragic. But we know from the work that this government has done in looking at this issue just how traumatic and impactful this practice was for the Victorian women who suffered under these forced adoptions. It is exactly why we set up a redress scheme in late 2023 to support the mothers who live with the consequences of these forced adoptions each and every single day. This is a small legislative change in this bill, but what it will mean is a world of difference for the mums and their children who are out there in the world seeking to reunite with them. The bill does this by allowing natural relatives to access identifying information about the adopted person to allow for those reunions to go ahead and happen. I for one certainly hope that this change leads to some very positive outcomes for those families affected by forced adoptions.

Another really important change here is to the Domestic Animals Act 1994, which will be amended to ensure that we can empower councils with better data on the location of dangerous dogs, a small change that will keep our community and especially our children safe from dog attacks. We see in the newspaper – I read those articles – that there have been the most terrible attacks from dogs that are unsafe and have likely attacked before and that end in tragedy. A child or someone walking by is attacked and ends up in hospital from that dog attack. We know that that does happen, and that is why we are doing this here in this bill.

I will not have time to go through the rest of the changes in this bill. The bill is not a milestone piece of legislation, but it makes a number of serious small, minor and technical changes to a bunch of different pieces of legislation, and I commend it wholeheartedly to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (10:50): I rise to speak on this bill. If the member for Laverton believes a red pen will help ease regulation here in Victoria, I am happy to buy the department a whole box or even a whole carton of red pens, if that is actually going to relieve some of the regulatory burden on this state.

If you go to the statement of compatibility and you look at the overview of this bill, it says it is there to support efficient and effective regulation and reduce the administrative burden of regulation. Can I say, those two statements do not pass the pub test here in Victoria. If you went out to anyone that is in small business, anyone that actually has to interact with the government from a regulatory point of view, they would say there is more red tape, there is more green tape and there is more black tape in this state than there ever has been before. The cost to businesses of actually filling in those forms, having someone go online and fill all those in, is just getting more and more. People are getting to the point where they are not prepared to run a business because of the impost of this government on them.

If you talk about the housing crisis we have in Victoria, the shortage of homes for ownership, the shortage of homes for rental and the shortage of homes for social housing, that is a crisis that has been created principally by red, green and black tape in the state. If you look at – and I have used this example before – C117, a major subdivision in the west of Echuca, that took six years to bring to market. For those people that invested there, bought that land and wanted to get that to market, it took six years because of the bureaucracy and the rules they had to go through to do that. WelCo is one of the investors there that is part of that subdivision. They are now proposing to do a 400-lot subdivision

at Cohuna, a smaller town in my community. The Gannawarra shire has identified that with the major projects that are happening in that area – VHM mineral sands mining, the VNI West powerline, renewable energy projects – there is a desperate need for housing, but that subdivision is being held up also by red tape, green tape and black tape in this state. Gannawarra shire has done all the planning work. They have stuck to all the rules, but the bureaucracy is saying, ‘No, we want you to do additional work. No, we actually think what you’re saying is wrong.’ Why should a bureaucrat have the right to say that all the work that a shire has done to get a subdivision in their shire done is wrong? Personal opinions should not count here. Again it is this issue of bureaucracy.

Then I go to the issue of land use activity agreements. That sounds very innocuous, but we have a subdivision in Bendigo where a gentleman there is being asked to pay half the value of his private land in a land use activity agreement to Dja Dja Wurrung because he needs access to a public road. Again, why should that impost be put on a subdivision that is going to provide housing in Bendigo? It is wrong that it has been modelled on the Timber Creek case, a High Court case in the Northern Territory, and applied to Victoria so they have to pay more. There is more red tape, there is more green tape and there is more black tape in this state, and for this legislation to say any different does not pass the pub test, as I have said.

If you go to particular clauses to the bill, part 12, the Service Victoria Act 2018 part, clarifies that fees must apply for the following category: providing or improving access to government services. Why should we have a new fee to provide access to government services? Government services are there to try and streamline the system here in Victoria to make it easier for business to actually operate. Why should they have to pay more to improve a government service? Isn’t that a core business of government, to actually try to be more effective and efficient themselves? There are also potentially fees there for sending to or receiving information from Service Victoria. Why should people have to pay to send information to or receive it from Service Victoria? Service Victoria, by definition, is supposed to deliver a service, not to charge more fees into the future.

The changes to the Subdivision Act 1988 seek to allow the registrar to increase the fees and charges for various services and permit the registrar to levy fees in line with pricing for Victorian value. This means fees are not limited to cost recovery but may also be based on value for service. Can I put it to the house that if you are actually basing fees on value to service from a government department, all the fees here in Victoria should be halved straightaway, because there is no value for service when it comes to dealing with government departments. Fees should actually be decreased, not increased, because there is no efficiency for businesses in how they interact.

It was interesting the other morning to listen to the *Rumour File*, because we have had a lot of talk about the digital licence here in Victoria and how that is the way forward. One particular gentleman, whose voice I do know – but I will not name him in the house – phoned in that he had been to a government agency where he was asked for proof of identity. He pulled out his phone, brought up his digital drivers licence and was told, ‘No, we don’t acknowledge that.’ What is the point of getting a digital drivers licence if a government department will not actually accept that as proof of identity? There is not value for service when it comes to giving anything here in Victoria.

Changes to the Transfer of Land Act 1958 will permit the collection of fees without being limited to cost recovery in Victoria’s pricing guidelines. Again, why should we have to pay more in the future for dealing with government?

I want to comment on the Water Act 1989 and the change there that will allow the Victorian Environmental Water Holder to not have a set time as to when they are supposed to prepare a corporate plan. In Victoria the environmental water holder owns hundreds of millions of dollars worth of water. They have a corporate plan that sets out how they are going to use that water responsibly and how they are going to use that water to actually achieve the best environmental outcomes here in Victoria. There is not consensus in the community that they do that anyhow, but apart from that, why should they have an open-ended extension to wait until they have the right information to prepare that plan? Timelines

make things happen. The environmental water holder has a timeline. They will prepare their plan. If they need an extension, they have to go to the minister to get that extension currently. Why should they not have to do that? As I said, timelines make things happen. If there is no timeline for the environmental water holder, there is no requirement for it to stick to it at all. I would say you will get a lot of drift as you go through in preparing that particular plan.

One of the issues that the lead speaker, the shadow minister, raised was this issue that the commissioner for environmental sustainability will have the ability under this change to go out and get outside work. We have a government employee of an important department, an important role that has an impact on a lot of people's lives here in Victoria, who gets a salary somewhere in the range of \$300,000 a year, and we are going to legislate change to allow them to go and get outside work. Why should they be allowed to go and get outside work when they have a full-time job for the government? I just find that rather offensive. Those people who are struggling in a cost-of-living crisis would be saying, 'I'm struggling to pay my rent or my mortgage, kids' school fees, all the costs I have in my life, and I'm nowhere near on a salary that big, and here's someone that the government's now going to do legislative change to allow them to go and have a second job when they already have a full-time job here in Victoria.'

The issue around not reporting the renewable energy feed-ins – I think you will find for all those people that originally put solar panels on their roofs, those that were lucky enough early on to get 60 cents per kilowatt hour for feed-ins, that that has slowly diminished over time. Why shouldn't it be reported? We should know what is actually happening with those feed-in supplies, so it can be reported. Why should that exemption be taken away and not have that reported into the future?

I think what we see with this legislation is – the truism will be there – under Labor you actually pay more and you get less. If you look at the changes in this bill, there is the ability to increase fees, and we have seen fees and taxes increase or new taxes introduced all the time. This bill enables the government and government departments by giving them effectively the right to charge more and give less. If you want a better service, you are going to pay even more again. This is just a bill that is not going to deliver. As I started with, it just does not pass the pub test, because people know that red, green and black tape is out of control in this state.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:59): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, and I would like to start by thanking Minister Pearson for his work in bringing this bill to the house for debate. Those who have been in this place for a while will remember many of Minister Pearson's speeches. The minister really did enjoy speaking on regulatory reform bills and would wax lyrical about how particular elements of a bill could be traced back to Graeco-Roman times and how it all originated from there. Unfortunately, because he had the second-reading speech incorporated into *Hansard*, we will not be honoured with that sort of contribution today.

As has been said, this is an important bill. It is an important part of government and Parliament to review legislation over time and make sure that it is more fit for purpose. Obviously it is called regulatory legislation and is about reforming regulation, and I do want to just echo some of the contribution that the member for Laverton made in terms of the difference that this Labor government – this Allan government and the Andrews government before it – has been making in terms of regulatory reform. As the member for Laverton stated, over the last 10 years the Allan and Andrews governments have reviewed and reformed regulations in liquor, environmental protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, health, planning, consumer affairs, fee pricing, owners corporations and more and reduced Victoria's regulatory burden by 25 per cent.

We are going to do more, and I want to touch a little bit on the economic growth statement which was released late last year. I had the privilege to work with the then Treasurer and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer the member for Frankston in putting together the economic growth statement and particularly hosting a series of round tables with industry, large and small, about what they would like to see that would help stimulate further economic growth in Victoria. One of the key

outputs from the economic growth statement was cutting red tape. This is what we heard from industry: onerous and outdated regulation creates headaches for business, stifles innovation and slows growth. That is why there are a range of initiatives that the government has committed to to further reduce regulation and make it easier for small business and large business to operate and grow in Victoria, because that will contribute to a growing economy and a more prosperous state and population.

Those initiatives include halving the number of business regulators by 2030, speeding up the environment effects processes, delivering new priority assessment teams with key regulators to fast-track the assessment of priority projects, using digitisation and AI to speed up government, streamlining liquor and planning approvals for hospitality businesses and removing the need for a planning permit for outdoor dining on public land. The target is to slash the regulatory burden for businesses to the tune of \$500 million by 2030. A lot of those regulatory items are in process and will be the function of future reforms and legislation, but this is the message from industry, and the government is listening. That is why it is in the economic growth statement, and these are the initiatives that we are going to introduce.

In terms of the legislation at hand, the amendment bill proposes to make changes to 14 different pieces of legislation, some larger changes than others. I do want to focus on a couple of particular changes to legislation, and one of them is about the changes to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 which propose a range of changes, including the voluntary surrender of certain approvals and licences, the notification of additional information to council, a timeframe for declared bird organisation applications and additional infringement offences.

I want to particularly look at the additional information to council. This revolves around the declarations about dangerous dogs, particularly if an owner moves premises or if the dangerous dog dies and the owner then notifies the council. There is an incident that I want to want to share with the Assembly, which I think shows why some of this legislation and reform are really important. I was contacted about six months ago by a constituent of mine who was horribly attacked by a dog. She was on holiday in Tasmania in a caravan park and she had to be taken away and treated at hospital, but the only record that they had of the dog was that the dog was last seen leaving in the back of a vehicle with Queensland number plates. We tried to provide assistance to this constituent, but it proved very difficult, because while most of the states have very similar legislation in terms of what is classified as a dangerous dog, it is invariably up to the local council to keep a record of that dog. The problem in this situation was that obviously the dog owner was not from Tasmania and the individual that was attacked was not from Tasmania, so the Tasmanian government and the local Tasmanian council would not have had any record that the dog was in the local area.

Obviously there are jurisdictional issues involved in trying to have our Minister for Agriculture get involved in that, but I think the request was more about trying to have some sort of national system of laws and register – that if a dangerous dog were to move from state to state, and particularly even if it was just taking a pet with you on holiday, there was an easier avenue to be able to notify the dog owner about an incident that had happened and to bring that up to prosecution if need be. I think that that is going to be an important change. Obviously it does not solve the particular scenario that I described, because of the cross-jurisdictional matters, but anything that is able to make it easier for notification to happen to councils when an owner moves or when a dangerous dog dies under the ownership of a particular individual is just going to make it easier for owners and obviously then safer for the community in general.

I also want to just briefly touch on the changes to the Water Act 1989. I was actually surprised that clause 62 refers to special meetings and changes to special meetings that will omit ‘by post or in person’, and that is in terms of the notification requirements of a special meeting. That will allow a special meeting to be notified by email now. If you think about all other walks of life, it would be pretty unusual if email correspondence did not qualify as a legitimate form of notification of a meeting, particularly in this day and age. We are aware of the cuts that have been happening at Australia Post,

and relying on mail or in-person delivery does seem very unrealistic in this day and age. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (11:09): I rise to give a contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, and I want to thank the Manager of Opposition Business and Shadow Minister for Finance for the work that she has done on this bill as well as the nine shadow ministers, I believe, who had input on the legislation across a whole range of portfolios.

We know this bill amends nearly 40 regulations across 16 acts, and the government claims the bill will streamline regulation, reduce administrative burdens and enhance economic productivity by making it easier to do business in Victoria, which would probably be a first for this government over the last 10 years. The bill as presented by the government is a necessary step towards regulatory reform. The government claims it will enhance economic productivity and simplify business operations, but I think we need to scrutinise some of these claims and consider the potential consequences for constituents and the broader community.

I mentioned those acts, and I will not go through them all at the moment, but I want to start with the Adoption Act 1984 and the proposed changes aiming to implement the recommendations from the 2021 inquiry. I want to echo the comments from the shadow minister in her 30-minute contribution, and I understand the significant injustices faced by many of those families and individuals affected by those past adoption practices. While my situation is a little bit different, my mother was actually adopted by a family who became my grandparents, my family, but later in life, when they passed away, my mother was reunited with her biological mother. I think these practices are important for not just the people who suffered the historical injustices but also for people who come from families of adoption as a whole. As it turned out, my biological grandmother had a relationship with a high-ranking member of the Australian Defence Force, became a single mother, could not take on my mother as a child and put her up for adoption, but later in life when that reunification took place she found out about some health issues within my side of the family – my biological grandmother ended up suffering severe Parkinson's later in life. I think it is important that people who do come from these families actually have the opportunity to understand possibly not just who their biological families are but also some of those issues that may arise in family history and those sorts of things, so I personally welcome some of those changes when it comes to this bill.

Can I just say, though, in terms of the whole regulatory reform piece, it should not be about just fixing drafting errors within legislation. It also needs to be about fixing efficiencies and making the lives of Victorians better. When these bills come up, and this is the third one of this nature that the government has brought up in the last few years, we have got to make sure that they continue to make the lives of Victorians better when we bring those pieces of legislation forward.

As I said, the majority of these amendments are administrative in nature, but some do make substantive changes to the powers of secretaries across a variety of departments, and I want to bring to light a couple of these. I will start with the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, and we know that since this act came into effect on 1 July 2022 it has been amended by this government no less than 10 times in two years. Now, you would think that when a government bring a piece of legislation forward they have done the work and they know the pieces that need to be put in place, but it clearly demonstrates to me this government are pretty much making it up as they go along when it comes to recycling and waste reduction. I also note the amendments result in individuals facing larger penalties, and these are significant for the stakeholders in this industry. I hope the government and the EPA will educate stakeholders about these changes, because as the shadow minister said in the bill briefing, there has been zero consultation with industry stakeholders about these new provisions.

One of the big concerns we have is around the amendments to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003. When you have someone who is taking on a role and the government want to, as they said, attract and retain quality candidates for the role of the commissioner, it is our firm

belief that if you are paying someone \$300,000 to do a job then that job should be done as a full-time gig, not part-time on the side, with people then seeking extra remuneration from other pieces of work. If the commissioner for environmental sustainability undertakes paid duties outside of the role, this should have the approval of the minister. The government argue it will enable them to attract and retain quality candidates, but they also argue the same situation applies in relation to other government executive board positions. However, it could be argued that such a provision converts the position into a part-time gig, as I said, so we need to make sure that the people who we give these commissioner roles to on \$300,000 are actually fully committed to doing the job at hand.

Can I just quickly reflect on the member for Box Hill's comments around domestic animals and dangerous animals. I think many of us have had a run-in with a dangerous animal at some point, so I fully welcome anything that allows us to further track and make sure dangerous animals are kept in check and the owners are kept in check and we know exactly where those dangerous animals are. Many of us have dogs or young children that we take to dog parks and such, and none of us want to see those dangerous animals inflict the sorts of injuries the member for Box Hill spoke about on any citizen or resident of Victoria. I fully welcome anything that does anything to make sure that we know where those dangerous dogs are at any time. I fully understand those comments, for sure.

I want to touch on the amendment to the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 and the minimum solar tariff feed-in determinations. As the shadow minister said, we know those feed-in tariffs are being reduced dramatically, which is going to have an added effect on those Victorians who have put solar on their house with the understanding that they would get those feed-in tariffs. We have seen them reduced significantly in recent times, down to 3.3 cents, and now they are going to be reduced further, down to just 0.04 cents. As the shadow minister said, why do we need to delay the reporting changes if there is no intention to change those tariffs again?

The Service Victoria Act 2018 – the amendments seek to raise revenue for the government by charging fees for various government services. I think the part that is worrying in both this and the Subdivision Act 1988 is that the amendments seek to raise revenue that is above cost recovery. Cost recovery is one part – the government should be delivering these services – but we want to make sure that there is no added impost. The Service Victoria app, the digital licences and all of these things hopefully add a level of ease and efficiency. We all carry our mobile phones now – I would much rather carry my mobile phone than carry my licence around most of the time – but we want to make sure that this impost is not put in terms of costs on the average Victorian just to be able to take on added services through Service Victoria. I understand that there is a cost to running these services and to implementing them across the Service Victoria app across a wide range of areas, but that added cost above cost recovery should not be added to Victorians.

When it comes to the Subdivision Act 1988 and the Transfer of Land Act 1958, it is the same thing – we want to make sure that these costs are limited to cost recovery. At a time when housing is an issue, we want to see more subdivisions taking place, we want to see more people being able to buy or build homes. We do not want to be adding an extra cost. We already know that an incredible number of property taxes have been added across the housing sector through the life of the Andrews and Allan Labor governments, to the point where we are talking 42 per cent of the cost of any house and land package being tax. We want to make sure that any other costs that are going onto these are not added purely through a bill like this, that is, as we said, supposed to be creating efficiencies. Efficiency should not mean an added cost to Victorians.

We do not have any major concerns with this bill. There are a few pieces that I think could be looked at and tidied up. As I said, the Adoption Act is something that I have a personal relation to. I am glad that these things are taking place. It is an important piece to act on. It has taken a little bit of time for this government to be able to do so, but overall I think that it is an uncontentious bill. We do not want to see added regulation, we want to see further efficiencies created across a whole range of bureaucracy, but those efficiencies, as I said, should not necessarily be about making the lives of bureaucrats easier. They need to be done to make the lives of Victorians easier, and not with an added cost.

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (11:19): I rise to give my contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This bill is the government's third regulatory legislation amendment reform bill, playing a vital role in ongoing regulatory reform to make Victoria a better place to live, work and do business. The bill will make amendments to 14 acts of Parliament; I am not quite sure where those on the other side get 16 from. As I have sat in the chamber I have gone quickly back through to the second-reading speech and through the notes and I can definitely see 14 acts, not 16, so I am a bit confused about that.

This bill will provide simple, practical and widely supported improvements to legislation that align with the evolving needs of businesses, communities and the government. This is an omnibus bill. As I said, it amends 14 different acts. To some extent these sorts of bills are just housekeeping. To some point they are not considered all that important, although I do note that the Manager of Opposition Business spent the half-hour of her debate ripping into this bill, pointing out many parts of it that she was displeased by. She thought that the government was doing pretty bad things through changing some of the words in this bill. But then I also note that she supports the bill, so again, I am confused by that. Either you do not like the bill and do not support it, or you can read the bill and maybe make some points but support it.

A lot of people are talking about the fact that we on this side, the government, keep coming back and making changes to acts. That is our job. There are acts from 1918 or 1956; things change. As we know, things can change significantly in the community and in our lives, legally and with technology. So we need to go back and look at the acts that regulate what we do in the community, or laws, and we need to change them because they are no longer fit for purpose. I think that is an incredibly important thing to do. For the people in this chamber who complain about the fact that we are making changes, it is not because we have not worked hard and it is not because we do not believe in what we have previously done; it is because we accept that things change. So I am quite happy to be here to talk about this bill.

The other thing I would like to point out too is that words have power. It is really important. Sometimes in this chamber I hear people hurling words around that are full of misinformation or that are designed to hurt, and it is really disappointing to hear that, because words have power. I spoke in my inaugural speech about the big changes that we need to make being important, but so are the little ones. They are vitally important. They keep the world going around; they keep the community supported. These little words are incredibly important. They could save a life, they could change a life and they could make a life.

As the member for Nepean leaves, I might just say in terms of words changing lives and altering lives, I agree, the Adoption Act 1984 is a case in point. Lives were changed when the member discovered family. These changes here might be little words, but they can change a life, and I think we should all remember that. That is a really important part of what we do in here.

I congratulate the people with the blue, green, red, black and purple pens that spend so long –

**A member** interjected.

**Paul MERCURIO:** Not purple? Well, I like purple. I will add purple in there. I do not know how they do it – sit in a room, probably a darkened room, read all these acts and somehow make sense of them and find the changes that need to be made, find the words that need to be corrected and cross the t's and dot the i's. It is vitally important work, and I am certainly grateful to the people that have the ability and the talent to do that. I am happy to get up on stage and fall over a few times, but I could not go into a room with a bunch of pens and make those adjustments, so I am very grateful for that.

I might talk a bit more about the bill, possibly.

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul MERCURIO:** I have got 5 minutes. I have realised, ‘Phew. I’ve got that far.’ It is only going to go down from here, because now I am going to talk about the mundane aspects of what these changes are about and what this bill is about. Again, I just keep saying that they are so important. I am going to go through each of the 14 acts and every part of them – no, I am not, because it is going to take too long. Look, there are a lot of really important things that will make a difference. Yes, they are cutting red tape, and they are trying to make life easier for the community, and again I support that.

The first cab off the rank, which I want to talk about really briefly, is the Housing Act 1983, and that allows me the opportunity to remind everyone in this place that Victoria is building more homes than any other state in the country and has a real plan to tackle housing issues, unlike those on the opposite side and indeed those in federal opposition up in Canberra. Currently the office of the housing registrar does not require ready access to bank account details of registered agencies. The bank account details do not provide any useful insight for the regulator, and it was deemed unnecessary for them to have access. Additionally, it raises concerns about having too much information, which leads to an unnecessary risk to privacy and security. The impact this change will have is just removing an unnecessary burden on registered agencies and just means there is one less administrative task for someone to do, giving workers more time for more important tasks – a small change but an important one. As I refer to my notes, I am seeing someone in a darkened room with a bunch of coloured pens changing words, and again I am grateful.

Also there is the Domestic Animals Act 1994. This one I thought was interesting. One of the amendments is to reinstate the penalty for seized dog or cat delivery offences. What that basically means is that they are reinstating a penalty. This amendment is just correcting a drafting error that was made in the previous amendment. This is just reinstating that the council-authorised officers can enforce the requirement that those who seize a dog or a cat must deliver it to a council, a shelter or a veterinary practitioner. This is done to stop people claiming found animals as their own or rehoming them or perhaps even selling them on to other people, when they are not the legal owner of the animal. I think that is a very important point. There are some other bits there which I might not go on with, as I have got 2 minutes left.

I did really want to talk about dumped rubbish, for one. There are some changes made there. Unfortunately in my community there is dumped rubbish on the sides of the roads, up by the railway tracks – wherever they can, actually. It is really sad, and I do not really understand the mindset of people that care so little about their own community that they want to dump rubbish anywhere. There is the cost of living, and there are certainly things people might try and save some money on, but it is not the point. It is not right. So there is an amendment, a change, which gives the EPA enforcement powers to go after businesses that are deliberately and systematically dumping waste as a business practice, often in large quantities. Often they are instructing their drivers to do so. So what this change does is it allows the EPA to actually go after the business, not the driver, and I think that is important, because if you are being put under pressure to dump rubbish to save money, that is unfair.

I have only got a minute left. I wanted to talk a little bit about adoption. I do not want to go into any personal circumstances, but I have had some experience within this area. I think the change in adoption is very, very important. I do note that people can find out about people who may be adopted or may be family only if the person is over the age of 18. As I said before, these are small changes that can save a life, can change a life or can make a life, and certainly within this area, as the member for Nepean said, finding out about adopted families is a vitally important thing for health and wellbeing but also to understand about your own physiology, mental status and all those sorts of things. So that part, the small words being changed in that act, I feel is vitally important. I certainly commend the bill to the house, and I hope the other side is not so grumpy about it.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (11:29): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. I am always interested when it has got the word ‘reform’ in there, because we know that essentially these are just fixing up and tidying up rather than reforming. I think I even heard members of the government earlier say that this is not

groundbreaking reform at all, but it has got that in the title, so I think it makes everybody feel quite good that they are making particularly big changes when it is not really so.

We have got an omnibus bill before us, 16 pieces of legislation over nine portfolios. Actually, it is not as chunky as I thought it may well have been when it was introduced. Typically, these bills are around tidying up, cleaning up, fixing drafting errors that happen from time to time. Sometimes there are oversights, and sometimes there are errors that have been in place that people have known about for a couple of years that they need to get to the fore to actually fix the issues with the particular act.

I do note, like the member for Murray Plains talked about in the statement of compatibility, that the bill amends laws across a range of ministerial portfolios to, and I am quoting from the statement of compatibility:

- support efficient and effective regulation
- promote consistency with other legislation and existing policies
- reduce the administrative burden of regulation, and
- address technical errors ...

