

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 18 February 2026**



# CONTENTS

---

<b>PETITIONS</b>	
Firearms regulation .....	1
Northern Highway–Elmore-Raywood Road, Elmore .....	1
<b>BILLS</b>	
Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026 .....	1
Introduction and first reading .....	1
<b>PAPERS</b>	
Community petitions .....	2
Papers .....	2
<b>BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE</b>	
Notices .....	2
<b>MEMBERS STATEMENTS</b>	
Southern Metropolitan Region schools .....	2
Lunar New Year .....	3
Large animal incident rescue .....	3
Teacher workforce .....	3
Palestine .....	3
Clyde North schools .....	3
Medicinal cannabis .....	4
Sickle cell disease .....	4
Kyneton Women's Football Club .....	4
Narrarrang Primary School .....	5
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region multicultural communities .....	5
<b>PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS</b>	
Greater Avalon employment precinct .....	6
Construction industry .....	9
<b>COMMITTEES</b>	
Legal and Social Issues Committee .....	14
Reference .....	14
<b>QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS</b>	
Housing .....	29
Construction industry .....	30
Ministers statements: Pick My Park .....	31
Alcohol and other drug services .....	32
Construction industry .....	33
Ministers statements: Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion .....	34
Bushfires .....	34
Suburban Rail Loop .....	35
Ministers statements: kinder kits .....	36
Child protection .....	37
Construction industry .....	38
Ministers statements: transport infrastructure .....	39
Written responses .....	40
<b>CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS</b>	
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	40
Western Victoria Region .....	40
Eastern Victoria Region .....	40
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	41
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	41
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	41
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	41
Western Metropolitan Region .....	42
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	42
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	42
Northern Victoria Region .....	42
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	43
Eastern Victoria Region .....	43
Northern Victoria Region .....	43
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	43
Eastern Victoria Region .....	44
<b>COMMITTEES</b>	
Legal and Social Issues Committee .....	44

# CONTENTS

---

Reference.....	44
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	45
Reference.....	45
<b>MOTIONS</b>	
Construction industry .....	61
<b>BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE</b>	
Notices of motion and orders of the day .....	77
<b>STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS</b>	
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	77
Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne’s Public Housing Towers.....	77
Department of Transport and Planning .....	78
Report 2024–25 .....	78
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	79
Budget papers 2025–26 .....	79
Sustainability Victoria.....	80
Report 2024–25 .....	80
<b>PETITIONS</b>	
Waste and recycling management .....	81
<b>ADJOURNMENT</b>	
Construction industry .....	87
Planning .....	87
Climate change .....	88
Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix.....	88
Barmah-Shepparton Road .....	89
South Yarra Primary School road safety.....	89
Construction industry .....	90
Warrandyte road safety .....	90
Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix.....	91
Northern Metropolitan Region mental health services .....	91
Government performance .....	92
Country Fire Authority.....	92
Hill Top Golf & County Club .....	93
Macedon Ranges police resources.....	93
Vandalism .....	94
Responses .....	95

## PETITIONS

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

1

### Wednesday 18 February 2026

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

#### *Petitions*

##### **Firearms regulation**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 12,570 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Victorian Government's decision to undertake a review of Victoria's firearm laws which is to be conducted by former Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Mr Ken Lay AO APM.

Public pressure to act quickly may result in rushed or ineffective decisions. Victoria already has some of the strictest firearm laws in the nation and serious incidents have consistently involved failures in intelligence, monitoring or enforcement, often where individuals were already known to authorities, rather than gaps in legislation.

Ideologically driven or hasty changes risk unfairly penalising responsible, law-abiding firearm owners without improving public safety or reducing the risk of terrorism or serious crime.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to commit to enforcing existing firearm laws, including identifying gaps in compliance, enforcement and resourcing, ensure that the review of legislation is evidence-led and without a pre-determined assumption that further restrictions on lawful owners are required, reject any new firearm regulations unless there is clear, publicly available evidence that it will improve public safety, guarantee genuine consultation with law-abiding firearm owners, sporting and hunting organisations before any policy or legislative changes are drafted and ensure the review separates law-abiding firearms owners from acts of terror so the response is fair and proportionate.**

**Melina BATH:** As this petition qualifies for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on the next day of meeting.