I want to talk about efficient and effective regulation for a moment and the administrative burdens that are placed on individuals and particularly businesses and the cost of business. One of the key costs of business is that of compliance and filling in forms and needing to jump certain hurdles, and sometimes these hurdles are so great that smaller businesses are being put on the same platform as some of the larger businesses who employ people who can do these sorts of things. But when you are a small business of two or 10 employees, you do not always have the manpower to do this, and we have seen so many businesses fold because of red and green tape. In 2023, actually, more than 129,000 businesses closed in Victoria, and we have commentary from industry experts about the difficult conditions in Victoria to open and operate a business compared to other states, and the administrative burden around regulation and inefficient regulations is indeed part of that.

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry only very recently said that 45 per cent of small business owners have considered closing or leaving in the last 12 months, and I think that is really quite sad. The *Herald Sun* last week said that more than 350 Victorian businesses per day are shutting their doors for good and we have the highest business exit rate across the nation. They were referring to data from the ABS and work being done by the Institute of Public Affairs. I think it is really quite sad that Victoria is difficult to do business in, and one of the reasons is taxes, taxes, taxes, but there are also the burdens of compliance and regulation. These need to be streamlined, and I will always support that.

I do want to touch on a couple of the areas that are referred to specifically: the EPA, the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria, and the changes around the illegal dumping of materials. I guess many of us would see in our electorates, as you drive around, materials that are dumped, and I have got a couple of key spots, certainly one at Castella, where there have been for too long building rubble, concrete and bits of plasterboard and things that have been dumped in a particular spot. And it has been dumped by trucks. It is much greater than somebody unloading their ute and chucking it not quite into the bushes in a little pull-over area. We have stuff dumped on roadsides all the time. I am pleased to see that here the government will now be able to pursue the owner of the vehicle or the company or the business that may own those vehicles. Previously they could only do so if the driver could not be identified, but the changes are here, and I see so much of this. Sometimes it is very deliberate dumping, and it would be a good thing if those companies who are doing that as a matter of course were taken to task. I think there is in this some discretion for the EPA, and I am pleased to see that.

But on the EPA, there are also a couple of areas around governance and the board, and I was actually quite interested in this, particularly around filling casual vacancies. Occasionally people leave the board, for whatever reason, and currently a person may be appointed only for the remainder of a term when a vacancy arises, and I would think that is perfectly normal. If you have got somebody leaving

one year into a three-year term, they would conclude at that three-year term, because very typically, if you look at the information on company directors, you have a changeover; you have rolling movement on your board. You might have three people who are up for reappointment at one point and then another three at a different one. When you start halfway through this to put somebody in who is off the cycle, I think it is going to be fraught with difficulty and create a lot of unexpected consequences. I am not sure that that is a particularly good idea. I am quite keen on governance and good governance. I am not sure that this change that is being introduced is indeed good governance.

With regard to the circular economy, I think this is the fourth crack at trying to get this right. This time they have included a provision around civil penalties, because they forgot to have the penalties in previously. It is not a bad thing that they have fixed this up, but it is the fourth crack at getting this in. The circular economy legislation is not particularly old – 2021. It is not very old at all, and this is the fourth crack.

Also as part of the changes here the commissioner for environmental sustainability will have the ability to undertake paid duties outside of their role. This is really quite extraordinary. We have a senior bureaucrat, who would presumably be well paid, having to get a second gig. I have thought about what this might look like. Perhaps it is a board position, but if you are taking a board position that has remuneration as part of that, perhaps you could waive that if you are already on the public purse rather than double dipping. One of the reasons for doing this is the attraction and retention of quality candidates for the role. Seriously, if you cannot get a quality candidate for the role of commissioner for environmental sustainability without offering additional perks, there is something very wrong. I am really quite surprised that the government has put that in. I am not aware of the extent of the rollout of that policy across the public service, but I would think that that is something to have a bit of a look at.

The changes to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 are fairly simple and are designed around helping councils and owners of menacing dogs, dangerous dogs and restricted breeds. From time to time their dogs will die, and I think it is only reasonable that if they are on that register, the obligation is to notify the council so that they have accurate information records, because I think the issue of dangerous dogs is something that everybody does hear about from time to time.

There are changes around the adoption laws. I will just remind the house that it was a former minister, Mary Wooldridge, who made the apology in August 2012 around forced adoption because of things that had happened to people which were not what they wanted. We have all heard many stories about this. The recommendations of the Legal and Social Issues Committee in 2021 are, three years later, coming into being. It is around making finding lost family members easier. For somebody who may have a sibling or an aunt there are some provisions here to help access information that makes it easier for them to find out about and possibly locate them. I do wonder how quickly science is overtaking our laws, because time and time again people are finding family members through DNA on ancestry.com. I have even seen TV shows where they help people do all of this through DNA. The more this is done through DNA, probably the less need there is for some of the adoption laws. I am curious as to how long that is going to take.

Finally, the Service Victoria changes will raise revenue for the government by increasing fees to access government services. Maybe you want us to pay for an app. Give me a break. Service Victoria is there to service the people of Victoria, and sending or receiving information is what they do. We should not be taxed on that.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (11:39): I am very pleased to speak on these regulatory reforms. I will attest that they are reforms. I looked it up on Google, and Google said ‘make changes in something in order to improve it’, and I would have to say fundamentally we are not here standing up for the sake of it – we are making these reforms to improve the system. I think that that needs to put on the table. We would not be just speaking to this legislation to pass time. It is because there are important improvements that are for the benefit of all, including the workers who are helping with the

regulations, because I think there was a comment about, ‘Don’t make things simpler for the workers who are implementing the regulations.’ I would say it is important for the workers and also those in the community who benefit from the improvements to the regulations. I am putting that point out there as well. Why not make processes better?

Fundamentally what it should and indeed is seeking to do is to provide a clearer, fairer and more modern system in terms of the laws and regulations while strengthening regulatory tools available to agencies that protect our state – particularly in this case to do with environmental protections, but I should say overall when we are looking at improving the way the state is managed – and refining redundant processes, reporting and notifications, helping to reduce administrative burdens on businesses, government and individuals. So it is making sure all those relevant persons or entities benefit from the outcomes being driven.

Firstly, I did want to speak to the changes with regard to removing barriers to help families who have experienced forced adoptions to reunite. I was thinking about my late great-grandfather. He did not find out until he was about 40 that he had been adopted. I do not believe it was a forced adoption – I just want to be clear – and I am going to draw it back to the bill. That had a cataclysmic emotional impact on him, as you can imagine, when you have gone 40 years of your life thinking these people are your parents and suddenly at 40 you find out otherwise. It certainly had a very significant impact on him and his emotional state. Now, he did manage to get through that, and he lived on until his late 80s – a credit to him for that. I must say, adoption per se, as we know, is a particularly emotional element because it does – I have not been adopted myself, so I am going to speak in an objective sense as best I can – cause one, I imagine, to question your identity and what has caused you to be the person that you are, and that raises a whole other vicissitude of existential questions. Nevertheless coming back to the bill, let alone being adopted, a forced adoption of course must be an incredibly traumatic thing to go through for those persons who have had to go through that. So it is certainly pleasing to see that these reforms are being brought about. Hopefully they will bring some comfort, and comfort is a word I am going to say very cautiously because we are talking about an after-the-fact improvement. Nevertheless it is one that is important in the context of the reforms that we are speaking to today.

I also do want to speak to the improvements when it comes to empowering councils with better data on the location of dangerous dogs, helping to keep the community safe. I was reflecting on a dog that my mum had, a dog named Paddy, a lovely dog. She was out one day with the dog, and then out of the blue two, I will call them, dangerous dogs came up off lead and absolutely pounced on poor Paddy. My mum was screaming. In the end a neighbour chucked boots to make the dogs let go, but unfortunately Paddy passed away, I think within a day or two, because the shock caused him to have a heart attack. So without meaning to be too negative, I am just saying we know the ramifications of irresponsible dog ownership, if I can put it that way, hence the impetus to have these kind of controls or improvements in controls and regulations. You think of your family pet as being incredibly resilient, but of course even they will have limitations as to what they can endure, so I am very pleased to see these changes being brought about, because that incident need never have occurred. I should say, certainly those dogs should have been appropriately contained, for starters. Nevertheless it does back in the imperative for changes that help to keep the community safer and have better awareness of where dangerous dogs are being kept.

Further, I am also going to reflect on not only the changes being brought about with regard to some of the matters that I have discussed but – and I am jumping around here a little bit – when we are looking at the issues of housing and land. We know that housing is an incredibly important element; it is a fundamental element of human existence. I know that there is certainly an imperative for us as a community as a whole, and certainly in government, to make sure that there are homes not only for the people of today but also for younger generations into the future. We have to think of them, and we know that, at least on this side of the house. That is why we are delivering more homes for young people, families and downsizers around 50 train stations and tram stops in Melbourne’s inner suburbs. This builds on the 10 initial pilot centres. I know, as somebody who lives in the absolute inner city –

almost in the city, virtually in the CBD, in probably the most built-up space you could have – what a beautiful community ambience there is. But it is also – I am just taking a little tangent here – a credit to the hard work that the community put in. There are some real leaders in our community who really bring people together and nurture those community spaces and events. Sometimes there are attitudes about apartment living, but let me tell you, it can be a really convenient element. It means you are right on the doorstep of all the arts, if that is your thing – it certainly is my passion – and all the wonderful facilities, the botanical gardens et cetera. Who would not want to live there? I am just putting it out there.

It is obviously not only in that space; it is all about choice as well. Activity centre planning is about building more opportunities and better communities by setting clear expectations for long-term growth – that is absolutely fundamental – and giving the community a say early, coming back to that regulatory element, and streamlining planning to unblock home building. We are undertaking a review to make it easier, faster and cheaper for Victorians to divide their blocks and build more homes. By making it easier for homeowners to subdivide their land, it will be easier for more Victorians to find a home in an established suburb where they have already got the schools and the ambulances and all the other things – what do you call them? Ambulance stations. There should be ambulances everywhere – they are mobile. Let me just be really specific about that. But certainly there should be all the services that you need to be able to live in a healthy and safe community, close to transport, jobs, schools and services.

I know that in late 2024 the government released a landmark plan for 27 additional greenfield areas across Melbourne's outer south-east, north and west to be released over the next 10 years, committing to providing the space and completing the planning work to deliver 180,000 new homes over the decade. Fundamentally what is inherent in this is that government is planning ahead for all Victorians and giving them choice, because while I might like living in Southbank, there are others who want to be further out. So be it. Good, great – let us make sure that they have those opportunities. That is exactly what we are doing. I should say, also in late 2023 – I am just reflecting on the record as well as forward thinking in this space – we made it easier to allow homeowners to build small second homes such as granny flats without a planning permit. I understand that has been a popular element because it makes good sense, and it is also a terrific use of much-needed land. We have also slashed stamp duty on off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses to cut up-front costs, speed up building and make it more affordable for everyone to buy off the plan through to October this year. We can see in these important elements the whole spectrum of housing choices and opportunities for people to be able to live where they want to live now and into the future – not only current generations but younger generations into the future.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (11:49): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This is an omnibus bill which covers off on many different pieces of legislation, and I would suggest that most people in this place surely could raise some local issues relevant to standing up for their people which would outline how Labor cannot manage money and how so often it is Victorians that are paying the price. For this reason I will particularly focus on elements of this legislation which seek to amend aspects regarding the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023.

The reason that I really want to focus on this is because mineral sands mining is something which is of great interest to my local electorate of Lowan. Within my electorate, which is about 20 per cent of the state, underneath our soils, we have the Stavely Arc, which is of course a rich source of resources. We have got a goldmine at Stawell, and we have got copper mines throughout the Grampians that are looking to be established, and what is happening and has been happening for the past 30-odd years is there has been extraction of mineral sands resources from our region. We have an enormous number of exploration permits, and we are looking at many applications for extraction licences for these mineral sands from my region.

While we have been undertaking mineral sands extraction for some 30 years, the more recent mining opportunities that have been proposed and put forward – and environment effects statements (EES) have been applied for – have certainly been in areas where there has not been extensive mining in the past. There is great concern from local landholders – particularly the farmers who rely on a clean environment and a productive environment in order to support their businesses and to support their families and the community where they live – that there has been a dearth of information provided to local people around the impacts of mineral sand mining. This is a catastrophic failure of the Allan Labor government, because there have been so many opportunities to provide information to my community around what structures are in place to ensure that there is not a disaster unfolding unnecessarily in the region in relation to mineral sands mining, the extraction of that product and also the transport of that product.

When you take things from under the ground, particularly in the mode in which mineral sands are extracted from the ground, it does result in dust. It does then require, for dust suppression, the use of an extensive amount of water. When we are looking at significant water shortages through my region at the moment this is of course a concern to farmers, who are already looking at water shortages. There is concern that any water that is applied for dust suppression will be of high salinity and therefore have an impact on the soil and the opportunity to rehabilitate the land and grow crops in that area. There are also concerns about the impacts of radioactive dust: how it is monitored, what impacts that will have on the health of the community and also what impacts that would have on the saleability of produce grown in my region given that there is an increasing pressure from global markets to ensure that there are clean products, particularly in food sources which are set for human consumption. Of course then that could have a significant flow-on effect on local markets and the ability to generate strong returns, not just for that business but also by allowing money to be put back into the local economy.

There are also concerns about freight. It is no secret that my electorate of Lowan and most areas of rural and regional Victoria host the worst roads not just in the state but arguably in Australia. If we are looking at trucking out these mineral sands resources, we are going to have more heavy vehicle traffic on our highways and on some of our private roads. How will our roads stand up to that when our roads are riddled with potholes and crumbling edges already?

We also have substandard access to the rail system because it has been neglected for such a long period of time by Labor. We have should have routes to port, down through to Portland, which are able to carry freight. Having rail services that could carry passengers as well – passenger rail – would be nice for my region. I always sit back and listen to other members of this place who are complaining because there are not enough rail services or railway stations or there are not enough stops on their line. We do not even have a train service in western Victoria – 20 per cent of the state, no rail services. And why is that? Paul Keating's One Nation project. Paul Keating's One Nation project was to standardise rail across Australia. He did not fund the whole thing, so we have got standardised rail which goes down to Geelong and the Ballarat line was never standardised. Therefore we have this situation where the rail gauge changes just south of Ararat at Maroona and you cannot get a set-gauge rail service through the region.

There is a simple solution: get a passenger rail train with an adjustable bogie and we could have rail services going not just to Horsham but perhaps further towards the border and perhaps even through to South Australia – head through Ballarat, perhaps additional services for Wendouree, and then head right through to Melbourne. It is a simple solution. It is a low-cost solution. It would be a very straightforward fix and something that would ensure that people who have not got access to good public transport and reliable public transport in my electorate of Lowan would have access to public transport and rail transport so they could do work, perhaps do their studies for university or school if people were off to boarding school, usually in Ballarat, or they could just sit with their family, perhaps have a nap and have a safe trip on their journey to Melbourne or Ballarat for the footy, to go shopping or just to visit friends and family. It is something that is important and has not been forgotten by me.

There are solutions to the concerns in my region about mineral sands. I have lost count of the number of letters of representation I have written to the Premier, to the Minister for Planning, to the Minister for Environment and to the Minister for Energy and Resources. There are simple bits of information that should be provided. I cannot exaggerate – I do not think it is possible to do so – the stress and anxiety that the lack of this information from the government has caused in my community. We need additional mental health support in my part of the state to support people through the journey around what mineral sands mining looks like. Even if it does not go ahead, we need additional mental health support. We still do not have a mental health local in Horsham, as was promised as part of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Our region needs some support right now.

But more than that they need factual information that is accessible and reliable, which is why I have called for an office of Resources Victoria to be established in Horsham. It is in the middle of the Wimmera, which is the heart of where all the mineral sands resources are at the moment. I would envisage that this office would be a place where members of the community could get reliable information on any permits through the region, any licensing, an understanding of the EES process and how they can give input to that, the current stage of development for the various mining operators through the region who have got a presence and also information about what the government is doing in terms of monitoring radiation from these mines and ensuring there is not dust that could contaminate crops or impact on the health of our community.

We need general information out there that is accessible around the rehabilitation process. Who signs off that land is to be rehabilitated, and who will provide assurance that the bond system is up to date? We do not have a lot of understanding of the value of the bond that is held by the government and how that is released, and it is felt that it is very much biased towards mining operators. This is all very straightforward information, but it has been very, very difficult to source, not just from writing directly to ministers but the website is in very technical language and set out in a very complex way. It is not accessible, and I think it would take a lot of stress out of the community if there was an office in the Wimmera. A further thing that I would ask for is more education. I would love a presence of the Earth Resources Regulator or Resources Victoria, for example, at the Wimmera Machinery Field Days between 4 and 6 March, an important event for our local community.

We also need concepts of fairness for farmers. They feel like there is going to be compulsory acquisition of the land; they feel like they are going to be driven off their farms. This is causing enormous stress. We need to ensure that there is a framework around a dislocation fee available and a compulsory ability that if farmers want to sell their land, mining companies have to set a high and a premium price for that land. Most importantly, we need to ensure that the government is listening. Please come out and speak to my community, take some of the stress out of our community around mineral sand mining and provide information that is trusted.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (11:59): I rise today to contribute on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. At 48 pages, this is a pretty standard omnibus bill which makes simple changes to numerous acts – I think around 14 acts if I have counted correctly – in order to support effective and efficient regulation and ensure consistency with other legislation. It streamlines processes, reduces administrative burdens and corrects minor errors. In other words, we are trying to make sure that the legislation works for all Victorians and makes Victoria a better place to live, work and do business.

Over the last 10 years we have reviewed and reformed regulations in liquor, environmental protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, health, planning, consumer affairs, fee pricing, owners corporations and a lot more. We have legislated regulatory improvements to automatic mutual recognition, cladding safety, wage theft, gender equality and casino and gambling laws, as well as worker screening processes, green energy and greater energy market protections, just to name a few, and we have reduced Victoria's regulatory burden by about 25 per cent.

Local governments will be able to better manage the potential risk posed by dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds of dogs. Amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 requiring the owners to notify local governments if the dog dies or is relocated will ensure that local councils have accurate mapping of where these dogs are and the current details to inform compliance and enforcement activities. It also means that councils will have better data on the location of these dangerous dogs, helping to keep our community safe. I just want to refer to the contribution by the member for Albert Park about the dangerous dogs that she or her mother encountered in regard to her mother's dog. We must make sure that with dangerous dogs the owners take greater responsibility. Unfortunately, there are some people in our communities that use these dangerous dogs just to intimidate other members of the community.

Our public officials will be empowered to better protect members of our community with amendments to the Adoption Act 1984, which allows the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety to not disclose certain adoption information when they believe it may increase the risk of harm to another person, including family violence. Further amendments will allow the secretary to notify or seek consent from a party, thereby alerting a person in certain cases when a request for adoption information is received and when the secretary believes this action would increase the risk of harm.

Natural relatives of an adopted person, such as siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents, will be able to receive identifying information about an adopted person for the purposes of reunification, and that is a good thing. As it stands, natural relatives are eligible to receive only non-identifying information about an adopted person, which reflects the ongoing shame and stigma of historical forced adoptions at the time the Adoption Act was introduced. This prevents natural relatives from identifying the child's adoptive parents or the whereabouts of the adoptive parents or the adoptive person, and this is especially important for members of the stolen generations. We anticipate that this reform will allow many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and their descendants to reconnect with their communities, their families, their country and of course their culture, and this is so important. The amendment is consistent with the 2021 parliamentary inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions. It recognised the grief and the trauma caused by historical forced adoptions, which most of us here would never, ever understand or appreciate, and the importance of improving access to adoption records and information for those that have been affected.

One of the other things that this bill goes to is illegal waste dumping. In my local area of Melton we see on the sides of the roads much waste dumped, unfortunately, particularly things like mattresses and other rubbish that is carelessly dumped on roadsides, in particular in places like along the Melton Highway. I have had several constituents contact me to report illegal waste dumping near their houses, and again, as I said, along the highways and the back roads of my electorate. Some of the other concerns that have been raised have been around building sites and the dumping on building sites. People seem to think that they have a right to dump rubbish wherever they want, whether that be on building sites or the side of the road. Personally I feel that the penalties for waste and rubbish dumping, regardless of where it is, should be much, much heavier. I think it is a terrible act just to dump rubbish anywhere you like, and it shows complete disregard for the environment.

Changes to the Environment Protection Act 2017 will mean that people and businesses that illegally dump rubbish are more likely to be caught. Currently the EPA can pursue the owner of a vehicle only when it is unable to identify the driver of the vehicle. This means the EPA is unable to pursue companies that are deliberately and systematically dumping waste as a business practice, often in large quantities. I should say that we experienced a situation like this at the back of our place, where a whole heap of rubble and rubbish was dumped – there is a creek at the back of our place – many truckloads of it, illegally. We pursued the offenders – this was some years ago – and quite hefty penalties were applied, and they had to clean it up at great cost, I am pleased to say. They had complete disregard – they just took it upon themselves to drop truckloads of rubbish and rubble at the back of our property, on a creek bed, unfortunately. These amendments will allow the Environment Protection Authority Victoria to pursue a business or business owners where a vehicle owned by that business has been

used to illegally dump waste. Again I make reference to the penalties that apply, and I think they should be a lot harsher in relation to people thinking they can just get away with it and that they have a right to dump rubbish.

This is a significant new bill that introduces amendments across multiple legislative frameworks. These changes aim to improve, as we say, regulatory efficiency and enhance protections for individuals and businesses, and they align existing laws with contemporary governance standards. One of the primary objectives of the bill is to reinforce regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms. The amendments include things like establishing a clear six-year limitation period for civil penalty proceedings, ensuring accountability while providing regulatory certainty; under the Domestic Animals Act 1994, restoring penalty provisions for offences related to seized animals and mandating notification requirements for owners of dangerous or restricted dog breeds; under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, enhancing the framework for Aboriginal child welfare services by allowing non-Aboriginal siblings to be included in Aboriginal agency oversight, improving continuity of care; enhancing environmental protections and corporate accountability – and I went to that before about the dumping of rubbish; and under the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, enhancing protections for commercially sensitive information, ensuring confidentiality in regulatory processes. There are many changes in this bill to make acts better, cleaning up acts to make it easier for Victorians.

A number of changes aim to reduce administrative burdens, improve digital governance and online legislation with contemporary operational practices. It allows Service Victoria to charge fees for its services, ensuring financial sustainability of digital service delivery. As we say, there are many, many changes to these acts – 14 acts in total. It removes outdated references to, say, paper-based conveyancing, modernises fee structures and clarifies regulatory authority. This is an important bill. I commend the minister responsible for this bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:09): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. In the second-reading speech for this regulatory reform bill, these regulatory reforms are proposed by the Allan Labor government and are supposedly designed to increase economic productivity, make it easier to do business in Victoria and protect consumers, community health and safety and the environment – very, very noble ideals that the state of Victoria absolutely urgently needs.

Economically Victoria is on its knees, and we would be thrilled if this bill actually achieved some of these worthy aims, and I sincerely hope it does. I suspect that this is instead just tinkering around the edges of nearly 40 regulations across 16 acts. It is an omnibus bill that is very much about administrative fix-ups covering multiple portfolios. There are some good things in this – I am not disputing that – particularly around the adoption law changes, but we have seen no evidence from this government in the last decade that the government has done anything but increase regulatory burden, and Victorians are certainly suffering as a result of that. We are seeing businesses just absolutely exit the state. The figures do not lie. The evidence is clear.

Frankly, this is a missed opportunity. This bill could have done so much more. There are so many opportunities where the government could have improved business efficiencies. They could start with how the government handles Crown leases, for example. In south-west Victoria there are a few examples I would like to raise, including the Princess Margaret Rose Cave near the South Australian border, the Robin Boyd-designed visitor centre at Tower Hill and the Port Fairy golf club.

The Princess Margaret Rose Cave has been closed to the public since 2021 when the private lessee could not get the government to engage with them effectively. They eventually walked away as they could not secure a lease, which meant they could not offer contracts to employees because they themselves had no security. You just cannot do business in that sort of environment. There were too many frustrations in dealing with the Allan Labor government. The government needs to reduce the

regulatory red tape to make leases more commercially attractive and ensure that processes are less onerous so people will consider opening up public assets like the Princess Margaret Rose Cave.

Regulatory red tape is holding back business. We need to ensure these leases are dealt with in a timely manner because assets like Princess Margaret Rose Cave cannot be reopened due to those overly burdensome, onerous factors. Access for the public to enjoy natural assets has diminished under the Labor government. The Allan Labor government has been completely inept at managing leases. We have seen examples in Nelson, as well as the Princess Margaret Rose Cave, where we have seen the bait shed go through the same thing and leave. The general store in Nelson has closed too, and they have lost access to the local shop. It is not an isolated situation, and the government's lack of understanding of how to do business is quite evident.

Businesses need security of tenure before they can invest in a business and make sure they get a return. The government is not offering this when they will not engage. The cave is located near the South Australian border. It has had \$650,000 worth of state tax money invested in it, yet it still sits closed in February 2025. The truth is that the government have not issued a new lease that we know of, and the fact remains that the asset is closed.

Another one is the tourist attraction in South-West Coast of the Robin Boyd-designed visitor centre at Tower Hill. This is a place that has been at the heart of my family's Sunday afternoons since I was a very little girl. I now take international visitors there because you can be guaranteed to see a koala, an echidna, an emu, a kangaroo and often even a snake. It is a wonderful part of the world where you are really guaranteed to entertain anyone. In 1962 a distinctive circular building at Tower Hill was designed by famed architect Robin Boyd. It was completed in 1969. It is a beautiful building, and it curves with the landscape and has a volcano crater and harmonises the natural landscape. It has been used as a visitor centre, but in 2023 it had some conservation works done on it. Those are now complete but the centre sits vacant and closed to the public – another public asset closed. With a bit of imagination and some commercial acumen and effort it could be a visitor centre again with a kiosk and a gift shop, but that would require the Allan Labor government to grant a commercially attractive lease and provide an opportunity for someone entrepreneurial to increase the amenity of the area. Instead the government has mired it in red tape. Everything is too hard, and that is what the community continue to tell me: it is all too hard, it requires too much effort. They urgently need to get some basic get-up-and-go so this can be addressed.

The Port Fairy golf club have been trying to finalise their lease for some time, and the excuse given by the government is the delay is because of COVID. During COVID the golf club reported to me the government said that they were two years behind. Imagine in a residential context if a renter was out of lease for a few years. The real estate agent just could not get away with it. If it would not be acceptable for them, why is it acceptable for the government? This means the club has to get a permit to do something as simple as fix a sprinkler. Seriously, is this bureaucracy gone mad? It is the opposite of efficiency. They are filling out forms, paying staff to do their job but they have to get a permit for something like that. This is a golf club of volunteers who are running a board and weeding the land that borders them so that they do not get the weeds from the Crown land close to the coast on the golf course, which is also Crown land. This saves the government money because you can see that there is a win-win for the golf course if they keep their area clean and free of weeds.

The government should be congratulating them and thanking them, but I am told the government are just making it really, really hard. Of course the government has the monopoly. They are the monopoly provider of leases for public assets, so the community do not want to upset the government, because what if they kick them out? That is what they are frightened of. There is a real power imbalance, and the government is using bullying tactics. We have seen that in Port Fairy – they are sending negotiators from Melbourne who do not even understand golf, is what was reported to me, let alone the realities of working with the land. It is a really unfair situation, and I urge the government to just get on with getting that lease sorted.

As well as managing leases, though, the Allan Labor government are completely inept at managing pest control, and this bill talks about changes to environmental management. We have got natural assets such as walking trails, caves, public golf courses and parks being absolutely overrun by rabbits. If anyone has been to South-West Coast of late and has gone for a walk down the beach at Portland, Port Fairy or Warrnambool, they will have seen rabbits galore. When I walk down to the coast in Warrnambool, I play this game of count the rabbits. I get to the railway line through the cutting and there is always at least 20 just sitting there, right next to you. It is absolutely out of control, and they are doing enormous damage to the natural environment.

Another example is Ralphs Bridge on the Great South West Walk. Access for the public to enjoy a natural asset certainly has diminished under the Labor government. It is completely inept at managing these assets. The Great South West Walk in mid 2023 had a tree fall on a footbridge. It took seven months for that committee of volunteers to get permission to remove the tree that had fallen on the bridge – seriously, to pick up a dead tree and take it off a bridge so that they could fix it. They still cannot get any action to fix the bridge and it is nearly 19 months on. It is absolutely bureaucracy at its bloated worst. It is simply tedious. Local volunteers, who built this 40 years ago themselves, who know it like the back of their hands, who do not want the environment ruined by big trucks coming in and bringing in a new bridge, have said, ‘We can repair it ourselves.’ But, no, no. The government knows best. So here we are 18 months later, after an engineer has assessed the site and promised a report and after a year they finally had an insurance claim lodged. Imagine waiting for a year to get your car back if you lodged your insurance claim a year later. It is just berserk. This is the government’s insurance organisation. We have all these volunteers who built this 40 years ago still waiting for an answer 19 months later to fix a footbridge. Honestly, it is berserk. The government needs to get on with replacing a simple footbridge that has been sitting there for four decades. Immediate action is needed to restore this treasured walk.

The government really have a long history of terrible management – their vegetation management on the sides of roads – all where they need to be setting an example. They could deliver a much better outcome. Instead we have this hopeless incompetence in managing public assets such as Ralphs Bridge on the Great South West Walk and the Princess Margaret Rose Cave, which sits idle and is closed, the same with the Robin Boyd-designed centre. As far as the Port Fairy golf course goes, surely they have not got people waiting to take on that lease. It has been there forever. It is an iconic golf course. Get on with helping the volunteers, not hindering them.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (12:19): I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to make a contribution on this important piece of legislation that goes to making sure that we are providing for a better, fairer system when it comes to reform and making sure through these 14 amendments to the acts that I will go through shortly that we are delivering and fine-tuning, if you like, an opportunity for those acts to be reformed. I will make some remarks shortly on the 14 acts.

I did just want to point out the fact that the business of government is making sure that we are delivering some long-term reforms but also the big projects. Many of those opportunities, initiatives and investments this government has made over 10 years now – whether that be the Metro Tunnel, whether that be removing level crossings or whether that be making upgrades to local community facilities, investing in community hospitals, or our broader investment in hospitals such as Footscray and Frankston. We are making sure that we are delivering those projects. But coming back and circling back to what is also in the can, we are making sure that we are looking to existing legislation that has already been through the house. Creating a fairer, better system is something that we should be focused on.

I was just in a meeting earlier, having some discussions around the EPA, and there are some provisions of course within this bill that go to the important work of the EPA. We are making sure that we are working with local communities to provide for the very best possible environmental settings as we balance that equation – often a fine line of an equation – of community sentiment, growth, challenges with the environment and the delivery of safe and efficient energy and waste with the important work

of the EPA as we as a state grow by more than 150,000 people per year. For growth corridors like mine out in Sunbury, we are making sure that we are doing that in a way that protects our environment. These are challenges that will continue to come through the doors of any government, no matter the political persuasion. Making sure that reforms such as those contained in this legislation, but also for the other acts as well, is indeed something that is critically important.

We want to make sure through the reform process and through bills such as this – despite some of the theatrics and carry-on from those opposite – that we have the very best reforms in place so that both business and industry have an opportunity to act in a whole number of ways that make our state fairer, better and stronger and, on the journey, create jobs. These reforms are important. I have touched on the reforms that are contained around the Environment Protection Act. The legislation also contains amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994, ensuring that we empower councils with better data on the location of dangerous dogs – I have heard other members speak about that this afternoon – and that goes to community safety and helping keep our community safe. There are amendments to the Adoption Act 1984 to remove barriers to help families who have experienced forced adoptions to reunite – yet again, another important step that goes to fairness and that goes to supporting families. Of course making sure that those provisions are in place is indeed important.

There are amendments around the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023 which go to the protection of commercially sensitive information provided by licence-holders in their workplaces, aiming to support effective and efficient regulation. Those changes, and those surrounding other acts, go to the premise of both protection and the importance of listening to community along the journey, a recognition that the government's work is never done. We need to always make sure we are going back in and reviewing both the legislation and the framework that surrounds the legislation, and in this instance the many reforms that are in place, to make sure that they are as good as they can be. Acting Speaker Farnham, as you know in your community, and as I am sure other members know, right throughout both houses of the Parliament, circumstances change. Global economies change, populations move, peoples' circumstances change in communities, and we need to be responsive to that. Having an opportunity to be able to do that work via this piece of legislation – and I understand this is the third piece of legislation that the government has brought in in terms of reform and a reform-style omnibus bill – is indeed important for making business and living in our state much, much better.

There are of course those amendments which go to supporting local communities and those that I touched on earlier with the EPA. We are making sure that we are indeed listening to our departments along that journey and bringing legislation through the Parliament to build on that record of reform over the last 10 years, having reviewed and reformed regulations in liquor, environmental protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, health, planning, consumer affairs, fee pricing, owners corps and more. And there is legislation that goes to regulatory improvements for – and I heard this mentioned earlier as well by other members – cladding, wage theft, gender equality and casino and gambling laws, as well as worker screening processes, green energy and greater energy market protections, to name a few.

That all builds to reducing regulatory burden. We are just, as we so often do in this great chamber, going to have to agree to disagree on those changes when it comes to regulatory burden. We are making sure that through the reforms we help, kickstart and support business. I heard other members mention the Business Acceleration Fund. Of course we are making sure that we are providing for those settings to support the important work that is done as our economy grows and as our state grows. This is very important work that the government will do today, next week and every day that we are given the great privilege and opportunity to be on this side of the house. Making sure that that work is done builds upon a broader plan across health, education, transport and right across every portfolio of the ministers on the front bench. Every single member on this side of the house should have focused in their mind an opportunity to make sure that we are investing, that we are supporting and that we are listening to local communities.

I will finish where I started. It is about striking a balance, and it is about striking a balance between community needs, which is of course listening to community, and making sure that we have got the policy settings in place to continue to be the best state in this nation and to make sure that we are delivering on the commitments that we took to the last election. Of course those are commitments that will be delivered, and we will continue to make sure that we are working right across those portfolio areas to work through the processes and the systems both of the Parliament and with the budget, which is just in a couple of months, to ensure that we are supporting every single Victorian to have the opportunities in life that they are rightfully entitled to – opportunities to live in their local community, enjoy their local community, have fun along the journey and do all of those things that we know Victorians love to do.

Although this bill may not be a show stopper and my speech may not be a show stopper –

**Cindy McLeish:** Come on, Josh. Don't undersell yourself, mate.

**Josh BULL:** Thank you, Cindy; you are very kind – this bill is important. It is an important piece of work from the Parliament. With those very short comments I commend the bill to the house.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:29): There is a lot in this bill, and the Greens are looking at the whole bill in detail to determine our position. But today I would like to speak on part 4, the amendment of the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. This part of the bill clarifies penalties relating to the circular economy act, including several penalties relating to operators of waste incinerators or thermal waste-to-energy facilities, to use the government's preferred euphemism. The Greens and I have made no secret of the fact that we are absolutely opposed to the use of incinerators as a way of dealing with Victoria's rubbish problem. Setting fire to our rubbish is a decidedly outdated way of dealing with it. It is more polluting and expensive than any other form of energy except coal, it produces mountains of toxic ash that create serious health risks for workers and surrounding communities and it undermines Victoria's move towards a circular economy.

We have an opportunity here to learn from rather than repeat the mistakes of the rest of the world. Particularly in Europe, the path of incineration is well worn, and they are now moving away from it due to the many problems it has caused. Denmark, for example, was becoming so reliant on waste-to-energy incinerators that it imported nearly a million tonnes of rubbish from other countries in 2018 alone. They realised of course that this was no way to cut their emissions and that their reliance on waste incineration was actively undermining investment in waste reduction and recycling systems. So now they are shutting down their incinerators one by one, improving their waste collection services instead.

Why should we go through all the trouble of building something very like fossil fuel plants in disguise only to rip them up later when we could learn from the Danish and take the much better route of investing in a truly circular economy? As Danish waste authority Jens Hjul-Nielsen said in 2020:

... if you don't have incineration plants today, you should start with recycling.

To put it another way, the best time to decommission a waste incinerator is before it is built.

I am not giving up hope that the Victorian government will see the light on waste to energy and consign this bad idea to the rubbish pile of history. Local communities and a number of Labor's own MPs who have made their opposition clear would certainly breathe a sigh of relief, but if the government must insist on building and running these ill-advised incinerators in Lara and Wollert and elsewhere, then I must insist that they expand on the list of banned items referred to in this bill that cannot be burnt in any waste-to-energy facility.

This bill specifies penalties for waste incineration operators who put banned waste through their facilities. I am glad to see there is a list of banned items and there will be fines in place to try to prevent this, but let us talk about what banned waste actually means. Section 74L of the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 defines banned waste as:

- (a) waste other than permitted waste or exempt waste; and
- (b) eligible containers ...

in the context of Victoria's container deposit scheme.

To understand banned waste and therefore to understand the circumstances under which an operator might be penalised under this bill we need to first understand the Victorian government's definitions of 'permitted waste' and 'exempt waste'. According to the *Victorian Waste to Energy Framework*:

Permitted **waste** is waste that can be used for thermal waste to energy under a cap licence. It includes:

- residual municipal waste from a council that has at least a three-bin kerbside system in place and collects waste in accordance with any applicable regulations.
- commercial waste that has been source-separated in accordance with any existing legislation or regulations, or can be demonstrated through a market assessment to be impracticable to recycle, even after sorting.

I am incredulous at this last point – the government's own framework defers to the market to say what is recyclable rather than available technology or a commitment to improving our waste system. If the financial costs of reusing and recycling certain types of waste are too high, then according to the Victorian government those types of waste can just be chucked into incinerators and forgotten. Of course this waste is not really forgotten, not by the environment, which has to absorb the greenhouse gases emitted by the transport and incineration processes, and certainly not by the local communities dealing with the toxic ash and chemicals from these incinerators, but it is forgotten by the companies getting rich from producing, throwing away and burning their waste, because they will not be held accountable for any of that.

And how about 'exempt waste'? Going back to that framework:

**Exempt waste** is waste that can be used for thermal waste to energy outside of a cap licence. It includes:

- certain streams of dry or fibrous waste biomass that are suitable for thermal bioenergy.
- hazardous waste.

So on top of the Victorian government doubling the cap of waste allowed to be burnt in these incinerators from 1 million to 2 million tonnes, operators will not even need to count these types of waste, much less find better solutions than simply setting them on fire. So yes, this bill provides penalties for operators who put banned waste through their incinerators, but the government's definition of 'banned waste' does not seem altogether meaningful from a perspective of caring for the environment and local communities.

If we have to do this – and again for me that is a big if – if the government insists we have to, then let us at least improve it. For a start, banned waste should specifically include materials that are able to be recycled with existing processes, including cardboard packaging, rigid plastic packaging, ferrous and nonferrous metals, wearable clothing and mattresses, regardless of whether these come from municipal or commercial collections, and certainly without the loophole that companies can just send them to the fire if recycling them is deemed too expensive.

I should emphasise that the penalties in this bill are of little value without proper enforcement. It is important that this does not just become another bit of legislation on the books. I urge the government to save themselves a lot of time, money, emissions and community backlash by scrapping these incinerators and investing in genuine circular economy solutions instead. They might feel embarrassed to walk back their plans, but surely it is not as embarrassing as stumbling through the same costly mistakes that many other countries have already learned from. But as a very distant second choice, I urge them to consult with waste experts to expand the list of banned waste to make it stronger, more comprehensive and free of loopholes that cost-cutting companies could exploit and to review and revise the list of banned items periodically to update it in line with emerging recycling technology.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (12:37): It gives me great pleasure to get up and speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This bill is about amending a multitude of existing regulations, so there is no single subject matter. The bill makes amendments to over 14 acts of Parliament that provide simple, straightforward and uncontroversial improvements to the legislation that I am sure all sides of Parliament can get behind.

The comments from the speaker just before me, the member for Brunswick, urged ministers and the relevant parties to make sure that they have done their research. I can say from the briefings that I have been in that that has certainly happened and we have definitely consulted with a number of community groups, so I absolutely commend this bill to the floor. It provides important benefits, ensuring that Victoria has clearer, fairer and more modern laws and regulations for all Victorians while also strengthening the regulatory tools available to agencies that protect our environment as well as consumers.

Unlike those opposite who are ideologically opposed to regulation, we know that good regulation is good for both businesses and communities. When Labor came to government in 2014, we inherited a regulatory system that was in crisis. The previous government slashed indiscriminately at regulations which were created to protect Victorian citizens and businesses. But this Labor government has a plan and we are delivering it. These amendments fine-tune legislation so that it reflects the modern needs of business, the community and government. The amendments aim to support effective and efficient regulation; promote consistency with other legislation and existing policies; streamline processes and reduce administrative burden for businesses, departments, agencies and regulators; correct technical errors; and make minor updates to legislation. These bills are important because they help government to continuously undertake regulatory reform so that Victoria is a better place to not only live but to work and to do business.

Here are the things that the legislation will do. First of all, we have got the amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994, which of course is keeping all of us safe in our communities. It will ensure that we empower councils with better data on the location of dangerous dogs, which helps to keep our community safe. There are amendments to the Environment Protection Act 2017 which will make it quicker and easier for both businesses and individuals to do the right thing and to be refunded financial assurances to be paid to the EPA. We are also amending the 2017 Environment Protection Act to allow the EPA to charge a business owner where their registered vehicle has been used to illegally dump waste. There have been some examples of illegal waste dumping in recent times, and this reform will better protect our communities, including in our national parks where some of this illegal dumping is occurring and on the side of freeways as the member for Melton mentioned.

Amendments to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 will also protect commercially sensitive information provided by licence-holders in their work plans. We are amending the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to provide the Essential Services Commission with the power to commence civil penalty proceedings within six years from the date on which a contravention occurred. This will give enough time for contraventions to come to light and give the ESC sufficient time to undertake complex investigations and of course to protect consumers.

Amendments to the Adoption Act 1984 will remove barriers to help families who have experienced forced adoption to reunite. Amendments to the Adoption Act 1984 will also allow the responsible secretary to refuse to disclose certain information where they responsibly believe it may jeopardise someone's life or physical safety or cause an individual harm. This is a critical reform that will mean we can better protect individuals where there is potential risk of family violence. Importantly, this bill will allow natural relatives to access identifying information about the adopted person to allow natural relatives to be reunited. This is an important amendment that will help people impacted by forced adoptions, including survivors of the stolen generations, to connect with their biological families, a fundamental human need which has been denied through no fault of their own.

This bill amends the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and the Subdivision Act 1988 to allow for the collection of fees in line with Victoria's pricing-for-value guidelines. This is a necessary reform that recognises that the diligent work of the registrar has been undertaken with every transaction, whether it is withdrawn, amended or rejected. Amendments to the Housing Act 1983 will ensure that regulators are not collecting unnecessary data from community housing providers, helping to keep sensitive banking information with its owners. Amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 remove unnecessary reporting requirements for licensed electricity sellers. Amendments to the Water Act 1989 will allow water corporations to serve notice of a board meeting by electronic means. This is another simple example of the way in which we are making sure that existing legislation reflects the modern way in which we govern, correcting technical errors and of course making minor updates.

Over the last 10 years the Victorian Labor government has reviewed and reformed regulations in liquor, environment protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, health, planning, consumer affairs, fee pricing, owners corp and more. We have legislated regulatory improvements to automatic mutual recognition, cladding safety, wage theft, gender equality and casino and gambling laws as well as worker screening processes, green energy and greater energy market protections, just to name a few, and we have reduced Victoria's regulatory burden by 25 per cent. Our government's record in regulation stands comparison with that of those opposite any day of the week.

Our government invests in regulatory reform because we know that good reform needs a kickstart. That is why we established the Business Acceleration Fund, and ultimately this is about giving business owners more time. Funded projects are estimated to grow Victoria's economy by over \$450 million per year and give back Victorians nearly 330,000 days per year in saved time. We have simplified Victoria's food safety requirements, saving 25,000 businesses nearly 40,000 days per year in preparing and managing food safety programs. That is time that they can now use to grow their business.

We have streamlined Heritage Victoria permits for low- and no-harm applications, including removing the need for some permits altogether, saving 6000 businesses 91,000 days a year, speeding up approvals to get houses built quicker and cheaper and of course increasing our housing supply. We have digitised applications and approvals at the conservation regulator, making it quicker and easier to process wildlife management permits, saving 11,000 agriculture businesses and individuals at least 678 days per year, and we have digitised licensing and approval for early childhood education and care providers, saving workers collectively 120 days per year of time. We have streamlined screening checks for NDIS workers, saving 2800 days per year for applicants, and we are getting these workers into jobs faster so that they can get on with supporting our disabled Victorians to live life with both dignity and respect.

We are also helping to get more workers into jobs sooner. We have accelerated approvals for accrediting taxis and rideshare services, meaning that workers can get on the job four weeks sooner. We have replaced the labour-intensive, paper-based national police check with a digital certificate and we have digitised working with children checks to make it easier for workers to show their credentials to employers and of course get a job sooner. We have partnered with local governments across the state to streamline and digitise their approval systems, making it simpler and faster for local Victorian businesses to have their applications processed as well as making it quicker and simpler for Victorians to apply for and receive a building permit from their local council.

Then we go to homes. We are delivering more homes for young people, families and downsizers around train stations and tram stops in Melbourne's inner suburbs; this builds on the 10 initial pilot centres. We are undertaking a review to make it easier, faster and cheaper for Victorians to divide their blocks and build more homes. By making it easier for home owners to subdivide their land it will be easier for Victorians to find a home in an established suburb if that is what they choose to do, closer to transport, jobs, schools and services. In late 2024 our government released a landmark plan for 27 additional greenfield areas across Melbourne's outer south-east, north and west to be released over

the next 10 years, committing to providing the space and completing the planning work to deliver 180,000 new homes over the decade.

Our government has no less strong a record in supporting our pets and their owners as well as improving animal welfare in our state. We have banned cruel puppy farms, with the strictest breeding rules in the country, and we have given renters the right to keep a pet. Victoria has become the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in both shelters and pounds.

This government's record of achievement is both in reforming our state and in regulatory reform, and it is one that we can be immensely proud of. This bill goes to enriching the lives of Victorians, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (12:47): I too rise on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, and I note that this bill contains largely administrative and housekeeping measures that the coalition will not be opposing. I want to speak about one amendment in particular to begin with, which relates to the Domestic Animals Act 1994. I met last year with a constituent in the electorate of Kew who very sadly lost her dog after he was attacked by another dog. The constituent was very, very concerned – and I raised this with the Minister for Agriculture at the time – that the Domestic Animals Act does not provide enough guidance to councils when it comes to actually declaring dangerous dogs. Sadly, this incident was preceded by multiple threatening encounters with the same dog over a number of years, and then it tragically ended with the death of the constituent's dog. Sadly, to the constituent's disappointment and concern, Boroondara council did not declare the dog as a dangerous dog for the purpose of section 34 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 following the fatal incident.

This section of the act indicates that a council may exercise a discretion to declare a dog dangerous if the dog has caused the death of or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking that person or animal. However, as I said, there is no specific guidance as to how that discretion should actually be exercised by councils, and because of that Boroondara council has established their own internal assessment processes for declaring dogs dangerous, which it has informed me implement VCAT's criteria. The constituent in this case is very concerned that this process is insufficient to prevent dogs such as the one that killed her dog from causing further harm.

I note that the bill before us today does make a number of amendments, and sensible amendments, to the Domestic Animals Act, one of those being that if an individual shifts between councils and their animal has been declared dangerous, councils must be notified, which was an issue that was raised in this case as the offending dog was shifting between councils. But it does not go as far to deal with the issues that I have outlined today around the declaration of dangerous dogs in particular, and I would suggest, as I have to the Minister for Agriculture previously, that we look at whether section 34 of the Domestic Animals Act should have be further reviewed and whether more specific guidance should be given to local councils as to how this section should be exercised so that councils are not left to themselves when it comes to implementing the criteria.

I think all of us in this place who have pets know that they are part of our family, and the loss of a pet can be absolutely heartbreaking. In this case it happened in such a tragic way in their own street with this dog that had caused the family much concern for many years, ultimately resulting in the fatality of their own dog. Again can I suggest to the minister that while the changes to the Domestic Animals Act are welcome in this piece of legislation, it is worthy of further review in terms of how we provide greater guidance to local councils to make sure that if there is an incident with a dog or any animal and there is a risk of that animal committing an incident again, then we look at how the guidance around declaring animals dangerous can give greater guidance to local councils.

More broadly on this piece of legislation, I would note that this is a bill that speaks to supposedly regulatory reform and removing the burden of red tape on businesses and industry in this state, yet it is very, very unclear from this piece of legislation and the number of amendments it makes to many pieces of legislation how the burden on business in this state will actually be alleviated through any of

these reforms. Victoria has gone from what was once seen as one of the best regulatory systems a decade ago to one of the worst in the country. The Andrews government upon assuming power did dismantle key elements of the regulatory management system. It abolished red tape reduction targets. It abolished the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission. And the quality of regulatory impact statements has declined under this government. Indeed nearly 10 years ago the Auditor-General found:

... gaps and weaknesses in the review processes for new or renewed regulation have added or maintained red tape that has not been adequately tested to assure its necessity or efficiency. As there has been no central, coordinated oversight of these review processes, it is unclear to what extent untested regulation has negated the gains from red tape reduction programs.

This bill does absolutely nothing to reduce the layers of red tape that are crippling businesses in this state. You do not have to take my word for it. We have heard from those opposite a shopping list of reforms that have supposedly made it easy to do business in this state. But you only have to turn to the experts, those who actually operate businesses in this state. If I turn to the Business Council of Australia's *Regulation Rumble 2024*, it ranked Victoria last for overall business settings and found:

With a low ranking for its property taxes and charges, payroll taxes, and business licencing requirements, the State has much room for improvement if it is to attract and generate business-driven growth.

Across specific areas impacting business conditions the survey ranked Victoria last for overall taxation, regulatory costs and trading regulations, with Victoria's property tax settings the least competitive nationally. It was ranked seventh for overall licensing, administration and compliance issues; sixth for the cost of workers compensation schemes, with premiums above the national average – and we know how those premiums are hitting small businesses time and time again; and fifth for planning and building permitting systems. There is no doubt that businesses are suffering the highest regulatory burden in the nation under the Allan Labor government.

The BCA is not the only organisation belling the cat. Just turn to the NAB regulatory impact analysis. This was commissioned by the Department of Treasury and Finance, so it was a regulatory impact analysis actually commissioned by the government. It has only seen the light of day because we on this side of the house actually FOI-ed it to make sure that we could understand what the impacts were on businesses as a result of this analysis. The government were keen to hide it away, and let me tell you why they were keen to hide it away: because the survey found that Victorian businesses experienced the worst impact of state government regulation in the nation.