##### **Northern Highway–Elmore-Raywood Road, Elmore**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 609 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the serious safety risks at the Northern Highway/Elmore-Raywood Road intersection, near the Elmore Bakery. This intersection is increasingly dangerous and as a major artery for long-haul cargo, livestock transport, and heavy farm machinery, and with the success of the Elmore Bakery, it has become a dangerous intersection.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently review the safety of the Northern Highway and Elmore-Raywood Road intersection in Elmore, consult with local residents and prioritise safety improvements.**

#### *Bills*

##### **Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026**

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

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:36): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 in relation to medical treatment for disabilities and other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**David ETTERSHANK:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers*

**Community petitions**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That the community petition 'Redevelopment of the Rosebud Hospital' be tabled.

**Leave refused.**

**Renee HEATH**: I move, by leave:

That the community petition 'Greater action on regulating and policing the use of jet skis' be tabled.

**Leave refused.**

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Ravenhall Correctional Centre: Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Prisoners – Part 2, February 2026 (*Ordered to be published*).

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendment C255.

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C413 (Part 1).

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendment C414.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme – Amendment C146.

Murrindindi Planning Scheme – Amendment C78.

*Business of the house*

**Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

*Members statements*

**Southern Metropolitan Region schools**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): Victoria is the Education State, and Labor want all of our children to receive a high-quality education. Programs such as our nation-leading, structured synthetic phonics program and our promotion of explicit teaching in the classroom are just two examples of how we prioritise education, and if you take a look at our NAPLAN results, they are having results and are improving our NAPLAN results. But we are also committed to ensuring that our kids have great school buildings to learn in. There are three schools that have got upgrades underway in the Southern Metropolitan Region: Gardenvale Primary School has just appointed a builder for their upgrade and modernisation project, upgrading and extending block A, fixing things like the library, improving the school administration and creating new learning workspaces; Hampton Primary School is in the design phase for the new gymnasium and performing arts centre and the relocation of modular classrooms and some infill classrooms in their B block; and we have Caulfield South Primary School, where a builder has been appointed, and some renders have just been released of what their new, competition-grade gymnasium will look like – a modernisation project giving students better physical education and performing arts spaces. We were at Narrarrang Primary School recently, with the Minister for Education, the member for Albert Park and Mr Berger, to look at the brand new primary school servicing the Fishermans Bend and Port Melbourne communities. The Allan Labor government supports students and teachers with better learning environments so they can fulfil their potential.

**Lunar New Year**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): Last weekend I was delighted to attend the lunar festival hosted by the Springvale Asian Business Association, known as SABA. The festival was a wonderful celebration of culture and community, bringing families, business owners and residents together to mark the Lunar New Year. I particularly thank the Springvale Asian Business Association because they continually organise a memorable event. With their ongoing dedication to businesses, they support the Springvale community. They have fought very hard to keep that community free of drugs and do not like having the needle and syringe program in their local area.

**Large animal incident rescue**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): I want to acknowledge and congratulate the Australian Horse Industry Council, AHIC, on the opening of Victoria's first nationally accredited large animal incident rescue, LAIR, which is a facility that has now started in Bendigo – a milestone following advocacy which I brought to this Parliament in November 2024. I particularly want to thank Mark Burnell, the president of AHIC, for his tireless efforts over the many years in making sure that we could get this important facility. This is a tangible step, providing the opportunity for the CFA, SES and other rescue first responders to respond to the needs of animals in great distress where they could save their lives.

**Teacher workforce**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): I also want to note that teachers have met and will be striking on 24 March because they need to have pay that is equal to that of those all around the world. I can say that teachers in Victoria are the worst paid in the country, and this needs to take place. It is a disgrace that this government has let them down.