Victorian businesses experienced the most difficulty in complying with state government regulation, and the impact of state government regulation was most acutely felt in the manufacturing sector, followed by retail, wholesale and construction. Forty-five per cent of respondents identified compliance requirements as the driver of worse government regulatory impacts. This was a survey commissioned by the government and then put in the bottom drawer so it would not see the light of today because it revealed just how crippling red tape is in this state under the Allan Labor government.

If you do not want to listen to the BCA and you do not want to listen to NAB, then let us listen to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. More than half of national businesses that the chamber surveyed said Victoria was the hardest place to do business in the country. Putting all of that impact to one side, you would have thought today after listening to those opposite that there have been floods of red tape reform over the past decade. But we know that in fact the government has sat on red tape reforms worth up to \$1.6 billion in savings for industry and business a year. This is what this bill should be about. It should be actually about reducing the red tape on business in this state to make it easier to do business and to ensure that those people in Victoria who put their livelihoods on the line to run their own small businesses are not hampered in doing so because of regulations put in place by this government.

The government sought advice on how to encourage departments to reduce the number of business licences in Victoria as part of this \$1.6 billion, but they have not acted on it. Today we have in front

of us a bill that does nothing to make it easier to do business in this state. Red tape is crippling Victorian industry, and it is because this government cannot manage money, and Victorian businesses and Victorians are paying the price.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (12:57): I rise to speak in support of the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This is a bill that makes amendments to over 14 acts of Parliament, providing simple, straightforward and uncontroversial improvements to legislation that reflect the evolving needs of government, business and the broader community. In my contribution to the bill, however, I would like to focus on changes contained in three of the acts before us, the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, the Water Act 1989 and the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

We know that if we are to take the real action we need to on climate change and the environment and move towards a more sustainable future, we must double down on our efforts to recycle and move towards that circular economy, and the reforms contained in this bill as they relate to the circular economy act will allow us very much to continue that work in that regard. Since 2020 our circular economy strategy *Recycling Victoria: A New Economy* has driven systemic change and established strong foundations for a circular economy which aims to take waste out of the community. Through this strategy, which is underpinned by a record \$515 million investment, we have of course introduced a range of new landmark measures across our homes and communities, including significant new recycling infrastructure, boosting capacity to process record volumes of material being increasingly recovered, the rollout of the four-stream household waste and recycling system via the introduction of the new purple bin to separate glass from plastics and cardboard and of course the rollout of the Victorian container deposit scheme, or the ‘cash for cans’ scheme.

It is anticipated that when combined these measures will help turbocharge our state’s circular economy and recycling and waste sectors in terms of economic output, job creation and of course sustainability outcomes. Via a \$6.7 billion boost to the state economy, they will create at least 3900 new jobs across technology design, repair, development, material research, material usage, processing and handling. We will seek to divert a massive 80 per cent of waste away from landfill by 2030 while helping reduce carbon emissions across the sector by 50 per cent. These measures to date, you may be interested to hear, have resulted in over 1.7 million tonnes of newly installed waste and recovery capacity across the state, with a further 424,000 tonnes of capacity for processing to be installed by the end of 2025.

The measures to date have also created a significant boost for environmental sustainability and circular economy outcomes across my community of Merri-bek. When it comes to the introduction of the new purple glass kerbside bin, the then environment minister visited Merri-bek on 14 May 2023 to announce that Merri-bek would become the 13th municipality to complete the rollout of the kerbside purple glass bin. As a result of these reforms across Merri-bek during 2023–24, councils reported the following collection stats, which included 12,900 –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** Order! At this point in time we are going to break for lunch.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

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

**Economic policy**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Before the 2022 budget, the government promised budget repair but on budget day delivered \$168 billion in debt. In 2023 they promised a difficult budget but increased debt to \$171 billion, and last year they pledged a slash-and-burn horror budget, yet debt ballooned to \$188 billion. Yesterday the Premier stated it was a little early in the season to be going through this performative act on the budget. Can the Premier confirm that

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this morning's announcement of another review is nothing more than a performative stunt before Labor delivers another debt-riddled budget?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I think we have seen exhibit A in the performative stunts for today from the member for Brighton. If we looked up the definition of 'performative stunt', we would see the member for Brighton. But in all seriousness, my government is focused on ensuring that every dollar that is invested in Victorian public services goes to the priorities of Victorian families. Like every household is watching every dollar, we know that we have to do that work as well, and that is why we are undertaking a review, which the Treasurer and I announced today, a review that will not touch frontline services like teachers, nurses, police and child protection officers. Liberals cut those services. We know that. But we know –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: On a point of order, Speaker, attacks on the opposition are inappropriate.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS**: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Manager of Opposition Business knows that it is entirely appropriate for the Premier, on her feet, to compare the actions of this government with those of the Liberal Party when they were in power.

**THE SPEAKER**: I do not uphold the point of order. I ask the Premier to be mindful of not attacking the opposition.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: This review is going to zero in on waste and inefficiency and in turn ensure that we can continue to invest in those services that we on this side of the house know that working people and their families rely on – good schools, local hospitals, safer communities – and continue to support those frontline services.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is required to be factual, and on the sentence and answer the Premier just went to, the Premier's review exempts all capital works.

**THE SPEAKER**: The Premier has concluded her answer, I believe.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Was that a supplementary or a point of order?

**THE SPEAKER**: That was a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:06): Public sector wages have doubled under this government from \$18 billion to \$36 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Office has released analysis today that details an additional \$3.6 billion blowout on top of the original budgeted costs. How can the Premier claim she is focused on making sure every dollar of investment goes where it matters when she has provided over \$3.6 billion of blowouts in public sector wages?

*Members interjecting.*

**THE SPEAKER**: Member for Polwarth, do you want to answer the question?

*Members interjecting.*

**THE SPEAKER**: Member for Polwarth, are you reflecting on the Chair?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): In responding to the member for Brighton's question, I have not seen the Parliamentary Budget Office report that he is referring to. Given previous requests from the Liberal Party to the Parliamentary Budget Office, it makes it very difficult to take anything at face value that the member for Brighton says. So if the member for Brighton would be pleased to provide the details, I would be delighted to take them, because I have not had the opportunity to see the Parliamentary Budget Office report that he is referring to.

*Members interjecting.*

**THE SPEAKER**: Do you wish to table a document?

**James Newbury:** The Premier asked for it, and I tried to hand it to her. It is the final page, Premier.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Let us go back to the purpose and to why the Treasurer and I made the announcement we did this morning about a review: to ensure that every dollar is focused on supporting those services that Victorian communities rely on – good schools, local hospitals and safer communities. We will continue, as part of this work, to understand our role in helping families at a particularly challenging time with the cost of living.

#### **Ministers statements: tourism and major events**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:09): I rise to update the house and to set the record straight, particularly for those opposite, that Victoria is a great place to live. Melbourne is a city with world-class restaurants, bars and cafes – a city with a buzz. It is the major events capital of this country and the major cultural capital of this country. It is no wonder *Time Out* magazine – not the magazine itself but its readers – voted Melbourne the best city in Australia and one of the best in the world. In regional Victoria we have spectacular coastlines, award-winning wineries and beautiful historic townships.

Victoria is also a great place to visit. Recently we have been breaking records: the biggest Boxing Day match ever held in the history of Boxing Day matches, right here at the G; the biggest ever grand slam, the Australian Open – better attended than all the other grand slams by a country mile; the first ever Pro Kabaddi League exhibition match played right here on Australian soil, with 300 million viewers overseas.

Whether due to the Twelve Apostles, the penguins at Phillip Island, our natural environment or our major events calendar, Melbourne Airport had its busiest month ever on record in January. We have world-class events, and many of them. For example, we had Indian folk singer Maithili Thakur at Fed Square, we had the Prodigy last night, we have got Kylie tonight and we have got a whole range of other people who want to be in Melbourne and Victoria. And what a touchdown the Premier secured for Victoria with the NFL coming here – the first ever midseason points match to be played in Australia, right here in Melbourne. It will absolutely be a game changer.

There is another way. You can talk down Victoria at every opportunity, talk down Victoria to the media at every opportunity, talk down Victoria on social media, or go and negotiate with the stakeholders, licence-holders – (*Time expired*)

#### **Integrity agencies**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. In June 2013 the now Premier said in this place:

It would make sense, you would think, for the government to be informed by what is coming out of the Auditor-General's inquiry.

Does the Premier stand by her comments or the outrageous comments by her minister that the Auditor-General's report is a gross misrepresentation of reality?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): In terms of comments made by me in this place regarding respecting the independence of independent agencies, of course I stand by those comments. As I said earlier today to the media and as I have said in private conversations with members of the opposition as recently as today, of course it is always the prerogative of any government to have a difference of opinion with integrity agencies and independent agencies. Unlike a previous Liberal Premier who sacked the Auditor-General – I know you are a big fan of Jeff. I know the Leader of the Opposition is a big fan of Jeff. He is modelling himself on Jeff –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair, Premier.

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**Jacinta ALLAN:** Let us be clear: we respect the independent agencies. More often than not we accept the recommendations from those independent agencies, but in reference to the report that was handed down yesterday by the Auditor-General, I respectfully disagree. I think when you add the Brunt Road, Beaconsfield, level crossing, which the Leader of the Opposition was calling for, and nine others to your program, that is an additional investment. It is not cost escalation, it is an additional investment, and government retains the right to make these decisions. Whether it is responding to calls from the member for Berwick to add a level crossing to our program or responding to calls from the member for Caulfield to add Glen Huntly level crossings to our program –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, and I ask you to ask the Premier to come back to the very narrow question.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier is answering the question fulsomely. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and that you let the Premier get on with answering the question.

**THE SPEAKER:** I remind the Premier to be relevant to the question and not debate.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The Leader of the Opposition referred to yesterday's Auditor-General report. The Auditor-General's report went to additional investment in level crossings in the North East Link project and also the Frankston Hospital, where we have added additional scope –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, 'Do you agree with the comments of your minister or not?' That was what the question was – very narrow.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I go back and restate my answer to the question at the outset: we have a view – I firmly have a view – that where you add scope, where you listen to the community like we did in Frankston, 'Give us more car parks when you build us our big, new, beautiful hospital,' we will add that scope. We will add that scope to the Frankston Hospital. When the member for Caulfield wants more level crossings, when the member for Berwick wants additional level crossings, that is additional investment, and it makes sense to add that investment as you are delivering these projects. That is why we on this side of the house understand the need to deliver projects, to support jobs and to support better connections for local communities.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): Last year the Premier directly attacked the independent anti-corruption commission by describing data from their perceptions-of-corruption survey as false, baseless and untrustworthy. Yesterday a Labor minister attacked the independent Auditor-General by claiming they have used shoddy methodology. Why does the government spend more time attacking agencies that seek to improve accountability rather than fixing budget blowouts because Labor cannot manage major projects?

*Members interjecting.*

**THE SPEAKER:** The minister for public transport can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Minister for Public and Active Transport withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:16): On 3 August 2021, when we announced that we were adding more level crossings to our Level Crossing Removal Project, the member for Berwick said, 'About time.' The member for Berwick – the Leader of the Opposition – cannot have it both ways.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier was asked about her government's attacks on agencies, not about level crossings. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was clearly being relevant to the question that was asked of her and taking the opportunity to point out some of the inconsistencies that the Leader of the Opposition has delivered over his time when it comes to supporting the expansion of projects in his own electorate.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** For the benefit of the member for Nepean, I was asked about major projects, and guess what, removing level crossings is a major project. That is why in answering the question –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am reluctant to do this, but the member for Frankston is going to have to leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

**Brigid Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, for the benefit of the Premier, the question was about fixing her budget blowouts.

**The SPEAKER:** I would ask the Manager of Opposition Business to not expand on a point of order. The Premier was being relevant when it comes to talking about major projects, but I do remind her of the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As we get on and deliver these major projects, supporting jobs and supporting communities right across the state, we will listen to communities. When they said, 'As you are delivering the North East Link make the tunnel a bit longer to support the community in the years ahead,' we listened and responded. This is additional investment that will make a difference in decades ahead and is supporting jobs right now.

#### **Ministers statements: equality**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:19): In Victoria there is no place for hate. I stood with the Premier at the Pride March alongside many on this side as she strongly reaffirmed her support for the LGBTIQA+ community. Turning up is important. It has to be real, always showing up when it counts. We must listen to all communities experiencing vilification, not pretend to understand their hurt when we have not experienced it, when we have not respected people's stories. The harm caused by vilification is a public health issue, causing real hurt, real damage, and it can compound over a lifetime. These harms are avoidable. We can meaningfully address hate and vilification through reform, through being inclusive and respecting and celebrating differences rather than fuelling hate, division and harm.

Victorians are wonderfully diverse and deserve to not be afraid, to not hide parts of who they are, to live wholly and freely without hate. Our commitment to listening to communities is why multifaith, multicultural and LGBTIQA+ leaders of faith welcome the government's anti-vilification reforms. Former federal Liberal Attorney-General George Brandis said people have the right to be bigots. While this may be the case for the Liberal Party and the Institute of Public Affairs, this government works to strengthen community cohesion rather than the right to spread hatred.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 118, I and many members take personal offence at the outrageous slur. We are there, and we are there every single year. To attack people demeans you.

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

**Vicki WARD:** This government works to strengthen community cohesion rather than the right to spread hatred, to be bigots. We work to support Victorians, not harm them with culture wars. This government will never accept discrimination towards people living with disability. We will never accept LGBTIQA+ people having lesser whole-of-life outcomes. We reject all forms of antisemitism, Islamophobia and discrimination towards people of faith. I have four words that block hate: equality is not negotiable.

**Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:22): My question is to the Premier. Under the Labor government's latest tax grab, the huge increases to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, CFA volunteer David George from Lake Goldsmith will see his fire levy increase from \$7000 per year to \$20,000 per year. In a cost-of-living crisis, why are Victorians like David facing a 186 per cent increase in their bills for a service they already operate as a volunteer, simply because Labor cannot manage money?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): I thank the Leader of the National Party, the member for Gippsland South, for his question. The government announced in December of last year some substantial reforms to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. This was in recognition that in the fire services but also across the state's emergency services there are men and women who go out in the most difficult of times to respond to emergencies. That is why we announced that we are replacing the fire services property levy with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and that every dollar will be returned back to those emergency agencies. We have seen it particularly in recent years, whether it was the floods around Rochester –

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Polwarth! This is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** and northern Victoria, the Dandenongs on repeated occasions or indeed every single fire season –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, relating to relevance, this was on why volunteers are being taxed for the fire services levy.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS:** Speaker, there clearly is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question, and she was discussing the levy, our volunteers and the importance of ensuring that we have the funding and support for our CFA volunteers that is needed.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying, with the increasing number of extreme weather events that we are seeing here in this state and the ongoing work that is asked for by the state emergency services, alongside the CFA and other volunteer organisations, we rely on these organisations to keep our homes safe, to keep our businesses going and to support our community. One way of supporting them is by making sure that every single dollar through this fund is returned back to our emergency services.

The member for Gippsland South referred to an individual who he has confirmed across the table is a CFA volunteer. What we have also made very clear is that an exemption from this fund will be made for active volunteers within the CFA and VICSES on their primary place of residence. We understand that there needs to be additional support for our volunteers in response to the additional demands, the additional call-outs and the additional requirements that are being placed on them as a result of increasing, more frequent, more fierce weather events, and through the fund we will support them, with every dollar being returned to support their efforts.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:26): After the Werribee by-election the Premier said:

I am listening. My government is listening.

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...

It is absolutely clear ... we need to do more.

Will the Premier listen to volunteers such as David and axe this unfair tax increase?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I take the member for Gippsland South back to one of the core reasons why we have made this change to the fire services levy. It is because we listened to those members of the SES. We listened to those members –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will be removed without warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We listened to those members of the SES – members in my community who raised this with me, who wanted to see an opportunity for them, for their service to be recognised and for their efforts to be supported through a fund like the Victorian emergency services fund.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, answers to questions need to be factual. The SES volunteers asked for their services to be improved, not for them to not be personally taxed.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was being entirely relevant. The member for Gippsland South asked me about how we have listened to the community, and I am telling him how we have listened to the men and women of the SES, who wanted to see opportunities to have their efforts supported. That is exactly what we are doing through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund.

### Ministers statements: health services

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:29): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of all Victorians regardless of their background. When people experience racism and discrimination it contributes to poor health outcomes. It is a health issue. We know that here in Victoria Aboriginal Victorians, people from culturally diverse communities, our LGBTIQ+ community, people living with disability – each of these groups of people continue to face ongoing barriers to getting the care that they need. That is why we are committed to delivering culturally safe care, because hate has no place in Victoria.

We know, for example, that for too long governments thought that they knew what was best for Aboriginal Victorians when it came to their health care. But we are committed to putting Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands – a policy position, I might say, that is not supported by those on the other side. That is why we are investing in the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will resume her seat. The member for Broadmeadows can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Broadmeadows withdrew from chamber.**

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, for the member on her feet, under standing order 119, the comments are unbecoming because they are seeking to impugn members' character. They are completely unparliamentary and disrespectful, and I would ask you to ask her to desist.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister did not refer to any particular members.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** It is well known that those on the other side do not support truth, treaty and self-determination. That is a fact. That is why we are investing in VACCHO to deliver Australia's

first cultural safety accreditation scheme in public hospitals, ensuring that Aboriginal Victorians can access the health care they need free of racism and discrimination.

Victoria is proudly a culturally diverse state, and we are working very hard to make sure that there is zero tolerance in our healthcare system for prejudice directed at any person. We are listening to voices from all backgrounds, faiths and cultures and taking action to ensure that our hospitals are places of safety for all Victorians. Unlike some in this chamber who think that this is part of a woke agenda, we believe that it is core government business, and we will ensure that Victoria is a safe place for people from – *(Time expired)*

### **Housing**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:32): My question is for the Premier. Premier, media reports have revealed this week that even federal and state Labor MPs have publicly declared that the plan to demolish and privatisate all 44 of Victoria's public housing towers does not stack up, describing it as the former Premier's thought bubble. One Labor minister has even revealed that the demolition plan was not actually discussed at any cabinet meeting before the announcement. They said that if it had been raised, it would have been debated. Premier, was the decision to demolish the public housing towers actually discussed at cabinet before it was announced?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I had trouble hearing the member for Richmond. I need to ask the Premier if she heard the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): It is all right; I heard enough. The answer to the member's question is yes, and the response to the premise in the question is that this is about investing in more social and affordable and community and public housing for Victorians, particularly for the most vulnerable Victorians, who need their government building them more new, modern homes. It is a stark contrast to the campaign of misleading activism by the member for Richmond, which is not about supporting those people with truthful, factual information but is all for a base political purpose, which we resoundingly reject while we get on and deliver more modern housing for some of our most vulnerable Victorians.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Laverton, you can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:33): Premier, residents are being forced to move out right now and demolition is imminent, but there is no actual plan for what might be built there and no guarantee from the Labor government that there will be any public housing at all at 42 of the 44 sites. Let me make this very clear for the Premier: I am talking about public housing, not social, not community, not so-called affordable and not private housing – genuinely government-owned, government-operated public housing capped at 25 per cent of a tenant's income. Can the Premier tell us right now: excluding Carlton, will there be any public housing on the remaining 42 sites?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): Putting aside the litany of deliberately misleading and unfactual information in the member's question – talk about patterns of behaviour and performative stunts; this question is littered with inaccuracies that are all designed to mislead people in our community who deserve better than this from leaders in this place, people who should be getting better than they are getting from the member for Richmond. In answer to the question, this program is about both adding to the overall number of homes built in this state and including at least 10 per cent more social housing for people who need governments investing in more housing for them and their families.

**Gabrielle de Vietri:** On a point of order, on relevance, Speaker, my question was specifically about public housing, not social housing.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Ministers statements: community safety**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:36): In Victoria there is no place for hate. Victoria is one of the most inclusive places in the world, and our diversity is our strength. The Allan Labor government has proudly driven reform to support our diverse community. We have acted quickly to implement recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. As Victorians we should be extremely proud to be the first Australian state or territory to ban the public display of the Nazi symbol in recognition of its role in inciting antisemitism and hate. Whatever your gender, your sexuality, your religion or your cultural background, Victoria is a place where you belong. Here you are accepted for who you are. It is the foundation of our community. It is the foundation of our democracy.

The overwhelming majority of us are committed to that ideal, but it is being challenged by a small number of people now more than ever before. We have seen appalling attacks on Victorians – attacks on people that the offenders do not even know – for no reason other than hatred of who they are. Over the last few weeks I have met with community and faith leaders on new laws to protect against anti-vilification, and they are all united. We must act, because we know what happens if we do not: rising antisemitism, rising Islamophobia. We saw neo-Nazis attend a rally in south-east Melbourne attended by the Leader of the Opposition. You cannot pick and choose –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, again under standing order 119, the member should refrain from making such improper reflections and actually engage in respectful debate. She is making statements that are completely baseless and untrue, and I would ask you to ask her to desist.

**MARY-ANNE THOMAS:** Speaker, there is no point of order. Everything that the Attorney-General said is the truth; it is factual. It has been reported extensively. There was a rally that was organised by the Leader of the Opposition to which Nazis showed up.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The house will come to order. The member for Glen Waverley can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Glen Waverley withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, three ministers in a row have effectively preached hate in question time today and used it under the guise of –

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order. The first point of order, raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, is also not a point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** You cannot pick and choose when it comes to equality. You do not get to say that vilification of one group is unacceptable but vilification of another group is okay. Hatred has no place here in Victoria, and if those opposite actually wanted to stop hate, then they would stop getting in the way of this government's work, support the community and join with us.

**Bail laws**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:39): My question is to the Attorney-General. Yesterday a 16-year-old offender who has racked up 95 criminal charges since 2023 faced the Children's Court on charges of home invasion and car theft. Despite the magistrate warning 'There is a high risk he will take the lives of others,' this serial offender was bailed yet again. How many more Victorians need to be killed or injured before the Attorney-General finally toughens bail laws?

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**The SPEAKER:** Order! I would ask the member for Malvern to rephrase his question. He is asking for an opinion. Could you do that, please.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** When will the Attorney-General act to stop more Victorians being put at risk of being killed or injured and strengthen bail laws?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:40): Thank you for the opportunity to speak for the first time in this place as Attorney in answer to a question. Our laws require bail decision makers to put community safety first and foremost. Communities expect it, I expect it, and our Parliament recognises the utmost importance of maximising the safety of our communities. I will continue to make it my work as Attorney-General and as a member of this place to ensure that our priority is to make sure Victorians can feel safe and are safe wherever they are – in their schools, in their workplaces, in their homes, in their streets –

**Michael O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney-General is debating the question. The question was very specific as to when the Attorney will act to strengthen bail laws.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Attorney-General was being directly relevant to the question, and she was responding to the question that was asked of her.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the Attorney of the question that was asked and ask her to come back to the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** We know here in Victoria that crime hurts working families, working Victorians. As I said, every family and every Victorian has the right to feel safe and be safe in their community. That is why we have heard that the Allan Labor government will always back our police, the men and women of Victoria Police who work hard 24/7 to keep our communities safe –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question specified that the magistrate said this young offender was a risk to the two families and working families. I ask you, on relevance, to ask the minister to come back to this question, which is about how many more Victorians will get killed or injured before the strengthening of bail laws.

**The SPEAKER:** That was not the question, Manager of Opposition Business. The Attorney was being relevant in the sense that she was talking about offenders and the risk, but I do remind the Attorney, while I cannot compel her to answer, to be mindful of the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** As I was getting to, we know that serious crime hurts Victorians, and our focus needs to be on crime and keeping Victorians safe. Last year, as those opposite know because they voted for them, we brought in new laws to deliver tougher consequences for serious repeat offenders – laws that, as I said, those opposite supported. We created an entirely new and separate offence for anyone on bail who commits a serious high harm risk crime, and we have made sure that bail decision makers must consider the likelihood of an accused person committing a serious offence –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

**Sonya KILKENNY:** if they are to be given bail. It is a requirement for our bail decision makers to take that into account. It is also why later this year we will be introducing electronic monitoring –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order ! The Leader of the Nationals will cease interjecting across the table. It is disrespectful.

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**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. The courts give bail because of your weakened laws.

**THE SPEAKER:** Order! Manager of Opposition, through the Chair. There is no point of order. I will rephrase what I said before: I cannot compel the Attorney how to answer the question. I do remind the Attorney not to debate the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** Thank you, Speaker, and I also should remind the member opposite that there is a doctrine of independence between the judiciary and this place as well. I would remind the member to perhaps not cast aspersions on our judiciary, nor in fact on the hardworking men and women of Victoria Police.

As I was saying, electronic monitoring of young offenders will commence very soon. We have also recently appointed a new dedicated Children's Court magistrate to deal with youth crime, and the police minister and I have been tasked –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling. She is debating the question.

**THE SPEAKER:** I cannot compel the Attorney how to answer the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** It is also why we are bringing in reforms to stamp out racism – (*Time expired*)

**Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:45):** In opposing bail, the prosecution noted that this youth offender:

... learnt that his actions have no consequences.

It's clear that this is becoming a game to him.

When the Labor government weakened bail laws by abolishing the offence of breaching a bail condition, didn't the government send a message to offenders that bail in Victoria is nothing but a game?

**Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:46):** I actually refute the premise of the question and do not feel it is an appropriate question for question time, but we will leave that aside. In the first instance, this is a matter that is not appropriate for me to comment on. It is a specific case. I do not want to second-guess the decision of a court. I am certainly not the decision-maker here.

**Michael O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question related to this government's decision to weaken bail laws by abolishing the offence of breaching bail conditions. That is entirely within the Attorney-General's portfolio. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

**THE SPEAKER:** The Attorney will come back to the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I actually rejected the premise of the question. As I was saying in the answer to your original question, this government actually toughened and strengthened bail laws last year – laws and reforms that those opposite voted to support. Those laws have created a new offence on bail. However, having said that, those opposite are aware that the police minister and I have been tasked to undertake a review of our laws, including our bail laws, to meet community expectations.

### Ministers statements: Vietnamese community

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:47):** Last Saturday I was proud to join, alongside many members of this place, Victoria's Vietnamese community in Footscray. Of course 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of that significant movement of Vietnamese people to Australia. Every member of this house should reflect on and be proud of the fact that when those families were forced to flee war and persecution in their own homes, they turned to Australia. They turned to us here in Melbourne and Victoria to create their new homes – a place of safety and freedom where today multiculturalism

is welcomed and celebrated. Vietnamese Victorians have proudly raised their families here, started businesses here and given so much back to our state.

As those of us who were there on Saturday, including the Leader of the Opposition, know, the community handed over to Western Health a cheque for more than half a million dollars, funds that they raised through donations for the brand new Footscray Hospital. They did it because they are a strong and warm and generous community. They did it because they wanted to say thank you to a country that has given them so much.

I think we also owe our Vietnamese community and all multicultural communities our thanks. We also owe them safety and security, free from hatred and division – the same ideals that brought them to this country in the first place – because it is one thing to stand on the stage like the Leader of the Opposition did and take a few photos accepting a big cheque for a project that, frankly, he had nothing to do with, and it is another thing entirely –

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier was also there having photos behind the cheque. I would ask you to refer the Premier to the sessional orders and standing orders –

**THE SPEAKER:** Order! Start again, Manager of Opposition Business, without the commentary at the start.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** The Premier is attacking the opposition, which is disorderly.

**THE SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the point of order.

**JACINTA ALLAN:** That is entirely the point: we were there to support these communities. We were there to thank them. It is also in turn our responsibility to support them and keep those communities safe from hatred and vilification, safeguarding our strong and proud multifaith and multicultural communities.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:51): (1000) My question is to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Given the Mornington Peninsula boasts 10 per cent of Victoria's coastline and attracts over 7.5 million tourists annually, the safety of our local beaches during the peak summer months is of paramount importance. Recent reports of jet ski violations, including disregard for the 5-knot speed limit and unlawful entry into swimming-only zones, have raised significant safety concerns. Notably, last summer saw alarming incidents around Safety Beach and Dromana, prompting a community petition that garnered over 6000 signatures advocating for stronger enforcement. In light of these issues, could the minister please clarify for Nepean residents how many incidents of jet ski violations the government is aware of on the Mornington Peninsula during the recent summer period?

#### **Monbulk electorate**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (14:52): (1001) Driving around my electorate, I have been very pleased to see pavement treatment works happening on Belgrave-Hallam Road in Belgrave South. My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In the next few months which other roads in Monbulk district are scheduled for pavement maintenance? I look forward to the minister's response.

#### **Euroa electorate**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:52): (1002) My question is for the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery. Why hasn't this government fully supported the majority of recommendations from the 2022 flood inquiry? Thousands of regional Victorians lost everything. Hundreds made submissions to the inquiry and pleaded for real change, yet this government has ignored them. Of the 73 recommendations, only 16 have been fully supported – that is just 16 out of 73 recommendations.

Even fewer will deliver immediate improvements for flood-affected communities like mine. Seymour, Euroa, Murchison and Benalla deserve better. Recommendation 23, helping high-risk households become flood-resilient – rejected. Recommendation 27, funding analyses of levee breaches – refused. Recommendation 29, building ring levees after a successful pilot – ignored. Recommendation 39, urgent mitigation measures – rejected. Please explain why. We deserve answers.

#### Glen Waverley electorate

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:53): (1003) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. How will the partnership between the state and federal Labor governments in delivering the Suburban Rail Loop benefit the residents of the Glen Waverley district? In a recent announcement the federal government delivered on their 2022 election commitment by providing \$2.2 billion in funding towards the Suburban Rail Loop. It is so important that we have a partner in Canberra who actually knows where Victoria is and, for my constituents, a partner who values the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. For far too long Victoria has been short-changed of our fair share of GST and infrastructure funding, but I am glad to see that positive steps are being taken to build city-reforming projects. I am excited to see the continuing progress of the construction of the Suburban Rail Loop, and I look forward to the minister's response.

#### Eildon electorate

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:54): (1004) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. What action is the minister taking to work with landowners and residents living in the Upper Yarra to tackle their ongoing wild dog issue? There have been continued wild dog attacks over the last few years, with recent increases in this area. Constituents have reported horrific attacks on ewes, lambs and calves on farming properties from Hoddles Creek to Gladysdale, Dixons Creek, Wesburn and McMahons Creek. All of this is in the wild dog management zone. In March Agriculture Victoria is conducting face-to-face community workshops to be held in Merrijig and Taggerty to discuss the proposed wild dog management plans. Again the Yarra Ranges residents have been left out. I implore the minister to make sure that they do not miss out and arrange for workshops to be in the Upper Yarra.

#### Northcote electorate

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:55): (1005) My question is to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. What is the latest information on this government's plan to use the Alphington Grange spur and 18A Miller Street, Preston, to build much-needed housing as part of the small sites pilot program? To be blunt, the inner north needs more affordable housing and there are tracts of government land which have been sitting vacant for far too long, serving no purpose and providing no benefit. Our government announced last year that these two sites in Alphington and Preston will be part of a pilot program to accelerate housing supply near to existing jobs, schools, transport and services. Approximately 190 homes are slated to be built across these two sites, and an EOI process was opened under Development Victoria, which resulted in a strong market response. These homes will be a vital part of our housing mix in the inner north, and we look forward to seeing progress towards delivering them.

#### Melbourne electorate

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:56): (1006) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Why is this government closing five route 402 bus stops along Kensington Road with no community consultation? Last week small signs popped up on Kensington Road informing residents that five stops would be permanently closed this weekend. There was no community consultation at all. Out of the whole City of Melbourne, Kensington Banks already has the worst access to public transport. People rely on this bus to get to the hospitals, to uni, to the city and to Footscray station to get on the V/Line. The stops being closed are some of the most well used on this road. At the very least there should have been consultation on which stops are most needed. I have received dozens of complaints about this. I have heard from several residents in their 80s, a woman with a double hip

replacement and many families with preschool children, who all rely on this bus. Their closest stops will be closed. They are now going to have to walk double the distance up a steep hill to get to the next stop, which means using public transport may now be out of reach for them. I urge the minister to urgently intervene before this weekend and stop these stops from being closed.

#### **Tarneit electorate**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (14:57): (1007) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and it is: how has Victorian Mosque Open Day helped to break down stigma towards Islamic faith groups? Victoria's annual open mosque day is a day that brings communities together and fosters understanding and mutual respect. In Tarneit we are lucky to have three remarkable mosques that are not just places of worship but also centres of community, charity and education. I would like to thank Melbourne Grand Mosque, Golden Wattle Masjid and also Virgin Mary Mosque for welcoming me and the broader community. In times when division is great, events like Victorian Mosque Open Day remind us of what truly matters: respect, understanding and community. I would like to thank the residents of Tarneit for demonstrating these values this past weekend.

#### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:58): (1008) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Over a year ago 50 residents were booted out of their homes at 50 Grosvenor Street, Balaclava, to make way for a new housing development, but instead of progress, the site was abandoned and left to decay into a dangerous, antisocial drug den, putting nearby residents at risk. It took a viral TikTok video showcasing graffiti, drugs and stolen bikes to finally embarrass the government into action. Now demolition has begun, but only after 12 months of inaction and neglect. Fifty residents who were well integrated into the community were forcibly displaced to make way for this promised development, yet they have seen no transparency, action or timelines. I ask the minister: when will you finally provide a clear timeline for the completion of this project so the residents can get on with living their lives?

#### **Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:59): (1009) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Last month our government announced that we would be tackling fuel prices at the pump by limiting how service stations raise their prices. Under this new policy, petrol stations will be banned from increasing the price of petrol under 24 hours. More importantly, they will be required to publicly report changes in prices the day before, which we can check on our phones through the Service Victoria app to make the best choice on where we need to go nearby. This policy will help folks save money at the bowser because they will know in advance what the price will be at the servo, which will not be able to increase it for a whole day. This policy is not a silver bullet in tackling the cost of petrol, but it will mean that people, including in my electorate, will be able to see what the petrol is going to cost the next day and make a decision on where to fill up in advance. My question for the minister is this: how will these changes work to benefit commuters and drivers in my electorate of Laverton?

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Speaker, I asked a question on notice last year to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It was question 1829, and I would ask that you please write to the minister and give her a nudge along.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Speaker, I also have a number of questions unanswered which I would ask you to follow up, please. There are 15 questions to the Minister for Finance and Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs: adjournment 833 and questions on notice 1621–3, 1763, 1897–9 and 1931–7. And there are two outstanding questions to the Minister for Water, constituency question 942 and question on notice 1930. I would appreciate you following those up with the ministers, please.

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

***Bills*****Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (15:01): Before we were interrupted for lunch I was talking in support of the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, particularly those reforms as they pertain to the circular economy and the work we are doing as a state government with Merri-bek council to help build a more sustainable local community, particularly through our waste and recycling reforms. In 2023–24 there were 12,900-plus tonnes of commingled and recycling glass collected by council’s recycling trucks. This equated to a 4.9 per cent reduction on the prior year, resulting from the move to fortnightly commingled recycling and the introduction of a four-weekly glass collection system. But dare I say the container deposit scheme has also helped to offset some of those collection rates. 17,300-plus tonnes of food and garden waste was collected during that time, a 31.5 per cent increase year on year following the doubling of collection frequency of the green bin. 26,400 tonnes of garbage was also collected via the red bin, which was a 7.5 per cent reduction on the year prior. It shows if we give people the options to recycle and take part in the circular economy, we will divert waste from landfill. When combined, this all signifies that locally our state’s work is making a difference across Merri-bek in this respect. I want to particularly acknowledge the workers and the drivers of Merri-bek City Council’s waste management trucks and the transport workers for what they do every early morning, an invaluable service along the kerbside.

Also, as I said, the rollout of the container deposit scheme by the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, which is included in this bill, is very much continuing to play a driving role towards us becoming a more sustainable community. Since its launch on 1 November 2023 the CDS has returned more than 1.3 billion bottles, cans and containers, which is huge, absolutely phenomenal – the highest take-up rate, I believe, of any other state or territory for that same period of time. Across my community of Merri-bek, locals have enthusiastically been collecting and depositing their cans across a growing number of local sites, including around 10 reverse vending machine sites. The Minister for Environment is in the chamber today, and he appreciates this work of course firsthand. We have rolled out a record number of local sites: at Dairy Drive in North Coburg, which is operated by First Nations social enterprise KARI; 59 Sydney Road, Coburg; 801 Sydney Road, Brunswick; 10 Moreland Road, Brunswick; the Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre on Pascoe Vale Road, which now also has a CDS site; 13 Domain Street, Hadfield; the Glenroy newsagency at 773 Pascoe Vale Road; and three recently installed sites across Brunswick West that I was proud to deliver at Union Square, AG Gillon Oval and Dunstan Reserve. These are in addition to our very friendly over-the-counter sites at Pascoe Vale Central News and Lotto on Cumberland Road, Coonans Hill bottle shop on Coonans Road, O’Hea’s convenience store at 156 O’Hea Street – a great milk bar near Coburg North Primary – the Friendly Grocer at 23 Merlyn Street in Coburg North and the IGA Xpress on Major Road, Fawkner. Across Merri-bek, as of the end of 2024, these sites have helped collect over 11 million cans, bottles, cartons and containers for recycling, providing locals with over \$1 million in refunds as of October 2024.

However, while we have seen commendable collection efforts across the north, it appears that it is Sayo Leahy that has become the de facto canbassador for the northern suburbs and is leading the pack. After we shared Sayo’s story at the official opening of the North Coburg Dairy Drive site on 14 February 2024 we had no idea just how gangbusters her story would go, having since been covered on the front page of the *Age* on 3 February and covered on Channel 10 news and Sayo having been featured on an interview on the *Project*. Sayo has thus far collected over 150,000 cans and bottles, equating to over \$15,000 in refunds being provided. If you had to provide a seat for every one of those cans or containers, you would have to combine the MCG, AAMI Park, Rod Laver Arena and Coburg City Oval to accommodate every single one of those cans – so quite the feat. And along with doing

her bit for the environment, Sayo has also said the CDS has very much given her a renewed sense of purpose and is very much helping with her overall health, wellbeing and mental health, and the additional funds she has raised are going towards her rent, car costs and health appointments.

But along with Sayo there are many others in our community doing great work through the CDS: Pascoe Vale South Primary School, Pascoe Vale North Primary School, Westbreen Primary School, Dunstan Reserve kinder, Nourishing Neighbours and the Moonee Ponds Creek, and Merri Creek and Edgars Creek friends-of groups. I particularly want to acknowledge as well young Noah Venberg, a year 10 student doing work experience in Parliament this week, from Coburg High School, who is in the gallery behind me. Thanks to Brenda Kittelty, another constituent as well. Noah understands firsthand; he is doing environmental studies, and he knows the importance the CDS will have when it comes to building a more sustainable future going forward. That is why this bill is so important. And for those wanting to take part in the CDS, people can come by my electorate office at 180 Gaffney Street in North Coburg to collect their free CDS recycling bag as well.

Along with strengthening our circular economy the bill will provide outcomes for the management and oversight of our waterways and creeks, seeking to amend the Water Act 1989. We have been doing a lot of work of course with our local creek groups: there is \$10 million for the Moonee Ponds Creek reimagining project; another \$5 million has been added by the Albanese federal Labor government. There is 460 grand to revitalise the Merri Creek through Coburg as well; 115 grand to support the Edgars Creek; and 25 grand further for the Moonee Ponds Creek, building on previous planning controls as well along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor. And the Minister for Water just recently announced community consultation for further planning controls to protect other creeks and waterways across the state, 17 creeks and waterways, including Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek and Edgars Creek across my community, and these changes aim to encourage responsible development around our waterways to help conserve natural habitats, safeguard local wildlife corridors and protect the health of waterways across both public and private land.

Some of these changes that are being proposed and being consulted on, which people can have their say on up until 16 March through the engage.vic.gov.au website, include ascertaining of a planning permit for new developments or significant alterations to buildings on properties along the waterway when the siting of a development is less than 50 metres from the bank of a waterway, to protect the landscape along the waterway; building a development above 6 metres in height or a development with a floor area greater than 50 square metres along a waterway; changing the ground level by 600 millimetres near a waterway; constructing a fence other than a visually transparent fence, such as a post-and-wire fence, close to the waterway; or removing any native vegetation along that waterway.

The bill also contains changes to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 – and I want to just acknowledge the pet census that we undertook recently, which analysed the state's pet ownership rates. In Merri-bek we have got 13,950 dogs registered and 8332 cats registered as well, so we love our pets; we love our animals. I want to acknowledge Project Underdog pet rescue in particular on Sydney Road, Coburg, who do a wonderful job in rehoming and supporting our animals in need.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (15:08): I rise today to talk on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, and as many speakers who have stood in the chamber before me today will say, this is a bill where we are making amendments through different parts of this whole bill that has been put through; it is an omnibus bill. The bill takes into account the Adoption Act 1984 for the Attorney-General and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996. We are cleaning stuff up all the way through child protection, so you know, if we are making parts of these acts better in child protection and in births, deaths and marriages stuff, that is great. The environment – we have just seen the former speaker, the member for Pascoe Vale, who walked out just now, very passionate about the circular economy, and it is great that we can do stuff there as well.

There is the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 – and we move through. We have got agriculture. We have got energy and resources, mineral resources, finance – it is a plethora

right across the board of what we are trying to change here. There are small changes that need to be done, but we do not want hidden things in these particular amendments and reforms, especially for things that may hold up our small businesses – things that may need changing but put in extra layers of work for people that run a small business.

Acting Speaker De Martino, I know you yourself would know how hard it is to actually run a small business. There are a lot of rules and regulations that we do need to do and achieve so we are compliant in running our small business, whether it be at a federal level or at a state level. We need to be making sure that we are doing the right thing. Sometimes when we do amend some of these bills, we make changes which cause unintended consequences on some of our small businesses, and we need to make sure that we are supporting fully our small businesses. I get out and amongst people in the Latrobe Valley, and whether they are tradies, as formerly I was, or they are people that are running florists or coffee shops, at the end of the day it is the person at the forefront that is actually doing the work in these small businesses, who has to sit down and do all the regulatory work to make sure that their business is complying with all the bookwork that they need to do. We want to make sure that that is as smooth as possible, because we need to be looking after and supporting our small business people.

There is also a bit on the EPA, on environmental protections. You have only got to walk around your local municipality now and see that there are concerns with rubbish being dumped on our roadways and also in our forests, if you get into them. One thing that I get told all the time, and from our local council officers also, is the amount of rubbish that is being dumped around our waterways as well, which impacts on one of the other particular components in here. We need to make sure that, one, we are on top of it, not allowing these people who are doing the wrong thing to dump their rubbish – and it is not domestic rubbish; sometimes it is building rubbish which is being taken out by the trailer load and put into our parks and also thrown in up against our waterways. We need to make sure that we have rules and regulations that we are maintaining, making it harder for these people that are actually going out and doing that. It is not only a concern in my electorate; it is a concern right across Victoria, and I am sure, for other members sitting here at the moment, it is being raised at their level.

We also have changes to the Housing Act 1983 and the Subdivision Act 1988, so it does give us a little bit of scope to be able to talk on housing and planning and the subdivisions. I know we obviously talk a lot about the crisis of trying to get people into a home and getting a roof over their head. I know in the Latrobe Valley, especially in and around Morwell, we have a crisis down there trying to assist people who are homeless that are living in cars and living on the streets. The workers working in organisations are engaging with these particular people. There are some people, I must say, that do not want to live with four walls around them and a roof over their head, and we just need to make sure that we are looking after them as best as we can, but we do have people in our community that need that security of a roof over their head, somewhere to call home. I think whether you are renting or you are a home owner it makes a huge difference if you have got the security of being able to have that home environment, that safe environment, for you and the family. I know, talking to the providers, that stocks are virtually nearly at zero down around through the Latrobe Valley and pushing through to East Gippsland. I think at one stage we actually had more people looking for crisis accommodation than we had available houses.

We need to be mindful that no matter if we are making amendments on these reforms or we are talking about housing and bringing more houses on line, people are relying on us to make the correct and the right decisions to give them the opportunity to be able to do that. On the planning with the Subdivision Act 1988, I also talked to developers. It is interesting to hear the red tape that they have to jump through to actually bring these subdivisions on line. At the end of the day we do have the houses, which are great, that come through, but there is a lot of work that is done before those houses actually get built, and there are all the hoops. Sometimes we need to make sure that the developers are doing the right thing, but there are hold-ups at local level and there are hold-ups sometimes with state acts and what they need to provide and with water providers. I know for sewage and for water and putting everything in, a subdivision does not take half a year or 12 months to get through; it can be up to five or 10 years

in the making from when they decide to do it. We need to make sure that we are bringing these developments on line and allowing the developer who is putting his hard-earned money into that development to bring it on line at an acceptable pace. They realise it takes time, and there are bits and pieces they need to do to get services and roads and so forth in, but we need to make sure when we are making decisions in here that we are not putting an impost on the developers and then on the poor old home owner as we move through there.

One of the other things – and I am sure we get it all across the state – is domestic animals. I know we have got a couple of changes here and amendments for that. It is one of the upticks in my office now, and I think it must be because the local council and local government are getting sick and tired of people coming through who are living next door to dwellings which have an unacceptable number of pets. In particular, down here in Traralgon and through Morwell and Moe, it is the unintended consequence of having dogs barking 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is one of the big upticks for people that are contacting my office at the moment, and probably, coming back from COVID, when people were a little bit locked in their houses, they needed something to do. A lot of people started being breeders, and we have got the offshoot of that now – a lot of places in and around our streets that have a lot of animals that are causing a lot of grief around the place. Barking dogs is a huge one. Also coming through now are stray cats that are moving through the municipality.

As our lead speaker said, we do not oppose this bill. We know that we need to make changes as these acts get a little bit more age on them to make sure that they do suffice in 2025.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:18): I also rise to speak on this legislation and in support of a bill that, as we have all been saying, is an omnibus bill that looks at amending various pieces of legislation for all sorts of different reasons. There are the ones that we have spoken about before, where there are just differences in the way we do things compared to when the legislation was originally brought into effect. There are also changes in technology that then require updated legislation. And of course the most important part of legislation is amendments and new bills that are there to protect Victorians in every aspect of life. It is always a balancing act. When you want to introduce legislation to protect and support Victorians, it often means it is about regulation and ensuring that when things go wrong, or there is a group, an organisation or a company that is not doing the right thing, there are avenues that Victorians can pursue in order to ensure that they receive justice.

This legislation is about doing all these things in different ways. I will not be able to talk about all the changes, because there are a number of them and they cross over many different pieces of legislation, but I would like to talk about one aspect of the changes and that is around the amendments to the Environment Protection Act 2017. This act, when it was introduced, was about giving more teeth to the Environment Protection Authority Victoria in order to ensure that our environment and people's urban environment are protected better and that there is better compliance and better assurance of that compliance. This change that we are talking about in this piece of legislation really is something that will be a great benefit to the residents of Thomastown.

The dumping of litter or rubbish has been happening all over the Thomastown electorate. Whether it is in the established suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor or in the newer suburbs up around Wollert and North Epping, it has become a huge problem with people dumping household rubbish, but more often it is industrial waste that is being dumped in dark corners, in parks or on people's nature strips. The current regulations provide that a registered owner or authorised user of, say, a vehicle that is dumping products or whatever cannot be found guilty by the court. Even if we have temporary cameras to watch and identify vehicles, for example, that are doing this, if we cannot prove that the driver or the person doing it is a particular person or their identity, then nothing happens. This piece of legislation will ensure that the business owner responsible for the truck or whatever it is that was carrying the rubbish and committing the crime will be able to be charged with the illegal dumping. Hopefully this will be another, while a small change in one sense, way of ensuring that all the levers are there to make sure that people that do the wrong thing are held accountable and can be brought to justice.

I am going to keep talking about this for a while. I am sure residents are going to be really happy that we are trying to ensure that the areas that we are all living in are kept clean and that they are treated with respect and that we can have pride in our neighbourhoods and in our streets. This is just one small step in the list of things that have been looked at in order to try to get under control what is going on in the area. There are a lot of great things that are happening. This is not all over the place, but it is in every corner. As the Premier has said many times, we are listening to Victorians, and I am hearing over and over again that there needs to be something done.

In fact this issue has also been raised by me with the council on many occasions, because in many, many cases the areas and what is happening are the responsibility of council. I know through that advocacy there have been additional compliance officers employed, and I believe at the latest council meeting there was discussion about the setting up of a taskforce. Rather than dealing with each individual dumping site and collecting the rubbish and using some portable cameras here and there, they are looking at a more systemic approach. I understand that they are looking at involving the police because, depending on how much and where these things are occurring, it could be a criminal act that the police could be actioning. In other cases it could be the Environment Protection Authority, so the aim is to have this taskforce include the EPA as well as council officers – again, all levels of government coming together in order to fight this problem and hopefully do something that is going to change it ongoing rather than this constant cycle of problems.

When you have just bought your house and you have just moved in – it is a beautiful house and you have been waiting for years for it to be built, to buy the right land to put it on and so on – you do not want your first experience when you get those keys and walk in the front door to be looking out the window and seeing a whole lot of mattresses or paint cans all piled up all over the place. I think this, as I said, is a really important piece of legislation. Of all the changes we talk about, this is something that I believe residents of Thomastown will be very excited about.

There are also amendments that are really, I guess, rectifying past wrongs when it comes to things like forced adoptions, and there have been a number of pieces of legislation and law changes around the issue of forced adoptions. This legislation provides further small changes that hopefully will make it a little easier for those that may be looking for their parents or for parents looking for children, just taking at least one other barrier out of the way in order for them to continue that journey to be reunited with loved ones. The example of this in this bill is a strange thing where the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, for example, is not able to disclose adoption information even if there is a court order or a subpoena. There are many steps, many hold-ups and many hurdles for people seeking that information – even with court orders it does not happen seamlessly and quickly. This legislation is making very meaningful changes to ensure a better experience for those seeking out loved ones that they were parted from at birth or soon after.

Other examples of some of the changes and amendments in this bill are strengthening some of the legislation around pet animals and dangerous animals just to ensure that there are stronger and greater safeguards for people. Again, I think we can see in some of these legislative changes that they are really local, neighbourhood-type issues that are being addressed. It is not always the really big overarching reform in the law that people are looking for. They are also looking for legislative change that can make life just that little bit easier in the way they go about their work or their play or their home, that ensure that they can exercise their rights in any way or ensure that they are protected. These small changes make it that little bit easier.