**Palestine**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:51): Last week on Thursday I stood with thousands of Victorians on the streets of Naarm / Melbourne to protest Israeli President Isaac Herzog's red-carpet treatment by the Premier of this state Jacinta Allan. We were told by the Labor government his visit would foster peace and bring unity, and Herzog himself claimed he was here to 'bring the relations between our nations on a new beginning and a better future'. These words ring hollow coming from a man found to be inciting genocide against Palestinians in Gaza by the International Court of Justice. Having him here in Melbourne last week begs the question: where is the commitment of this government to accountability for grave violations of human rights? Instead, those of us demanding justice for genocide are told by Labor leaders to turn the temperature down.

The New South Wales Premier refusing to apologise for the police force's brutal and disrespectful treatment of praying Muslims and peaceful protesters and the lean towards censorship rather than discussing the reality of what is really going on speaks to the lack of moral courage by Labor governments across this country. Let us not forget: regardless of how you feel, Israel has committed and is still committing a genocide against Palestinians.

**Clyde North schools**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Victoria certainly is the education state, and that is evidenced furthermore by the rollout of 100 new schools, the last 19 of which have opened this year. Earlier this week I was thrilled to join with Mr Tarlamis and the member for Bass to attend the opening, with the Minister for Education, of two fantastic new schools in Clyde North – the fifth and sixth new schools just in the suburb of Clyde North that we have opened in this term of the Parliament, being Balambalam Primary School and Birranga College.

It was terrific to join the staff, student communities and parents for the opening of both of these two wonderful schools. I would like to particularly thank Danielle Heatley, the principal of Balambalam, and Nick Hamer-Smith, the principal of Birranga, for having us along. Balambalam is an Indigenous

word meaning moth or butterfly, and the school has embraced that as part of its identity, having commissioned an authentic piece of artwork, *Beautiful Butterfly*, which they then used to sample off for their uniform and other designs around the school. It is a terrific school community already. To see these brand new schools already enlivened with such a positive culture has been wonderful to see.

It was also a very pleasant surprise for me to see my former Japanese teacher at Birranga College, apart from having to then give an example of my since deteriorated Japanese skills, which was very delightful. Also, when Mr K was asked if I was a good student, he said I was but only in year 7. We had terrific school openings at both of these new schools in Clyde North.

**Medicinal cannabis**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:54): Members may recall that some two years ago the government abandoned its public commitment to reform driving laws for medicinal cannabis patients and instead announced that they would conduct a world-first closed-track driving trial to evaluate the impact of THC on driver impairment and, secondly, to assess various technologies that would measure impairment. We were profoundly unimpressed at this government backflip. There has already been a truckload of such trials, pardon the pun, and we felt the government was just trying to kick the can down the road into the next Parliament. We did, however, feel that the evaluation of impairment testing technologies would be really useful. The government assured us that the trial would be completed by mid-2026 – plenty of time to resolve this question in the current Parliament.

Last week we got a briefing from the minister's office. Surprise, surprise, it turns out the trial is taking longer than expected and Swinburne will not even have the report to government until 2027. Even worse, it was confirmed that due to budget issues there will be no evaluation of impairment-testing technologies. Once again it is all too apparent that this government does not give a damn about the thousands of Victorians on medicinal cannabis who need to be able to drive their cars responsibly. The government keeps talking about new solutions. Well, here is a suggestion: start telling the truth, and stop treating the large and growing medicinal cannabis community like dirt.

**Sickle cell disease**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): Recently I had the privilege of joining the Premier and the Minister for Health at the Victorian Clinical Genetics Service at the Royal Children's Hospital. They were able to stand behind and beside a very truly marvellous and significant milestone: the expansion of our newborn bloodspot screening program to include sickle cell disease. Commonly known as the heel prick test, this program has been the cornerstone of the Victorian public health system since the 1960s. Last year alone more than 74,000 newborns in our state were screened under the program. By adding sickle cell disease Victoria becomes the first state in Australia to offer this screening for free, bringing our total number of screen conditions to 35.