As I stated at the start around technological change, who would have known that water corporations cannot serve a notice of a board meeting by electronic means at the moment? This is modernising the legislation so information like notice of meetings can be provided to board members electronically, which is such a great step forward.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (15:28): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. Today we see that Victoria has the highest unemployment rate in the country. In

the half year to December Victoria accounted for 30 per cent of insolvencies nationally. Business vacancies in the CBD are rising compared to lowering rates in other comparable cities like Sydney and Brisbane. Median house prices have trended downwards, while in other states they are going up. Approvals for properties are going down in Victoria; they are going up in New South Wales and in Queensland. Regulatory reform in the way that governments deliver services and price those services is vital. More to the point, it is not only vital, it is urgent. It is urgent because at the moment we are seeing businesses in Victoria flee to other jurisdictions. If they cannot flee, they are thinking about it and will do it as soon as they can.

We see that for a number of reasons. We have the highest taxes in the country. Regulation is so onerous that many businesses find it easier to do business elsewhere. The cost of energy is growing at such a rapid rate that it is just not viable for many businesses to survive if they stay in Victoria. So regulation, regulatory reform and the efficiency and proficiency with which the Victorian government delivers and prices its services are crucial, and you would expect that the government would bring measures to address the exigencies of those things I have mentioned just then.

This bill which is before us today does a number of things. We will not oppose them, but they do not address those pressing matters, and I will come back to those in a moment. To the extent that the bill addresses things like adoption, which is more in the nature of a social reform rather than a regulatory reform – one would have expected it in its own distinct piece of legislation – we will not be opposing that. It is overdue as a reform, and we support it.

There are some other aspects of the bill. I will not touch on many aspects, but I do want to mention a couple which emphasise the mixed priorities of this government. First of all, seeing it as a priority to ensure that the commissioner for environmental sustainability can moonlight on the job is I think an undesirable act of public policy. I think the nature of commissioner positions is such that if they are worthy of being created, then they deserve a wholly dedicated occupant of that role. Just why the government has felt it necessary to do that and, more to the point, how a person occupying that role can discharge the functions and duties of that role – putting aside the salary, but more importantly the significance of the role – is beyond comprehension. Why the government thinks that is a good act of public policy is beyond me. In terms of other actions and steps taken in this bill, you have to scratch your head as to whether the government understands the urgency of the reforms that are needed in this state.

I want to turn more to what this bill does not address. Two years ago the Department of Treasury and Finance undertook an options exercise to give the government some things to consider by way of economic reforms which would save businesses in the state costs. They presented a series of options to the government, all told in the order of around \$1.6 billion in savings to the government. These are easy red tape reforms which the Allan Labor government could undertake at a moment's notice. Were they in the bill? No. You would think it would be an easy win for the government to deliver some relief for businesses that are already struggling in this state by implementing those red-tape reforms, but no, they are still sitting on the desk and there is no evidence that they are anywhere in this bill. Despite the second-reading speech of the minister, nothing in this bill will actually provide relief to businesses. That was a missed opportunity.

We saw late last year the Business Council of Australia deliver its *Regulation Rumble 2024* report. It found on costs and regulations Victoria was last – eighth in the league table of states and territories – in terms of costs and regulation. When it came to property taxes we were last. When it came to payroll tax we were second last. It does not tell a very good story. The CommSec report into the state of the states in October last year put Victoria in a position where it is slipping as a state. The NAB regulatory impact analysis, which came later in the year, reinforced the reality that for businesses in Victoria life is hard and getting harder, and certainly harder than it is in other states.

Against the backdrop of that you have to ask: what did the government do when it was confronted with this mounting evidence last year and in 2023 about the importance of regulatory reform? It

delivered an economic growth statement, and it had four action items in that economic growth statement. I will deal with the two that are most relevant to this bill and the subject matter of this bill. The first was that it would open doors. In the course of that, it has created what I count to be no less than eight new bureaucracies or offices that will need to be funded by government to help grow the economy. I would have thought growing the economy was providing a regulatory environment that sees private sector investment grow and expand. But what is more peculiar is in the next step, cutting red tape. The government boasts that it is going to reduce the number of regulatory agencies from 37 to 18 and that it is going to deliver \$500 million in savings to red tape by 2030.

Now you have to ask: how do you deliver those? How do you deliver red-tape reforms when you are creating more bureaucracy? Just two or three pages preceding the red-tape reduction part of the growth statement, the government has created additional offices and bureaucracies, including the investment coordinator-general. Really? I would have thought that business knows what to do to employ more people and invest more capital if you just provide it with the right regulatory environment. There is a natural resources marketing coordinator. I mean, really? These are offices that will be funded by government to help businesses grow. As I said, you do that by providing a regulatory environment for businesses to make decisions that gives them certainty, not this approach by the Allan Labor government which surprises business with new taxes, changes to regulation and a higher cost energy environment and which does not allow them to grow. This bill is that missed opportunity I talk about.

Where we sit in the federation is that once upon a time we were the driver of economic and federation reform. Victoria has gone from being a driver to being a passenger and now to being a patient. We are a drag on economic growth in this country because we are becoming an economic laughing-stock. It is why premiers like Labor Premier Peter Malinauskas in South Australia are eyeing off businesses – he personally contacts business leaders in Victoria to try to drag them across to South Australia. Chris Minns takes a similar approach.

The point I want to finish on about regulation is this: it might not appear to be a very exciting subject for those observing these types of debates, but when governments get it wrong, it has very profound consequences. In Victoria we have seen an unhappy and sorry case study where onerous regulation, supported by higher and growing taxes, drives away investment. For governments, as much as they can ride on the taxpayer dime for a very long period of time, sooner or later moments of reckoning start to occur. The ratings agencies S&P and Moody's are sounding stronger alarm bells about the direction of our economy, but even more than that – even the Reserve Bank, buttressed by advice from the IMF and the OECD, says when governments grow, when they get regulation wrong, they not only crowd out private sector investment, which is the key to economic growth and prosperity, but drive down productivity and make it even harder for economies to recover. That is what the Reserve Bank is saying: collective state debt and the level of regulation are driving down economic growth over the cycle and into the longer term. The way we address that is by getting regulation right so that we are efficient as a government and proficient in delivering for all Victorians.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (15:38): I also rise to contribute to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. It has been a very wideranging debate. The member for Hawthorn's contribution was very engaging, but I am not entirely sure it was especially germane to the contents of the bill; it was more of a matter of public importance or a grievance. But I think those on the opposition side are missing out by having that level of economic competence on their back bench rather than their front bench.

Nonetheless, speaking about the substance of this bill, I note this is one of those interesting debates where there is ostensibly bipartisan support, but commencing with, I think, the member for Evelyn, who was the first speaker of the opposition, there was 30 minutes of thundering off the long run against it before a tacit acknowledgement at the very end of the speech that the opposition, the coalition, will not be opposing it. I would suggest that if there is so much wrong with the bill, where are the amendments circulated by those opposite to consider what is apparently so wrong with it.

I think fundamentally this is a really good piece of legislation that reflects the quite painstaking, very unglamorous – as the minister in her second-reading speech noted – but ultimately important work of ongoing regulatory reform that is the duty of governments. While the member for Hawthorn suggested that this somehow represents a lost opportunity, I think that the measures in this bill, in contrast, actually reflect a contribution towards ongoing productivity-enhancing reform and supply-side reform that do make a difference. He also talked about Victoria's mantle as being a contributor to reforms across the Commonwealth in that vein, and I think that this is a government that has inherited and built upon the mantle of the Bracks and Brumby governments in exactly that endeavour, and this is yet another piece of legislation that contributes to Victoria being a better place to do business.

These are, as we know, substantial regulatory omnibus bills that cut across multiple domains of government. There was some conjecture earlier in the debate about whether there were 16 or 14 different acts that were impacted by this piece of legislation. I will take my lead from the minister who introduced it in commenting that there are almost 40 separate proposals across 14 different acts and 10 ministerial portfolios.

There are many important and worthy measures within the bill. The member for Nepean and others talked about some of the provisions relating to adoption, and there have been some very impassioned and engaging and worthwhile contributions in that direction. Initially the aspect of the bill that I wish to dwell upon is the amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994. As a representative within the Hume local government area, as I know the member for Broadmeadows and the member for Sunbury, who are also in the chamber, are, I am well aware of some of the challenges that Hume City Council has had in monitoring dangerous dogs. The member for Sunbury knows sadly too well the cost of a dangerous dog roaming in his electorate and the impact that had on local residents, and that is why these are not arcane or meaningless pieces of legislation or regulatory change. These make a difference by making our communities safer.

When I am out doorknocking through suburbs and when I am meeting with people in my community, one of the things that arises quite regularly is people's fear about roaming dogs, whether that is into their gardens, in the parklands where their children are playing or just menacing dogs that are not necessarily being properly maintained. Obviously it is the responsibility of local councils, including Hume in my area, to ensure that local residents are being compliant with dangerous dog laws. This goes some way to improving the capacity of council to ensure that compliance, and it does make a difference because it will mean there are fewer instances of dangerous dog attacks. That is worthwhile. That means there are fewer presentations to emergency departments and there are fewer children who are traumatised by having a dangerous dog rear up at them or attack them.

Again, superficially, it is a small thing in the context of what we do in this place, but it is actually something which makes a difference in the lives of those in our communities. I see it as part of the broader swathe of work that this government has undertaken to improve animal welfare and to support pets and indeed their owners. The member for Pascoe Vale touched upon some of those earlier in the context of the animal census. We have also banned the cruel practice of puppy farming, with the strictest breeding rules in the country – a worthwhile reform. As somebody who has been enabled to keep a pet as a consequence of our reforms to enable renters to keep a pet, I know very well the value of that kind of reform to the way in which Victorians can live and the freedoms that they have as renters to keep animals and to be responsible pet owners.

Another dimension of the bill that I wish to discuss is the amendments to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023, which will allow the minister to redact confidential or commercially sensitive information when responding to requests from anyone who has paid the prescribed fee for a copy of a work plan or work plan variation that was registered before the commencement of a new duty-based regime as introduced by that amendment act. That is a bit of a mouthful, but what it means in practice is that it will improve the confidence and certainty of investors to take part in a very significant and growing economic sector in our state. Again, by contrast to the member for Hawthorn, who, in keeping with many other speakers on his side of the chamber today,

bemoaned the economic lot of Victoria, this government's work to support our critical minerals sector is incredibly important. It is positioning Victoria to be at the vanguard of growth in an incredibly significant area of the economy. Unlocking new supplies of critical minerals will inject billions of dollars into our regional communities, including in areas of Victoria where I formerly worked and taught, like Stawell. In the Wimmera there have already been significant rare earth and mineral sands projects which are already exporting valuable commodities internationally and also contributing to supply chains for manufacturing in our own country and our own state.

Unlocking the reserves of critical minerals that exist up near Swan Hill at the Goschen rare earth and minerals sands project and the Avonbank mineral sands project in the Wimmera has the potential to produce around 311 million tonnes of minerals, including zircon, titanium and other rare earth minerals, which are absolutely integral to battery manufacture and solar panel manufacture and other things which are the very cutting edge of advanced manufacturing and where we need to position ourselves as a state and as an economy. If we can capture more of that supply chain from the extraction of rare earths through to the manufacturing sector and then ultimately to their use by consumers and in the industrial sector, we will position ourselves for substantial and sustainable growth and economic activity into the future. I believe that those projects that I alluded to before alone have the capacity to deliver a \$3.5 billion economic boost to western Victoria and to have spillover effects for the rest of the state equating to a further \$15 billion.

In the time that remains to me, the last dimension of this bill that I wish to discuss is the enhancements to the Environment Protection Authority Victoria's powers and the strengthening of the regulatory tools that are available to it to keep our environment cleaner and the communities that we all serve more livable. This is, again, a superficially small but incredibly important piece of regulatory change because it will improve the capacity of the EPA to target those who are perpetrating criminal acts in our community, who are spoiling the natural landscape and who are inflicting their household and industrial refuse on others. Whether it is in parks, roadside verges or any other area across our community, it is an intolerable situation that we have those in our community who are able to do this without adequate consequence. So it is really important that the EPA have every tool that they need to crack down on illegal dumping and to ensure that those who are perpetrating it are brought to justice, that there are penalties for it and that Victorians who are trying to live in great communities are not subject to that behaviour.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:49): I move:

That this debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

**Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024**

*Council's agreement*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino)** (15:49): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024 without amendment.

*Committees***Electoral Matters Committee***Reference*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:49): I move:

That this house refers an inquiry into the conduct of the 2025 by-elections for the districts of Prahran and Werribee to the Electoral Matters Committee for consideration and report no later than 8 December 2025 and the committee should examine:

- (1) the conduct of, and processes implemented by, the Victorian Electoral Commission and its officials; and
- (2) voter turnout.

This is an important inquiry, and I know that the new chair of the committee the member for Tarneit will be looking forward to that inquiry. It is important when we have by-elections like this that we take the opportunity to review what worked and what did not work. We know the Victorian Electoral Commission told us that they prioritise accuracy over timeliness, but there has got to be a balance there, I think. We are all here for accuracy, but I think we can all probably agree that the timeliness could perhaps be improved. I think this is an important inquiry, and I commend it to the house.

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (15:51): The Liberals and Nationals support the government's motion for an inquiry on these by-elections. It is imperative we uphold our democratic values here. I think after what we saw in Prahran and Werribee – and there are many members of the chamber who spent time on the polling booths, in scrutineering post election day and also spent plenty of time on the recounts – we know there were challenges right across the various polling booths with scrutineers, many of them not just members of this chamber, who did turn up, but also volunteers from many political parties.

Across various booths we saw a huge number of instances where scrutineers were unjustly locked out. At Riverbend Primary School they were locked out for a period of time while the election officials had a meal break. At Manorvale Primary School, Liberal and Hopper volunteers were locked out. At Iramoo scout hall scrutineers were locked out until 6:30, hindering their oversight; the same at Wyndham Park Primary, where they were locked out for 25 minutes. At Iramoo Primary they were locked out for over 30 minutes. I mean, we cannot be locking scrutineers out when votes are inside with no-one overseeing them. At the Manor Lakes booth the vote counting did not start until 25 minutes after a meal break. At Thomas Chirnside Primary School scrutineers were allowed inside before the doors were locked but then had to wait 25 minutes for the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to take their meal break. It indicates a proper lack of planning due to scrutineer access, and it affects the transparency of counting. At Westgrove Primary School scrutineers were told at 6:15 that due to a meal break they would have to wait. At Werribee Secondary College voting did not start counting until 6:45 pm. I know the Leader of the House said we need to do things in a timely manner and accurately; well, none of this reflects a timely manner. At Riverwalk Primary School a scrutineer had already signed in and was told he had to wait outside while new scrutineers were registered. This did not follow proper protocol. There were delays in counting at several polling booths. These cannot be overlooked, and such delays honestly erode public confidence in our electoral system.

The count in Werribee was described as disastrous by officials from both the Labor and the Liberal parties, and starting half an hour late at some counting places and finishing close to 1:00 am produced a painstakingly slow release of results. The pre-poll period was equally chaotic. There have been reports of wildly inaccurate vote tallies, unorganised ballots left unsupervised, and the VEC's reconciliation account was found to be 1300 votes off, a glaring discrepancy that raised alarm bells about the integrity of our electoral processes.

If we cannot trust the counting of our votes, how can we trust the outcomes of our elections? I know the Leader the House mentioned voter turnout, and we know in Prahran that was extremely low, but we also know from the inquiry into the 2022 election, and also some questions that were asked during

that inquiry in regard to the Warrandyte by-election, that the VEC in that by-election in Warrandyte only spent \$150,000 on digital advertising, but they said it was in line with the Victorian government strategy – and you have to question why the independent VEC is following a Labor government's digital strategy when it comes to getting information out to voters about an election. My opinion is that if every voter has an address, why can't the VEC send every voter a letter or information in regard to an election when they are happy to send information to every voter who does not turn up to vote? If you are happy to send them a fine, then be more than happy to send them the information about –

**Iwan Walters:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think it is very dangerous, particularly in the context of this debate, for members on either side to impugn those opposite and to suggest that there is a political conspiracy in the context of the VEC. Imputations on other members are unparliamentary.

**Sam GROTH:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I did not refer to any member. We have had that ruling from the Speaker many times today, including in question time.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** I remind the member on his feet to address the motion. There was no imputation.

**Sam GROTH:** When you talk about voter turnout, I think the VEC should also look at some of those locations for pre-poll. For anyone who did attend the Prahran pre-poll, there was one on Chapel Street, but the one down on Wilson Street was hidden away. There was no parking. There was a whole bunch of traffic work going on, and it actually ended up resulting in one of the volunteers being hit by a car, which is not something we want to see when people are turning out to volunteer at elections.

We need to see the VEC take an approach that reflects the needs of all members of the community. Social media is great for younger members, but there are a whole lot of people in our community who are older. Like I said, everybody has a postal address. Everybody has the ability to receive information in regard to a by-election or a regular election.

I want to refer to an article from 14 November 2024 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in regard to the VEC commissioner's defeatist attitude when it comes to elections. Commissioner Sven Bluemmel stated in this article that despite the scale and complexity:

The prescribed timeline for Victorian elections is the shortest in the nation ...

He further added:

As electoral participation continues to grow, it is increasingly difficult to meet these timelines, and there is no longer any contingency for unforeseen disruptions or failures.

For me this signals a lack of confidence in the VEC's ability to effectively manage elections, which is deeply concerning. But his notion that 'The risk of an election failure is now real' is not a message that should be coming from the head of our electoral commission. Instead, we need to be instilling confidence in the electorate that we are equipped to handle the complexities of modern elections.

Another issue that emerged during these by-elections was the apparent lack of impartiality from election officials. In Prahran polling place managers were reported to have made inappropriate comments about Liberal Party posters while failing to address similar issues with posters from other parties. This behaviour undermines the professionalism expected from our electoral officers and raises concerns around bias in the administration of our elections. It was disheartening to see a junior official in Werribee removed following a Labor complaint while no similar actions were taken against senior officials in Prahran who exhibited partisan behaviour. The inconsistent handling of complaints is troubling and calls into question the VEC's commitment to impartiality and fairness.

It is our duty to ensure electoral processes are conducted with the highest standards of integrity, and the inquiry into the Prahran and Werribee by-elections is not merely a procedural step, it is necessary to restore public confidence in our democratic system. We must hold the VEC accountable for its actions and ensure that all electoral officials adhere to principles of fairness and transparency. The

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inquiry needs to focus on several key areas, including scrutineer access and treatment, delays in counting, impartiality of election officials and pre-polling procedures. We will absolutely support this, and we look forward to these matters being addressed when the inquiry comes to the committee.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:59): I would like to rise in support of the motion this afternoon, and in doing so I would like to congratulate the brand new member for Werribee John Lister, who was sworn in yesterday and who will make an absolutely fantastic local representative for the people of Werribee and continue to fight for them every single day.

There is a referral proposed here for an inquiry with a narrow term of reference into the Werribee and Prahran by-elections. The reason for those narrow terms of reference is that a 2022 state election review has already been undertaken. We thought it was important for this inquiry to only really deal with the issues that presented themselves in those by-elections.

As to the terms of reference or the two points to this motion, it will review the conduct and processes implemented by the Victorian Electoral Commission and its officials, and it will examine voter turnout. By-elections historically have low voter turnout already, and indeed elections held in electorates with a high multicultural population typically have pretty low voter turnout as well, but only 79.91 per cent in Werribee and then, shockingly, 68.28 per cent in Prahran is a real problem. This inquiry needs to get to the bottom of why that is and what processes can be strengthened around the VEC and the way that they communicate with voters as to notifying them of elections. That is incredibly important.

The conduct of the VEC and their systems will be reviewed as well, which is also incredibly important. An independent electoral commission is a fundamental pillar of our democracy, and I will not question that, like the member for Nepean just did, because I think that is incredibly dangerous. It is dangerous; it is hurtful to our democracy. In saying that, we need to make sure that the VEC's systems that they put in place and the training that they provide are adequate – not just adequate but as good as they possibly can be. The member for Nepean used the example of one VEC employee or volunteer in Werribee directing people how to vote in a polling booth. That is pretty bad stuff. That is something that is incredibly dangerous to our democracy. The VEC has to maintain its independence at all times. Political parties have to be confident of that, but voters have to be confident of that. This is one of the greatest democracies in the world, and the fact that we have independent electoral commissions is a really large part of that. I am sure that will come under scrutiny as part of this inquiry.

The member for Nepean also mentioned some situations where scrutineers were locked out of polling booths after the voting period had concluded, so after 6 pm. I have heard of an example where one voting centre manager wanted to lock out scrutineers for half an hour whilst there were open ballots on the table in the voting booth. I am not going to stand here and blame workers and I am not going to blame volunteers – I am not going to do that – but the VEC's processes and training around those things have to be robust. We have to be as confident as we possibly can that all of that has been adequate leading up to the election. This is what the inquiry will deal with. As I said, narrow scope, narrow terms of reference, and it is an inquiry that we will be able to knock over relatively quickly and report on in December. I look forward, as the chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, to undertaking that work, and I commend the motion to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:03): I will start by agreeing with the previous speaker and reiterate that the coalition will be supporting the motion that the government has moved in relation to the inquiry into the two by-elections. It is important to make sure that, as we have one of the best democratic systems in the world, the systems that make that happen, that are in place, are robust and they work. At times they will not be perfect, but this review is an opportunity to look at where things can be improved and where we can do better.

I think it is also important to start by noting that the Victorian Electoral Commission enlists, at times of election, the most wonderful people to take part in the democratic process. People from all of our

communities put their hand up to be part of votes when they take place, whether it be a general election, whether it be a by-election or whether it be a federal or state election. Often when you are in your community you will see people that you know, and obviously when you go into a voting place you will show them the respect they deserve, because they are there to make sure the system works and to make sure we all get the chance to vote. They are good people; they are great staff. I am sure that everybody in this place would agree that the VEC enlists the best parts of the community to be part of the system.

This inquiry hopefully will look at some very important issues. When we talked about things that do need to be addressed, I know that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition noted a number of things like making sure that scrutineers had access to buildings at the right time. I am aware of other instances where people were let into buildings unaccompanied. I saw votes being found, and in no way am I casting any aspersion upon anybody. Nothing is ever perfect, but when you see boxes open that have not been sealed and significant numbers of votes found in wrong boxes, you want to make sure that those issues, in terms of the way the VEC operates and the processes around them, those mistakes, do not occur, because we need to make sure that our system is beyond reproach. There are things that have occurred in the by-elections that need to be addressed, and we need to make sure that we go through and enhance our processes. I saw a lot of those issues firsthand scrutineering in Werribee on the first day. A number of us on this side of the chamber were there scrutineering as those votes were being counted, and so were a lot of the staff of the Labor members on the other side of the chamber. There were a lot of us in the room, and we were all there for the scrutineering. Both state and federal staff of the government members were there.

There were a number of other issues that hopefully we can look at as part of the inquiry, not just things to do with the count and scrutineering but also making sure that with pre-poll, which more people want to do, we do not look for ways to make that difficult for people. My view is we want to make sure that people have the longest opportunity. As someone who at every pre-poll in my own elections will stand there for every minute of every day, it would be easier to say let us do it for a day or two less, but my personal view is it is a really fantastic way to engage people. If we are talking about turnout and we want people to turn out, the best way to do that is provide them more opportunity to vote. I think we always have to fight against a push to truncate voting. I think that people want to vote earlier. They want the option and convenience of voting at pre-poll. I think we need to give them that chance, and we as members and our campaign staff around us, we just need to stand there for longer, frankly. I know that many will not love me saying that, but I really do think that is important.

I do want to note one real concern I had in the by-election process, and that was the VEC seeking to require sign-in for volunteers who were working at booths. I very strongly oppose the requirement to disenfranchise people from attending a polling booth and having their voice heard in terms of campaigning for candidates. The idea that big government needs to record who is there and record the details of those people and enforce some kind of 'big government' bureaucracy over people expressing themselves is very, very concerning. I know that the coalition have already spoken about our concerns about that. But I think it would be wrong to think that the VEC should trial that any further, and it would be wrong for the VEC to think that that would in any way be appropriate in an election. Effectively it would run against the grain of you having the right to a freedom of association and to a freedom of choice around your own vote. To have government recording people and how they vote – because that is effectively what it is, recording people's votes, and government would hold the data of any campaign worker that the VEC collected in terms of how they were campaigning – is a very dangerous path. It runs against, in my view, both federal and state law.

I am sure that the VEC has not looked into the legality of what they were asking people to do, but I suspect that there would be serious legal issues with it, and I was shocked to see them trying to do that.

I hope that this review also goes into some of the broader structural issues with the VEC that played out in this by-election – as we talked about, things like scrutineers et cetera and some processes around that. They are not unique to this by-election. We have seen some of these issues play out. I know in

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the last state election there were polling places that ran out of ballots. We have seen final counts still not being done on a number of seats for the 2022 election – the two-party preferred votes have not been done on a number of seats still to this day. So not everything is perfect, and though this review goes to this specific by-election, I think it would be fair to say that there are some processes in relation to the VEC that are starting to look shabby. Hopefully this review will assist in making sure that we can clean up the edges of those problems that do exist before the next state election.