Sickle cell disease is a serious inherited disorder that affects how red blood cells carry oxygen. While it currently affects a small percentage of our populations, its prevalence is increasing. If left undiagnosed it can lead to severe pain, strokes and permanent organ damage. By identifying it within the first 72 hours of life, we can start treatment early. I particularly want to acknowledge Agnes Nsofwa from Australian Sickle Cell Advocacy Inc, whose tireless advocacy has been instrumental in this progress. This expansion is testament to the Allan Labor government's commitment to providing a fairer healthcare system that delivers peace of mind for parents in the north and right across our state.

**Kyneton Women's Football Club**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:57): I am thrilled to rise to share the wonderful news that the Kyneton Women's Football Club has finally been allowed to play. Late yesterday the club shared that they had been approved to compete in the Central Victorian Football League. This was no easy process. The team walked away from the Kyneton Football Netball Club after experiencing disgraceful sexism. Since then it has fought just to be accepted into a league and to play football. The experience of this club is far from isolated – women across the country face the same exclusion,

disgusting comments and unequal treatment on sports fields everywhere. Kyneton had the guts to say that enough is enough and that women and girls belong in sport and in doing so have become an inspiration to women and girls playing football everywhere. A big congratulations and ‘Yeah, the girls’ to club president Nat and the entire team. I am looking forward to celebrating with you back in Kyneton very soon. Carn the Wedgies.

**Narrarrang Primary School**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): I recently had the good fortune to be able to attend the official opening of Narrarrang Primary School in Port Melbourne, alongside the Minister for Education, the Parliamentary Secretary for Education in the other place and member for Albert Park Nina Taylor and my Southern Metropolitan colleague Mr Batchelor. The 2026 school year has only just started in Victoria but it is already a big year for our public schools, with 19 new schools having opened their doors for the first time on day one of the first term of the year.

We as a government promised to build 100 new schools by 2026. By adding these 19 onto the 81 already built, we have now achieved that goal. These new schools are being opened across the state with an emphasis on providing new school places in growth areas. Narrarrang Primary School’s catchment area includes Fishermans Bend, which is currently home to Australia’s single largest urban renewal project. By 2050 the area is expected to be home to 80,000 people, which demonstrates why it is so important that new schooling infrastructure be built to prepare the area for an influx of new residents. The area’s existing residents are enjoying being able to send their kids to a school which is much closer to where they live.

I would like to thank everybody involved in delivering this important project, and in particular I would like to thank the workers who did an incredible job on the design and construction of the building. Without them putting in the hard work the school could never have been built. I would also like to thank principal Tim Sawalaga for hosting us and showing us around the campus. Tim has a great vision for the school, and I look forward to seeing what he and his team and his students achieve in the coming years.

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region multicultural communities**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I rise today to thank the Chinese and Islamic communities of the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region as last weekend I had the privilege of attending the Manningham Chinese New Year Festival in Doncaster East, as well as the United Muslim Migrants Association mosque in Doncaster East as part of mosque open day. These events displayed Victoria’s greatest strength: our cultural diversity and a sense of community. Communities displaying and sharing their culture and faith at events like this enriches the social fabric of Victoria by recognising our shared contributions that are made here in Victoria and make Victoria a great place to live. The Manningham Chinese New Year Festival was a colourful and lively event celebrating the Year of the Fire Horse and was well attended by Chinese community and local businesses and of course featured some spectacular lion dancing and very tasty food. Multicultural businesses contribute to not only the local economy in Manningham but also the broader Victorian economy. Supporting businesses like this is why we are delivering our \$17 million investment in supporting multicultural traders and precincts, which revitalises local trade. I then attended the United Muslim Migrants Association’s mosque in Doncaster East as part of the mosque open day. This is a day where mosques around the state open their doors to share insights into the Islamic faith. This helps to foster understanding, combat hate and build bridges within the local community. In times of rising Islamophobia it is crucial to push back against harmful narratives, and I want to thank the UMMA mosque for being so warm and welcoming to me and all visitors that attended as part of mosque open day. I want to thank again the Chinese and Islamic communities for inviting me to be part of these joyous celebrations of your respective cultures, and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