If I can finish on a final point, I was just speaking about the sign-in and the requirement for big government to hold data on that. I note that when we talk about turnout and the issue with turnout at this by-election, perhaps the VEC could focus more on getting people out to vote than trying to record the campaign workers who are there to express their view. I think we need to forget and focus less on the bureaucracy and more on the engagement. That is, I think, something that government departments and government agencies forget – they forget the outwardness of their job and focus more on the internal. I am not saying there are not internal issues that need to be addressed, and hopefully they are, but I think the VEC needs to look frankly at the way the AEC operates. The AEC tries very hard to be an outward organisation in terms of encouraging voter turnout, and they do a good job. They try and be as cool as they possibly can considering they are an electoral organisation, but they try really hard on that engagement piece. That is something I think the VEC can learn from, and this review would be an opportunity to do that. Just to reiterate, the coalition will be supporting this motion. It is a good opportunity.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:13): I too rise to speak on the motion put forward by the Leader of the House – it is a really important motion before the house this afternoon – but in doing so I briefly want to reflect on the recent Werribee by-election. I have to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the new Labor member for Werribee John Lister, or Johnny Lister, for persevering and getting over the line. As a Wyndham MP I know he will be a tremendous addition to this side of the house and an excellent representative for the folks in the Werribee district. I cannot wait to work collaboratively with him over many years to deliver the services, the infrastructure, the amenities that the folks in the outer west need and deserve. We know that by-elections are never an easy race, but what I do know is, having campaigned alongside John this January, he is up to the task of fighting for the people of Werribee, and that is exactly what they need and deserve and will get in John Lister.

This motion seeks to refer both the Werribee and Prahran by-elections to an inquiry by the Electoral Matters Committee, and I have to say I support this motion wholeheartedly. Like so many of my colleagues and those opposite, I was out on the booths in Werribee on the day of the by-election – at Iramoo Primary School in fact – and throughout election day I heard from so many folks who were out volunteering on the day about some of the shocking conduct that they were seeing during this by-election. At the Manor Lakes booth, one of the busiest booths in the Werribee by-election, there was a Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) employee who was supposed to be independent and impartial, and that person was allegedly telling people to vote for the Liberal candidate.

I also want to note, and I just find this incredible because in my experience most of the VEC staff do everything they can to be totally impartial – they do not want to look at you, they do not want to talk to you; we cannot even use the bathrooms in many instances – that this same volunteer was seen out speaking to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and former Premier Jeff Kennett, telling them she hoped they would win. Can you believe that? It does not matter whether you are in government or not in government, that kind of thing is absolutely amazing.

**A member** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** That is right. It is absolutely not on. It is inappropriate. Regardless of your political leanings, I think that we can all agree that this is extremely concerning behaviour in a VEC official – a person who has been charged with the responsibility of conducting these elections, of assisting voters, of managing and counting votes behaving in such a partisan manner. If this was the

other way round, those opposite would be saying, 'I know exactly the same thing,' and rightly so. It is not on.

We also saw other I think strange behaviour by VEC volunteers throughout the day. I heard from volunteers who were kept waiting for half an hour after the polls were closed so that VEC staff could take a half-hour meal break. I do not think anyone here would deny staff who had been working all day the chance to grab something to eat, to go to the bathroom, after polls had closed after the last few voters have cast their votes. But to actually go ahead and lock out scrutineers for half an hour whilst votes are potentially left unattended is something that we need to think about, and it is cause for alarm. That is half an hour when scrutineers cannot see the ballot boxes and ensure that they have not been tampered with. I do not want to veer into the realm of election conspiracy theories – we are not the Republican Party – but this does create major anxieties and uncertainties over the conduct of vote-counting processes, and scrutineers should be allowed to be in the room.

We also saw major delays in vote counting, which took place all night. We know that the last counts to be returned on the night were at 12:45 in the morning. That is hours and hours and hours of counting, and on some booths I know that scrutineers had been there so long that the school gates had closed. Can you believe that? The school gates were closed, and they had to then jump over the fences to get out. Imagine that: scrutineering all night for hours only to be locked in the school. I certainly hope those volunteers, some of whom were some of our wonderful young Labor team, consider making submissions to the committee recounting the things that they saw throughout this by-election and the issues that they had with how it was conducted. We always need to look for ways to improve, and the VEC are no different.

This inquiry is also going to look at the issues surrounding turnout at these by-elections. I know that previous speakers to this motion on both sides of the chamber have talked about that. The way in which elections are conducted matters. It does not just matter here in this place; it matters to the broader Victorian public. It is a serious matter. All Victorians, no matter their political stripes or leanings, should have faith in the integrity of their vote and the impartiality and independence of the VEC in conducting elections. It is for these reasons that I commend the motion to the house.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (16:19): I rise to make a contribution on this motion regarding the referral of the by-elections for the districts of Prahran and Werribee to the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) for consideration and report. I am moved to do so because of the contribution made by the member for Brighton actually. The member for Brighton raised an issue regarding registration of campaign workers, and he alleged in his contribution that we are talking about big government in that circumstance retaining data about campaign workers. I do not know if there was a specific regulation put in place for the purposes of those by-elections. I do not know whether there was actually a head of power for the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to compel campaign workers, and if there was not, then of course that is not appropriate. But I would say to the general proposition that the member for Brighton takes such strong disagreement with that we absolutely should as a Parliament be ensuring that there is accountability for those workers who, as part of the electoral process, present themselves to voters at voting places. Those campaign workers have a special responsibility in our democracy to conduct themselves with a degree of integrity and a degree of decency.

I have to say, whether it is the clowns to the left of me, the socialists, or whether it is the jokers to the right, the Freedom Party, there are participants in Victoria's democratic processes who actually do not believe in those processes. There are participants in Victoria's democratic processes who actively seek to undermine those processes. On the polling lines – and I refer back particularly to the 2022 general election – we saw all sorts of just rank behaviour. I know over in the west the member for Footscray had to deal with the Victorian Socialists behaving in an appalling fashion. I know that my polling booths in Ringwood had to deal with the Freedom Party behaving in an appalling fashion. We also had to deal with Liberal Party volunteers behaving in an appalling fashion. I was assaulted by the Liberal candidate's husband during the course of the 2022 general election, and it was just disgusting conduct, outrageous conduct.

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The problem that the VEC have presently is that they do not have a set of enforcement powers – they do not have a suspension power, they do not have an identification power – and they remain sort of toy soldiers in the electoral movement, where they purport to be able to do things but actually have no real power, no real grunt and no real ability to ensure that polling places are free from harassment, hate speech and a whole bunch of things that we frequently talk about in this place as being really, really important. I think it is entirely appropriate for the EMC, in considering the processes implemented by the Victorian Electoral Commission, to consider whether any campaign or identification process was implemented and, if it was, whether it worked and whether there was an appropriate statutory or regulatory head for the exercise of that power.

*Members interjecting.*

**Will FOWLES:** No, that is fine. I am just asking them to consider it, boys; calm down. I am asking whether the EMC ought to consider that and, in doing so, turn their minds to what happens next. The general election is not that far away, some 20 months away, I think, and we should turn our minds to whether campaigners ought not to be so much identified but identifiable. That is, in the event of a complaint, is there not a mechanism by which people can be identified? We saw this a bit in the 2022 general election, when the cookers, the Freedom Party and their mad associates, would turn up en masse to a polling place, harass me and my campaign staff, harass Greens party members and their staff and then scoot off really quickly before complaints could be filed and before we could actually get action out of staff. We even had that nutter who ran for the seat of Mulgrave – we even had his people turning up to our polling place to vote absentee, wearing their campaign shirts, wearing them into the polling place, in clear violation of the rules. But by the time polling staff finally realised they needed to act on that, the people involved had fled the scene.

It is not important that government keep tabs on who is or who is not participating in the democratic process – I do not think anyone in this chamber is necessarily going to support that – but identifiability is different to being identified and having records kept on you by, to use the member for Brighton's somewhat hysterical phrase, big government. I think it is far better that we do, though, have a system of registering campaigners so that they cannot be at a public place handing out material for a political party if they are not registered with the VEC. That would ensure some accountability.

Another thing I would encourage the EMC to consider and one of the things we were in the process of considering when I chaired that august committee is whether or not we ought to limit the number of campaign workers at any given polling place. It is one of the challenges we have, and I am sure Liberal members in this place will be pleased, with the possibility of the teal countdown down in the Scottocracy of Kooyong, that we could cut down from 120 hander-outers and maybe get it down to 20 or 15 or maybe 10. The Libs were outnumbered 10 to one down at Kooyong in the 2022 federal general election, and I am sure they would love to see that particular trend constrained. Yes, there is a matter of reasonableness and the need to be able to demonstrate to voters that you have a broad-based body of support.

What we have now are polling places that are so intimidating to so many that people are choosing to vote early. That means that we are our own enemy there as practitioners of politics. We are our own enemy because the environment we present to voters in polling places is in fact so hostile, so awful and so challenging that people do not vote there at all. Then you lose the opportunity to engage with that voter whatsoever, because if they are a voter – and there are thousands of them in my electorate – that lives in a secure apartment block or if they are a voter who is on the silent roll, you simply have no ability to engage with them. We would all hope in this place that we would at least have the ability to engage with voters and at least have the opportunity to engage with voters.

One of the reasons why I think this is so important is that the safety, the approachability and the experience of the voter when being in a polling place is absolutely critical to the important democratic tenet of people casting an informed vote. So often we answer questions in polling places. Yes, at times there can be spirited debate between campaign workers or candidates and campaign workers. I

appreciate that. We never want it to get out of hand, like the sort of disgusting conduct that was meted my way in 2022. What we do want is the opportunity to be able to have those conversations, that civil discourse, with voters. For as long as we as parties in this place, as political practitioners, allow polling places to be hostile environments for normals, for people who do not practise politics – for as long as that is the case – we will continue to have this nexus between the representatives and the people they represent continuing to be eroded. If there is a flaw in modern parliamentary democracy, it is the erosion of that nexus, the erosion of that link between the represented and the representative. For as long as we make polling places hostile environments – nearly alien environments – we will continue to reduce the opportunities we have to engage with voters in civil discourse, to put our views about what the future of the state ought to be and to put our views about what the future of our communities ought to look like. These are very, very important matters. It is important then that we address the safety and the approachability and the reasonable engagement that ought to be protected by polling places that are appropriately regulated.

The VEC has a range of cultural issues. I have absolutely no doubt of that, and I hope that the EMC tackles those matters head on. I hope that the EMC does that without the shadow of partisan advantage infecting their thinking, because I think we have seen examples of that in the past as well. It is absolutely critical that the VEC does better. It is also critical that we put in place a set of rules that allow us as professional practitioners of politics and allow us as people who want to put a view to citizens to put it in a reasoned way and a civil way. The onus then is on us. The rules ought to be created by us to deliver up a system that is better not just for us as practitioners but, most importantly, a system that is better for voters, better for our constituents and better for the very people that we are put in this place to represent.

**Matthew GUY (Bulleen)** (16:29): I will be prompt because I know the chamber needs to be. First of all, I want to say that unlike previous speakers I am not going to be so polite. Secondly, I want to congratulate the minister for bringing this motion to the chamber and then to the committee. I think the minister has moved this motion for a reason, an important reason.

All of us as members of Parliament should put our political parties aside. As members of Parliament, we need an electoral commission that operates utterly impartially. I know a number of members from all sides will have examples where they have heard things on election day or otherwise. My comments are not about election day workers at all. Many of those workers are people who also work for the Australian Electoral Commission as much as the Victorian Electoral Commission, and I think the AEC does an exceptionally good job. My comments are about the VEC leadership and particularly a previous inquiry where the VEC was referred to the Electoral Matters Committee and were utterly hostile to all members of that inquiry, particularly the former commissioner Warwick Gately and the head of communications Sue Lang.

They had a lot of questions to answer for given their utterly partial behaviour at the 2022 election, for which those two individuals should be referred to the anti-corruption commission under electoral interference for misconduct in public office. It is wrong that those people have not been the subject of an own-motion inquiry for one of our investigatory bodies to look at their conduct as supposedly senior members of the Victorian Electoral Commission who utterly politicised their position during the last state election. They were utterly hostile to all members – Liberal, Labor and otherwise – of the Electoral Matters Committee when we asked them to come and present themselves to that committee after the last election.

I congratulate the minister and all members who have spoken so far for saying we want the VEC, albeit under a different commissioner, to answer for some of the complete incompetence that occurred during the Werribee and Prahran by-elections. I would urge the Electoral Matters Committee not to stop there but to again go back and ask why the VEC's head of communications would offer up an interview to Neil Mitchell in the middle of an election and then say:

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But in fact I would offer that it was the Liberal Party's response to my interview that kept the negative media going for several days.

That is what an operative, a senior member of staff of a supposedly impartial body established to count votes and manage the conduct of elections, said during the last state election inquiry. That person could say it against the Liberal Party, the Labor Party, anyone in the future. They should not be saying it against any political party.

It is important for us as MPs in this chamber to ensure that that body are doing their job impartially in every circumstance and, I might add, competently, because what we saw in 2022 was utter incompetence, and there was again utter incompetence at both the Werribee and Prahran by-elections for members on both sides, with very important and relevant examples of that. I cannot say enough: whether it is losing votes in Bass or telling people how to vote in Eltham at the last state election or the examples that both sides have mentioned during the two by-elections, it is utterly improper.

The leadership of the Victorian Electoral Commission is so discredited after the actions of the former commissioner Warwick Gately and the head of communications Sue Lang, who should never occupy independent positions like this again because we cannot have those people being trusted for Labor or Liberal, the Nationals or the Greens or anyone in this chamber. We need an independent body. I urge the committee in its reference – which the minister has correctly done in this chamber – to look at either abolishing or removing the VEC from future by-elections or elections in this term coming up, to employ the AEC – because the AEC and VEC have the same workers on the ground – to manage the next election and to either utterly abolish or review the operations of the VEC as part of the recommendations of this committee, because they have shown from the last state election that their actions – particularly those of the two individuals I have mentioned – were utterly improper. I thank the minister again for bringing this motion to the house and for all parties for vocally supporting it.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (16:33): I will say on behalf of the Greens that we support this referral to the Electoral Matters Committee. I will take this opportunity before I begin to congratulate the victors of the two by-elections, Rachel Westaway and John Lister, for their successes. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the many unsuccessful candidates. I would particularly single out the Greens: Angelica Di Camillo in Prahran and Rifai Raheem in Werribee. Notwithstanding the comments and the terms of reference, which are appropriate, I know that the Victorian Electoral Commission and their staff do need to be thanked for their hard work.

I want to focus now on the second point in the terms of reference, which is voter turnout. I want to start with a couple of numbers to draw attention to this. In 2022 in Werribee turnout was about 85.5 per cent, and that dropped to 79.9 – almost 80 per cent – a couple of weeks ago. In Werribee in 2022 there were just over 1500 absentee votes compared to 72 at the recent by-election. Now contrast those figures to Prahran. Remember that turnout in Werribee dropped by about 5.5 per cent. In Prahran turnout was about 83 per cent in 2022 and just over 68 per cent earlier this month. Absentee votes were about 3500 in 2022 and 79 at the by-election. So turnout dropped by about 5.5 per cent in Werribee, and it dropped by about 14.5 per cent in Prahran. Absentee votes dropped by about 1500 in Werribee and by about 3500 in Prahran. In Prahran there were 7500 fewer voters, and almost half of them were the missing absentee votes. Antony Green wrote about this:

... turnout is always lower at by-elections.

And it is always substantially lower in geographically small high rental electorates like Prahran.

If you look at the Prahran electorate, 57 per cent of people in Prahran are renters. That is higher than Germany, at 52 per cent. Prahran is also one of the smallest electorates, at 11 square kilometres. Werribee is 32 per cent renters, which is actually still above the Victorian state average of 25 per cent, and it is almost 340 square kilometres.

It turns out Antony Green wrote about this 10 years ago. In October 2014 he wrote an article, 'A comment on New South Wales by-election turnouts'. He listed all the reasons for the low turnout in

small inner-city electorates with a lot of renters. Briefly, people in those electorates who move house in the inner city are more likely to cross an electoral boundary compared to those who move house in larger country electorates. If you move 5 kilometres, you will probably still be in Werribee, but you certainly will not be in Prahran anymore. People who move are often unaware that they have moved across a state electoral boundary. It is common for people to name their municipality when you ask them their state electorate. Let us face it, folks, we are not the most famous people in Victoria, and our electorates and our electoral boundaries are perhaps not as well known as they should be. More renters in an electorate means more recent arrivals to that electorate who may not be aware of their new electorate and may not have updated their enrolment.

Finally, absentee voting is not available in by-elections unless you happen to have moved from Prahran to Werribee or vice versa. If you are out of the area on polling day you cannot vote. Renters and more mobile younger people are therefore less likely to vote in by-elections and therefore to have their views represented in the result. When I was doorknocking in Prahran we came across quite a few homes where the names on the roll were not the names of the people currently living at that house. We know many renters moved out of Prahran without updating the roll, and most of their homes are not empty, so others have moved in and presumably mostly not voted. Given problems with access and awareness, it seems that many people would have a reasonable excuse, by the way, for not voting, and I would hope that they are not fined.

So those moving house are more likely to be younger and renters and to have different political views which are under-represented in by-elections. The Electoral Matters Committee need to consider whether they regard this as important. I think it is, and I hope that the Electoral Matters Committee will look at what practically can be done to alleviate it. We expect some lower turnout, and lower turnout would be fine if the people who did not vote were just the same politically as the people who did. But when there is a systematic difference between voters and non-voters in by-elections, then there is a systematic bias in the results. That is a problem that the Electoral Matters Committee should try and fix.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

**Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (16:39): I rise to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This bill marks the third bill of this type in the last several years, where the government has sought to make changes to various acts through an omnibus bill. The bill before the house today includes almost 40 proposals across 16 different acts and multiple ministerial portfolios. The bill includes various departments and agencies, identifying issues within their areas of responsibility, for which they have sought changes and improvements.

Within the bill we are debating today there are a number of objectives within the pieces of legislation as such. The bill aims to support effective and efficient regulation, promote consistency with other legislation and existing government policies, streamline processes and reduce administrative burdens for government, business and individuals and make a number of other minor updates and corrections to existing legislation.

The government claims the bill will streamline regulations, reduce administrative burdens and enhance economic productivity by making it easier to do business in Victoria. On this side of the house we are always looking to see a reduction in red tape and an improvement in efficiency to remove that burden from businesses across the state. There is no evidence that this government has done anything but

increase regulatory burden. We know that businesses are doing it really tough amid rising costs of doing business. Red tape and regulatory complexity are commonly raised as enormous barriers. Victoria has been labelled the worst jurisdiction in the country to open a new business because of high property taxes, energy costs and the amount of regulatory burden and complex red tape. As an example, cafes, childcare operators and retailers have to apply for more licences here than in any other state. This bill is a missed opportunity to do so much more to support businesses and improve efficiencies.

Part of the bill refers to the Essential Services Commission Act 2001. Currently under the act itself there is no explicit limitation period for commencing civil penalty proceedings. The bill will set a six-year period for the Essential Services Commission to commence civil penalty proceedings. It is understood that through this six-year period the ESC can undertake investigations and commence civil proceedings that are necessary to promote the long-term interests of Victorian consumers and oversee regulated industries across the state. This amendment will see the act being brought in line with other legislative frameworks for regulators who have an enforcement role in commencing and conducting proceedings in relation to civil penalty proceedings.

Another amendment the bill makes is to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023. The minister will be allowed to redact confidential or commercially sensitive information when responding to requests from anyone who has paid the prescribed fee for a copy of a work plan or work plan variation that was registered immediately before the commencement of the new duty-based regime.

Another amendment is to the Environment Protection Act 2017. Under these amendments the Environment Protection Authority Victoria will be allowed to pursue a business or business owner when a vehicle owned by that business has been used to illegally dump waste. I am sure like many other electorates, we are seeing more and more illegal dumping of waste. I have seen in recent times people taking photos of people who are dumping waste in public spaces and posting them to social media. This is basically a name and shame. Often you will find that people dump waste in secluded areas, such as in the bush. We all have a part to play in protecting our natural environment by deterring this type of behaviour.

Currently under the Environment Protection Act the EPA can pursue the owner of a vehicle. I am sure this has been the case for some time; the act itself was first legislated back in 2017. However, the EPA have been restricted in pursuing companies that are deliberately dumping waste as a business practice. So hopefully going forward, after the bill's passage, the EPA will be able to pursue these companies that seek to go beyond the law and illegally dump waste.

A valid concern about the bill is the expansion of liability for waste management businesses under EPA's act with minimal consultation with key stakeholders, leaving industry stakeholders uncertain about compliance and potential impacts. This bill will also allow the commissioner for environmental sustainability to undertake paid external work, which raises concerns about conflicts of interest and a potential dilution of the commissioner's full-time commitment to environmental sustainability.

The bill will also allow for local government across the state to better manage the potential risks posed by dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds of dogs. The bill makes amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1984 which will require owners of dogs to notify their local council if their dog dies or is relocated. This will ensure that local councils have accurate and current details in order for compliance and enforcement activities. In addition to this amendment, the bill will also simplify the processes involved for individuals and organisations who are required to register their dogs. For example, dog trainers, dog breeders and similar types will be able to request that their registration be revoked and therefore no longer need to pay an annual fee, which addresses an oversight that means currently their registration can be revoked only in cases of noncompliance.

The bill will also clarify the powers of the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to authorise a principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to exercise their various powers in relation to protective intervention and protection orders or relevant orders with respect to Aboriginal children as well as any of their non-Aboriginal siblings. By making this amendment, the bill will clarify the intent of previous amendments made to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, which authorised an Aboriginal agency to exercise certain powers and functions with respect to Aboriginal children and their non-Aboriginal siblings by deeming them to be a class of children. These changes are important and needed given the diversity of families and avoid delay to child protection investigations that would result from individual authorisations. I had a very close friend, Aunty Faye Lynam, who was a proud Yorta Yorta woman, who passed away in 2023. Aunty Faye was from the stolen generation, and she had so much compassion and care for out-of-home children. Aunty Faye fostered over 30 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, many out of child protection, and played a significant role in so many children's and families' lives. She often said it was a difficult system that had many challenges and needed change.

The second objective of this bill is to promote consistency with other legislation and existing government policies. The bill amends the Service Victoria Act 2018 to address a gap in legislative coverage in Service Victoria's ability to charge fees for the services it provides to Victorians. Currently Service Victoria charges customer fees where it is required through existing legislation, like applying for a working with children check or paying for car registration. I note that the amendment states that it will not affect fees for existing customer services; however, it does say in the second-reading speech that before any fee can be set there will be mandatory public consultation as part of the regulation-making process, leaving the gate open for imposing fees. The bill does enable government agencies to introduce new fees for services and also removes the ability to issue refunds for certain payments, which could impose additional financial burdens on businesses and individuals.

The bill also amends the Adoption Act 1984 following recommendations from various inquiries and reviews. The Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety will be able to disclose adoption information in response to a court order, subpoena or request from a royal commission. In addition, the amendments made to the Adoption Act will give the secretary access to adoption information held by Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria. This follows the Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry back in 2021 into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria. Currently the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety can request access on a case-by-case basis, which creates unnecessary burden.

The bill also amends the Housing Act 1983, and that will save registered housing agencies from being required to provide bank account details to the housing register for inclusion into the register of housing agencies. The Essential Services Commission: through amendments the bill makes to the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the ESC will be enabled to make determinations later in that year. The bill will also remove the requirement of licensees who are authorised to sell electricity to report on how many small renewable energy generation facilities sold electricity to them and how much electricity the licensee bought.

The bill also makes a number of minor updates and corrections to existing legislation. The bill removes several minor technical errors and references to superseded terminology and provisions contained in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023.

In addition, the bill updates the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 to reflect the provisions for which a civil penalty order can be made by the courts to reflect new provisions introduced by the Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Act 2022. Just on the circular economy, the container deposit scheme is having a significant impact on my local community. FOOTT Waste's Shepparton depot continues to lead from the front, being the fifth most popular drop-off location in the state and the second-highest in regional Victoria. I am hoping I am ahead of the member for Pascoe Vale, who also actually raised his significant numbers.

After much delay in making this a reality by the government, people are doing their bit for return of investment by recycling their containers for the betterment of the environment.

The bill is wide reaching, covering many different portfolios and various departments and agencies, identifying issues within those departments and seeking some improvement. However, it is very much hit and miss.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (16:49): Bills like this are important. Regulatory legislation amendment bills make sure that we are continuously undertaking regulatory reform so that Victoria is a better place to live, to work and to do business. We are fine-tuning and finessing all the time, and it is important to do so because society changes and legislation needs to change – as does any business. I heard some barbed comments coming from those opposite at times about these changes, but on the whole, there is not a business that thrives or exists well that does not change its policies and procedures, review them, modernise and try to find better ways of doing things. That is exactly what we are doing here, and I think it is really important.

This bill amends 14 acts of Parliament to provide simple, straightforward and uncontroversial improvements to legislation. The ones that I would like to speak about today are amendments to the Environment Protection Act 2017, amendments to the Adoption Act 1984, amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and amendments to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021, because I know these will all have an impact. All the changes will have an impact across Monbulk, but these are the ones that are particularly close to me.

The Environment Protection Authority Victoria, through this bill, should it be passed – we cannot anticipate things – is now going to be able to charge a business or business owner where a vehicle registered to that business has been used to illegally dump waste. It has been interesting to listen to the contributions around the chamber today from all sides, because clearly it is not just in my electorate where this is an issue. But we definitely do have problems with illegal dumping of waste. We have had it in our parks, we have it on our roads. At night when it is dark and sometimes there are not many cars around there are some taking the opportunity to dump not small amounts. This is not coming from someone's house; these are large quantities from multiple places. Someone is likely making quite a bit of money from dumping that waste in our public areas and our parks, and it is appalling.

I have had residents outraged about it, and I have been outraged too. I am really pleased that in Wellington Road lots of waste got cleaned up relatively quickly and in Bobs Park the issue has been addressed. All that dumped waste – and we are not just talking about rubble either but about chemicals, asbestos and other horrible stuff; it was in the papers last year – has been cleaned up. Bobs Park, which is no longer functioning, has been closed with a hard barrier. They cannot get in there anymore, and that is delightful. But what is really great is that, if the EPA now catch anyone in a vehicle, by tracking the licence plate they are able to impose penalties on the business. That is fantastic, because there is no greater deterrent than thinking you might be on the hook for the money for what is going on. So they should be, because the cost to clean up dumped waste is unbelievable. It is terrible. It is a cost impost that none of us should have to bear. Businesses should be doing the right thing and making sure they manage their waste. This is a great way to ensure that they will think twice about doing what they have been doing up until now.

There is another act that I want to speak about because it is one that is close to my heart, and that is the Adoption Act. I missed the member for Nepean's contribution but heard many speak of it, and I have a similar story in my family. My father found out that he was adopted at the age, I think, of about 59. He had long suspected that his father was not his biological father. He was never able to ask his mother, because he was worried it would hurt her. But after his mother passed away the truth came out. Although this legislation would not have helped him, because he was adopted in another country, back in Italy, I feel real empathy for those who are trying to find their natural relatives and biological relatives, because for dad there was a yearning all his life. He felt that his father was not his biological father, and he did not love him any less when he found out actually; he probably loved him even more

because he had been such a beautiful father to him for so many years. But the connection, when he found his relatives back in Italy – we went over there and met them – was astounding. It is where I discovered where my nose is from, and it makes so much more sense now because I saw them all and thought, ‘We are related.’ I ended up with an extra eight aunts and uncles and a multitude of cousins. They were a bit miffed that I was the eldest. I am too because I would have preferred to have probably been a bit younger than someone else, but that is okay. I can manage with that.

This Adoption Act will make a real difference, and it will impact people’s lives. At first blush, some may think regulatory amendments cannot be that interesting. Well, these changes have an impact and do make a difference to people’s lives. There are no bells and whistles necessarily with things that have a profound impact, but this really will because this will allow the secretary to comply with a court order to produce documents and court proceedings and from a royal commission, which is currently not permitted. This is the important part that I was talking to: this bill will allow natural relatives to access identifying information about the adopted person to enable them to identify or connect with them, and that is critical. It is important on many levels for people to understand where they have come from, but there is also the big question that can be posed to by doctors when you present: ‘What is your family’s medical history?’ For people who have been adopted, they cannot answer that question without knowing it, so this can aid people in that as well.

It is a really important amendment too that will help people impacted by forced adoptions, including stolen generations, to connect with their biological family. There is a yearning. My father had a yearning, and it is a fundamental human need to understand who your people are, where you are from and who you are connected to, and that has been denied to them through absolutely no fault of their own. But there is balance with this too, because the amendments to this act will allow the secretary to refuse to disclose certain formation where they reasonably believe it may jeopardise someone’s life or physical safety or cause them harm, and that is a critical reform which means we can better protect individuals when there is a potential risk of family violence. There has been real careful consideration here, which I am pleased to see.

There are a couple of other changes I want to talk about. I am looking at the clock and I am probably not going to get a chance to talk about the Domestic Animals Act, but I concur with everyone about dangerous dogs. They are an issue. We have all walked somewhere where there is that dog along the fence line who barks and makes your heart jump out of your mouth. The reforms here I think will go quite a way to ensuring that when dangerous dogs move from one LGA into another, we know about it.

The one I really want to talk about is the circular economy, because waste reduction and recycling is quite close to my heart. I have to say we are a bit excited in the hills because we got our first reverse vending machine in Cockatoo only a few weeks ago. It is excellent. We are so excited, because the hills are not conducive to big machines that require a very level surface. It has been wonderful to see this reverse vending machine in Cockatoo, but I have to give a particular shout-out to Emerald SES, because they have one of Return-It’s –

**A member** interjected.

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** They are legends at Emerald SES. They have one of the most successful over-the-counter container deposit scheme (CDS) collections in Return-It’s entire catchment. The volunteers at Emerald SES are going gangbusters with this, and here are some of the benefits that perhaps were not anticipated before this was introduced. Not only is the community connecting with their SES more than they ever have before, because they can bring their containers and either donate them or get some money, they have managed to increase their volunteer numbers there, because people have turned up and seen that this is a place they are welcome to visit and that it is open and approachable. There are friendly faces ready to collect their bottles and their cans and give them some money for them or accept the donation for themselves, and people are feeling more connected in that community with Emerald SES. They were legends before they started this, and they are even more

legendary now for what they have been doing there. They are an absolute success story, and it has been wonderful to see, so I have got to say this Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 is fundamentally important on so many levels.

Obviously talking about the CDS makes me very excited, but the Adoption Act, which I was speaking about previously – before you were in the chair, Speaker – is quite significant. It really will change people's lives – those affected, those who have been adopted or are related to people who have been adopted. If my father's family back in Italy had had the chance to track him down through legislation like this, his story and his journey would have been rather different, and he would have probably been able to meet his own biological father before he himself passed away. That was the tragedy in Dad's story; he never got to meet him. But that is how I know that this will have a significant impact on many, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (16:59): Thank you, Speaker, for coming in to listen to my groundbreaking contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, another of this government's omnibus bills that makes serious changes to various acts. The majority of these are administrative, so I will not go into great detail, although I would have loved to.

*Members interjecting.*

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Come on in, guys, because some of the changes include how the EPA can penalise those who dump waste. This is a big topic for most of us. My office has heard from so many constituents about an increase in rubbish being dumped along roadsides and outside properties as well as issues accessing landfills across the electorate. All it takes is a look at some of our region's community noticeboards to see the issue. Seymour, Kilmore, Euroa – it does not matter what town you look at, issues with rubbish and a lack of accountability to clean it up is a problem in our towns. This comes as –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of the remaining items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

#### **Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

**Assembly divided on question:**

**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, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari,

Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And Michael O'Brien's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the Allan Labor government:

- (a) urgently considers additional options, including those available to Victoria Police, as a practical means of tackling antisocial and vilifying behaviours; and
- (b) consults further with Victoria's faith groups, including the Jewish and Islamic communities, who have warned the government that the proposed 'genuine political purpose' defence to incitement will damage social cohesion in this state.'

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Malvern has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Malvern should vote no.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*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, Maree Edwards, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

## ADJOURNMENT

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

### Question agreed to.

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time, government amendments 1 and 2 be agreed to and the bill be now read a third time.

### Assembly divided on question:

*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, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

### Question agreed to.

### Read second time.

#### *Circulated amendments*

### Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 4, page 5, lines 10 to 13, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Clause 9, page 16, lines 3 and 4, omit "and teaching" and insert "teaching, preaching and proselytising".

#### *Third reading*

### Motion agreed to.

### Read third time.

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

### Business interrupted under sessional orders.

#### *Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### North East Link

**Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:12): (1021)** My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Environment. I ask the minister to require the Environment Protection Authority Victoria to provide real-time updates to air quality at all the locations along the North East Link. At the moment residents

in both the City of Manningham and the City of Banyule are provided with intermittent updates, which are quite delayed – some months delayed. Particularly along that construction route you have a number of schools such as Trinity, Marcellin, a number of primary schools and Catholic schools like St Martin of Tours in Rosanna. You have suburbs like Watsonia, Macleod, Yallambie, of course Bulleen on my side of the Yarra River and a lot of residents who live very close to the construction works. They deserve to have accurate up-to-date information about air quality readings that are published online that they can access so that people have clear information where they can make appropriate decisions about what the actual air quality at that construction site is. There really is not any excuse. This material is collated. It is obtained. They should be operating all the time. It is only fair for those residents and for those parents who are sending their children to those schools and for the kids that are using those sporting grounds both on weekends and after school on weekdays that they are provided with that information.

For the many, many Melburnians who use in the north-east the trails in the Banyule Flats on the north side of the river in the City of Banyule and on my side around the City of Manningham and those who are using them around Birrarung Park, do those areas have air quality readings that are safe and that are within range? We know we can find them at the touch of a screen. That material is available. I ask the minister to intervene and require the EPA to find that information, put it on their site and allow all of those residents the available information so that they know whether or not the North East Link construction is meeting the air requirements that they should be required to attain.

**Preston electorate water infrastructure**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (17:14): (1022) My adjournment is for the Minister for Water, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to the Melbourne Water site on High Street in Reservoir to discuss the use of their landholdings across our area. As some members might know, the suburb of Reservoir is actually named Reservoir because it was the site of Melbourne's first service reservoir, which was constructed back in 1863 as part of the original Yan Yean pipeline, and of course that pipeline and that service reservoir complex continue to operate today. The pipeline runs down Cheddar Road and along St Georges Road down into the city, and then we have a very large pipe that comes into our part of the world from the Maroondah Reservoir and runs from Norris Bank Primary under a long linear reserve that is well known up in that north-eastern corner of Reservoir. Then there are also pipes that branch off underneath JC Donath Reserve to head in the direction of the St Albans Reservoir and then another well-known reserve, where the pipe that heads across to Coburg and Essendon goes underneath West Preston in the Regent linear reserve.

I thank the CEO of Melbourne Water Dr Nerina Di Lorenzo and Vix Penko and all their team for the work they do to maintain all of that very important water infrastructure, which lets us all turn on our taps and have showers and so forth, but also the good work they do to ensure good environmental outcomes there and to allow the public access to their landholdings where that is appropriate. It is to that particular end that I would love to chat to their team and to the minister.

The linear reserves in particular come up a lot when we are doorknocking. They are essentially just flat areas of grass, like most utility reserves are; people walk through them, often because they are a convenient shortcut, and I know particularly if you live in the Benambra and Grampian streets part of West Preston, they are a very significant shortcut. If you are getting down to Newlands Primary School with the children or heading down to the Coburg Hill shops it saves you 600 or 700 metres on your journey. One thing we might discuss is the fact that the gates there only have a very narrow gap. It is fine if you are walking, but if you are pushing a pram or particularly if you are in a wheelchair or some sort of mobility scooter you cannot get through the gate, and that does mean those people then have a much longer journey.

It would also be great to chat about some other ideas that get around the community – certainly converting more of the linear reserves and creek reserves into bike paths, which was touched on by our northern trails strategy; planting more trees along the existing Northern Pipe Trail, particularly

north of Preston station, where it is a bit sparser; and also potentially rerouting that Northern Pipe Trail, which is very popular, through the service reservoirs area, where it branches off from GE Robinson reserve. I know the minister knows our part of the world very well. I actually ran into her by coincidence in Surly's Bar on High Street over the summer break; she is well acquainted with our particular suburbs. She is an excellent Minister for Water, and I thank her for her consideration of this adjournment matter.

### Community safety

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (17:17): (1023) My adjournment tonight is for the Premier, and the action I am seeking is for the Premier to allow members of Boroondara police to attend the community safety forum I am hosting next month. Every day I am listening to my constituents, and many are telling me that they no longer feel safe in our community; indeed not a day goes by that I do not have a constituent contact me about their concerns when it comes to crime and community safety. This is a terribly sad indictment on the government's performance when it comes to one of its most sacred duties, which is to keep our citizens safe. Every Victorian has a right to feel safe in their own home and in their business.

I want to share some of the correspondence I have received of late that has prompted me to hold this forum and many to book for the forum. One resident said:

... I regret to inform you that we have experienced yet another incident of aggregated burglary on our street ... This marks the third such occurrence in under 12 months. Furthermore, over two separate nights last week we had a number of ... individuals casing homes, entering back yards ... It has been a very worrying week on our street.

Another resident, a mother of three who was luckily away at the time her home was targeted, wrote:

... last night my home was invaded by a group of males who stole the keys to our three vehicles.  
... I am just so distressed. I don't even want to return to our home. The police have been wonderful but there's only so much they can do with such ridiculously lenient laws ... I am scared for my children and how things could've gone so very differently if we were home.

A father from North Balwyn wrote to me, saying:

Many residents, including myself, feel increasingly unsafe ...

...

I understand that these issues are complex and require a balanced approach. However, the safety and well-being of our community should remain a priority.

Yet another wrote:

I have never before been concerned about safety but I am now.  
... my neighbours had a home invasion this week, they are traumatised.  
The service station at the end of my street has been held up recently.  
... my mothers house ... was broken into ...

Why are the victims rights to be safe ignored?

Premier, why are you not listening to these victims? Why have you allowed the pendulum to swing too far in favour of the perpetrators instead of community safety?

The latest crime statistics from the Crime Statistics Agency do not lie. Crime has reached the highest level on record in Victoria. Youth crime has also hit a 15-year high. The crime statistics in my own electorate paint an equally concerning picture. Crime in Boroondara from September 2023 to 2024 show that aggravated robbery is up 57 per cent, aggravated burglary is up 43 per cent, motor vehicle theft is up 27 per cent and theft from a retail store is up 33 per cent.

Under this Labor government bail is a revolving door for repeat offenders. The weakening of bail laws under this government is directly contributing to this worsening crime crisis every day. Premier, all I

am asking is you allow members of Boroondara police to attend the community safety forum so that residents can better understand what is happening in our area and what measures they can take to keep safe.

**Laburnum Primary School**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (17:20): (1024) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier in his capacity as the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Laburnum Primary School in Blackburn to see the newly completed classroom building. In the 2022–23 budget the government announced \$8.755 million in funding to upgrade and modernise the school. This funding has delivered a fantastic new two-storey building with 10 modern classrooms, creating better learning spaces for students and supporting teachers to deliver high-quality education. Can I congratulate the project architects, BCBA Studio; the builders, Newton Manor Constructions; the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association; and of course the Victorian School Building Authority, who have worked with the Laburnum school community to deliver a facility that the whole community can be proud of. This investment reflects the government’s commitment to ensuring every child has access to quality education in modern facilities. The Laburnum Primary School community is a wonderful community dedicated to providing the best opportunities for its students. With students now beginning to settle into the new building, I encourage the minister to visit and see firsthand how this investment is being put to great use.

**Maroondah Positive Education Network**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (17:22): (1025) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to reinstate the \$33,114 per annum funding that was recently withdrawn from the Maroondah Positive Education Network, a collaboration between the Maroondah City Council, the Maroondah Principals Network and the Department of Education. Maroondah City Council have recently contacted my office with great confusion as to why, after eight years of funding this incredible program, the funding was suddenly stopped just before Christmas, with no explanation and no time for any possible transition of the program.

This valuable program uses a system-based approach to build capability, connection and community to enable schools to create and maintain flourishing learning environments where relationships are important and other people matter. In 2021 the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System recognised the work of the Maroondah Positive Education Network, stating that:

... the schools ... in this network have made significant progress ... The Commission encourages the Victorian Government to continue to explore the potential to scale this program.

The Maroondah Positive Education Network has also drawn national and international attention over the years, so this funding is crucial for the ongoing delivery, sustainability and success of the program. Its benefits are for the more than 10,000 children and families in Maroondah. I again ask for the minister to reinstate the funding for this very important program.

**Enable**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (17:23): (1026) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to Enable in Broadmeadows. Enable is doing outstanding work in our community, driving economic growth, supporting the principles of the circular economy and contributing to a sustainable future. I first met Julie and the Enable team with the then mayor Cr Naim Kurt at the Buy Recycled expo at the Broadmeadows town hall, organised by Sustainability Victoria and Hume City Council, which showcased recycled product suppliers from across the region. I congratulate Hume for their support and commitment to the circular industry, which is expected to add \$903 million to the city’s economy and create 1500 jobs annually by 2040.

I was so excited to meet Julie and the team from Enable and hear about their wonderful social enterprise, employing local people, recycling laptops and other equipment and supplying these to people who struggle to afford laptops, all the things that make my heart sing – accessible jobs, social outcomes and saving resources from landfill, leading the way right here in Broadmeadows. And I will also finally have somewhere I can drop my old laptops that have been floating around the back of my car for quite some time. I have been waiting to visit for some time, and I would be very excited for the minister to join me and see the great work they do and how we can expand social enterprises and the circular economy across Victoria.

**Waterloo Road–Lloyd Street, Moe**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (17:24): (1027) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is a detailed explanation of why long-promised upgrades at the intersection of Waterloo Road and Lloyd Street in Moe have still not commenced. Some four years ago Moe residents were told this particular intersection was earmarked for upgrades, with an acknowledgement from Labor that it posed an unacceptable and persistent risk for road users. More than 13,500 vehicles cross the tracks at Waterloo Road and Lloyd Street every day, and there have been at least three serious crashes at the intersection in the last two years. Vehicles, including trucks and buses, frequently queue short-stacked across the train tracks, and it is no exaggeration to say that this current intersection could possibly be a death trap in waiting.

I stood in this place 15 months ago and asked the minister for an urgent update and was told preconstruction activities, including land acquisition and utility service relocations, would happen mid-2024. Given it is now 2025 and there is still no action at the intersection of Lloyd Street and Waterloo Road, Moe residents have justifiably expressed concerns about the project and when it will start. Residents have been waiting for these desperately needed upgrades that seem to be dragging on and on and on. Minister, the intersection has been identified as dangerous and needs to be addressed as a matter of utmost urgency.

In regional Victoria we are fed up with constantly hearing this Labor government boast about the level crossing removal projects in Melbourne while we scream and shout for some attention to the paid to our roads. If this government can remove 84 level crossings in Melbourne in five years, then surely it can get on with delivering one crucial safety upgrade to a single intersection in Moe that has been promised for four years. Minister, can you please explain to the people of Moe why works at the Lloyd Street intersection have not commenced?

**Pascoe Vale community safety**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:26): (1028) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Safety, and the action I seek is an update on the work being done by the Victorian Labor government to enhance community safety across my electorate. Every Victorian has the right to feel and be safe in their homes, their streets, their workplaces and their neighbourhoods. I commend and thank for their work all Victoria Police and emergency service personnel across the state, who work every day, 365 days a year, 24/7, to keep us safe. I also acknowledge all the housing, health and community workers, social workers and justice officials, who work daily with some of the most complex cases to keep us safe.

In this respect I am very proud to be part of a government that has continued to prioritise community safety, crime prevention and tackling the root causes of crime by a range of initiatives, including a record \$4.5 billion investment to support Victoria Police with the powers, tools and resources they need to keep us safe, and recruiting an additional 3600 Victoria Police officers since 2014, including 180 extra police officers allocated to Merri-bek and 21 specialist family violence police deployed to Merri-bek. We have introduced stronger bail laws which deliver tougher consequences for serious and repeat offenders, including for home invasion and aggravated burglary. We have introduced stronger laws to crack down on organised crime, outlaw motorcycle gangs, unexplained wealth, the illicit tobacco trade and illegal dangerous weapons such as machetes. We have modernised our youth justice

system to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 years of age and supported Victoria Police through Operation Trinity to crack down on and deter youth offending. We continue to support victims of crime and families of victims, and we continue to invest in those crime prevention and early intervention initiatives, all designed to tackle root causes of crime, whether it be housing, family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol issues, socio-economic disadvantage and others.

These initiatives ensure that my community of Merri-bek continues to experience overall lower crime rates and lower criminal incident rates than the state average. In this respect, I fully commend all of our local Victoria Police members for working 24/7 across Fawkner and Brunswick stations, including area commander Inspector Andrew Markakis and his whole team; Acting Sergeant Kristie Givney, who is taking ownership of Central Mall and Victoria Street Mall issues, leading a series of operations to respond to local safety concerns; Acting Sergeant Adam Biderman, who is leading safety initiatives across North Coburg and Newlands; Acting Senior Sergeant Mark Abela, who has taken a proactive approach to the removal of antisemitic slogans and offensive material across Merri-bek; and Sergeant Geoff Kwest, who is assessing all liquor licences. I commend all the officers involved in Operation Boston, dealing with car thefts, which has made nine arrests thus far.

On 3 April local police will be again hosting another Merri-bek community safety forum, which I again look forward to attending and encourage all residents to make time to come to. However, notwithstanding this work, there still remains a lot more to do to keep our community safe. A Pentridge Village community forum was held on 16 January, which I attended, as well as a Coburg traders forum on 30 January, which discussed some recent serious incidents that have impacted safety. Local residents greatly welcome ongoing support and action from government, police, social services and all stakeholders who respond to these matters and help us deter and prevent such incidents going into the future. That is why we will be working to establish a central Coburg revitalisation working group to bring together all relevant representatives to help support Coburg revitalisation matters and community safety initiatives, including a range of other measures, with stakeholders and with community to keep our community safe and to revitalise central Coburg as well.

**Elsternwick planning**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (17:29): (1029) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is for the minister to urgently intervene to stop Pace Development from overturning VCAT's decision on the Woolworths site in Elsternwick. Since 2018 residents have endured two extensive VCAT hearings spanning some 34 days. In the most recent hearings VCAT issued a permit with conditions, which were accepted by Pace Development. Residents of Glen Eira council also accepted that, even though some of the conditions were not ideal for some of the residents, who have been fighting against this development since 2018. Now we hear the developer wants to overturn VCAT's decision. The question really is: why have VCAT if in fact the developer has the ability to overcome that?

Some of the issues that they are attempting to overcome include increasing the number of apartments from 134 to 148; increasing the number of floors from three, which would add four storeys to the southern tower and an extra storey to the northern tower; increasing the number of living areas in the southern tower from nought to 13, which would impact the residential amenity of homes located in the nearby streets; and adding a right-hand turn from the supermarket car park, which would send 2500 cars per day through the planned Jewish cultural precinct, which was to close this off and to create a neighbourhood amenity, and that is at risk from these changes. It would also impact community safety by sending trucks through local suburban streets, like Sinclair Street, during the demolition and construction. The proposed changes fundamentally alter the conditions imposed by VCAT, which were designed to protect the local community's interests. Elsternwick residents will certainly learn their fate within weeks, and the minister's urgent intervention is required.

Residents have endured so much in this area. We are all for appropriate development, but overdevelopment is absolutely not on, and Elsternwick is jam-packed with towers and

overdevelopment. This particular community have really gone through far too much stress. They have had two lots of VCAT hearings. Enough is enough here, and I think it is time for the minister to intervene to ensure that she stands with residents to make the developer stop trying to overreach in a situation where the jury has been heard and VCAT's decision has been heard. Ultimately, why are we overturning a decision that VCAT has ruled on twice? So I urgently call on the Minister for Planning to overturn this decision and ensure the residents of Elsternwick and their best interests are heard.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (17:32): (1030) I think we all remember that part of that folklore movie that is in all our hearts when Darryl Kerrigan looked at his family and with great pride said, 'Dale dug a hole.' Not too dissimilar to that, in Burwood right now we have a hole that is getting bigger at the Burwood SRL East station. So my adjournment this evening is to ask the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Ms Shing in the other place, to come down and have a look at the tunnel boring shaft, which is 50 per cent completed, and work that is underway. As we all know, the SRL is not just a train project; it is about the future of our city. The SRL East is centred around the second-biggest employment sector in our state outside the CBD. It connects Monash Uni, where thousands and thousands of people come every day, to trains. It connects Deakin Uni, my old alma mater, to trains. It connects that employment sector, as I said. It also will allow us to put housing where we need to put housing, because the next generation are looking at the price of housing and we have to do more, and we are doing more. On top of that, it is still a train project and it will take cars off the roads. So maybe, just maybe, when this is finished in 2035, if Mr Kerrigan was still hanging around, he would not have to move the Cortina to get to the Camira to get to the Torana to get to the Commodore.

### Responses

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:34): The member for Bulleen, who I note has left the chamber, raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment. The action he seeks is that the EPA provide real-time updates on air quality during the construction of the North East Link. The member for Preston raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Water, and the action he seeks is that both the minister and Melbourne Water join him in High Street, Reservoir, to look at land reserves held by the water companies and to discuss ways in which they can be accessed and in which the utilisation of those reserves can occur. The member for Kew has a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action she seeks is in relation to a community safety forum that she is organising in her electorate. The member for Kew is still in the chamber, I note, accompanied by her little son.

The member for Box Hill is also in the chamber – excellent – and he has an action for the attention of the Minister for Education, and that is that the minister join him at Laburnum Primary School to see some recently completed works and to enjoy and see in action the benefits of the Allan Labor government's investment in education. The member for Croydon has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and that is to restore some funding to the Maroondah Positive Education Network. The member for Broadmeadows has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, and the action she seeks is that the minister join her out at Enable, which is an outstanding social enterprise in her electorate.

The member for Morwell, who, like me and you, Speaker, has a long journey after this long adjournment, has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action he seeks is that there is delivery of upgrades at an intersection in Moe that he wants to see finalised. The member for Pascoe Vale has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Safety. The action he seeks is an update on community safety initiatives that have been implemented to benefit his constituents. The member for Caulfield has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action he seeks is that the minister intervene to stop developers in his electorate seeking to overturn, yet again, decisions already made by VCAT. The member for Ashwood has a matter for the attention of the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop in the other place, and that is to come and join him and see

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the work that is well underway on SRL in his electorate and to see the benefits that fantastic multigenerational project will deliver in terms of housing, jobs and opportunities for the people of Ashwood.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Thank you to the clerks and attendants and parliamentary staff for their support this week. The house now stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:38 pm.**