### *Production of documents*

#### Greater Avalon employment precinct

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:01): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) engaged Alluvium consultants to prepare a drainage and flood strategy for the proposed future development area known as the Greater Avalon employment precinct (GAEP), including undertaking a drainage and flood assessment for the proposed growth areas, and determining existing and future drainage and flooding issues and/or constraints affecting the site and surrounds;
- (2) further notes that apart from a brief memo by Alluvium published on the VPA project website titled 'Greater Avalon employment precinct – existing conditions flood modelling report – technical memorandum – (Alluvium) May 2024', none of the other reporting completed by Alluvium has been publicly released, including work that details potential future impacts of proposed developments in the precinct on the Ramsar wetland in the vicinity of the GAEP; and
- (3) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all reports prepared by Alluvium related to the Greater Avalon employment precinct.

I am pleased to rise to speak on this short-form documents motion. This documents motion relates to a process that is currently going on in my region in the Greater Avalon employment precinct, or GAPE. The VPA is currently in the process of preparing a planning scheme amendment for the GAPE. This includes the Avalon framework plan and the development plan overlay to GAPE west. There are advanced plans for major developments in this area in manufacturing and logistics and possible airport expansion. While not under direct consideration in this planning scheme amendment, we know that Vopak also has plans before the government for a gas import terminal in this area. While these developments are being enthusiastically spruiked as big economic opportunities for the region, the area comprises extremely important and vulnerable ecological sites and is an area of immense cultural sensitivity. This includes critically endangered grasslands and species that call the grasslands home and nationally and internationally significant Ramsar wetlands, which are essential for migratory birds and other flora and fauna, many of which are threatened and endangered species.

We have heard concerns from a range of stakeholders about the adequacy of environmental considerations in this process. Specifically, there are grave concerns about the challenges arising from drainage and contaminants like PFAS and difficulties mitigating these to prevent ecological loss, including at the Ramsar site. Simply put, polluted stormwater run-off into these wetlands and coastal areas could devastate local ecosystems. There are already significant flood risks at the site, which will be exacerbated by climate change. Coastal inundation and erosion are also major threats. These are things that have already been identified by several of the entities that are involved in the assessment process here, including the City of Greater Geelong. Maps on the website of MAB, which is the company seeking to develop the area, show significant development in the intertidal zone and Ramsar site where protected wetlands are mapped.

We understand that Alluvium consultants were contracted by the VPA to undertake a drainage and flood assessment for the proposed growth areas and determine existing and future drainage and flooding issues and constraints affecting the site and surrounds. Apart from a brief memo regarding this work on the VPA website, there are no other reports that have been publicly released containing Alluvium's assessment. We believe that the full reports may contain conclusions that indicate that proposed drainage solutions are inadequate with respect to environmental protection. Victoria already has less than 1 per cent of native grasslands left, and Ramsar sites and wetlands are disappearing, threatening many species of migratory birds. This is due to a multitude of threats, including overdevelopment, pollution and climate change.

This Labor government has time and time again shown that the environment is not a priority. It has ignored repeated calls to update our broken wildlife laws. It is gutting already minimal environmental

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

7

programs and continuously cutting departmental staff and has no real vision for how we not only protect but restore nature in this state. We are experiencing a biodiversity crisis. While it is being compounded by climate change, it is a disaster in and of itself. It is being driven by the prioritisation of industry over the earth and waterways. What we have left is precious and irreplaceable. Protecting it should be our top priority, but instead it seems like everything is being done by this Labor government to try and facilitate development at all costs. We call on the government to release these reports. The Victorian public deserves full transparency regarding the likely environmental impacts of the developments planned for the GAEP.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:05): I rise to speak on the short-form documents motion put before us this morning by Dr Mansfield. Indeed in doing so I note the very significant importance of the Greater Avalon Employment Precinct, indeed of the Avalon precinct, as part of *Plan for Victoria* in building, driving and accommodating our state's continued future growth. In doing so, and in accordance with the government's custom with these types of motions, I affirm that the government will not be opposing the short-form documents motion before us today.

I do want to briefly comment on, as we have discussed many times, concerns about the system which we have currently in the standing orders in relation to short documents motions. Whilst I completely accept the importance of this particular issue, I note the fact that there was a vacancy on the slot this week and it seems that we see a case of people scrambling to try and fill that vacancy, rather than having that short-form documents motion that they actually wanted to raise. I would just make that remark at the outset – that as part of the ongoing work and refinement we are undertaking with our standing orders it is very important that we have this opportunity in whichever way it is deemed to be. But if we are at the point of now just trying to fill the slots rather than having the original purpose for them, then that would call into question, again, the slapdash and shambolic nature of the way in which Mr Davis has once again attempted to fiddle with the standing orders.

Now, I do wish to make some remarks on this particular issue when it comes to Avalon. It is a very important precinct, and it is important that the appropriate environmental processes are undertaken, which is part of the reason why I say that we are quite happy and do not oppose this motion before us today. Avalon is an important precinct. One could even say that we will see jobs taking off as part of the runway for development that we have on this precinct. We are going to see a potential of up to 8000 new jobs, with total jobs exceeding 25,000 upon completion of the precinct, which includes of course Avalon Airport itself. This is a very important project. When you couple and consider it with the fact that we have a very large and booming regional city in Geelong, when we have the booming western suburbs of Melbourne too, it is also an important part of providing those economic opportunities and those jobs closer to where people live.

Indeed we have seen dramatic improvements in particular on the Geelong corridor, with train frequencies now running at every 20 minutes during the day. I had the opportunity to go out to Geelong quite recently on the V/Line, and it was a terrific experience. It was very fast and indeed quite simple to get down there, with trains every 20 minutes there and back. It made it quite a good choice and helped me to leave the car in Melbourne and take the train down instead. If you look at the upgrade to the line down beyond Geelong through to Waurn Ponds, and the expansion of capacity that has opened up, including with that frequency boost, it is all very important too. It is also part of that diversification of jobs away from just the central business district of Melbourne. Avalon is and will continue to be a very important jobs precinct under this government, and *Plan for Victoria* certainly places it at its heart for the western suburbs of Melbourne and for the Barwon community as well. We know that the western corridor of Melbourne and Geelong is expected to deliver more than 128,000 dwellings by 2051, reflecting the importance of sites like Avalon, which is, as I say, an area that is continuing to take off.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (10:09): We will be supporting Dr Mansfield's motion. These reports should always be released, as should all the others that are languishing in the backlogs of your departmental ministerial offices. As for a motion that you have got, you could have brought it

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

forward this week and we would have supported it to try and get a better process, but you have chosen not to. Anyway, I turn to the motion of Dr Mansfield, which I do want to add to. I have been out on this site numerous times and there is need for development there, but this site is ridiculous, and I want to raise my concerns about the Victorian Planning Authority's approach to the development of this site. We certainly do need development land in this area, but the west part of the Greater Avalon employment precinct seems a very odd place to start. There is a significant amount of developable land in the area which does not suffer from the same amount of environmental disadvantages. It seems odd, to say the least, that the VPA has pushed this GAEP west land first, and I think it is worthy of further investigation. It is not just me saying this, it is included in formal submissions to the public exhibition of planning scheme amendment C477.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action says there are outstanding matters previously raised that are not addressed in the exhibited material and that these should be resolved prior to the finalisation of the amendment. They go further. DEECA does not support the approval of the native vegetation precinct plan without confidence that the offset obligations can be met. On the 93 hectares of coastal saltmarsh, DEECA warns it is likely to degrade more rapidly due to increased freshwater incursions from adjacent development. It also identifies unresolved water management issues, including potential impacts on the adjacent Ramsar-listed wetland. Parks Victoria refers to uncertainties related to potential impacts to the reserve and associated biodiversity values and the absence of comprehensive hydrological modelling of the upstream catchment and flows through to the reserve. The Victorian National Parks Association describes the amendment as premature and raises fundamental questions, including:

It is in our long-term interests to fill-in the Cheetham Salt works in the western portion of GAEP, given their functional ecological significance ...

These are serious reservations on Ramsar obligations, climate risk, flood plain development and the adequacy of environmental assessment. DEECA warns that passing the planning amendment despite these reservations and instead deferring key investigations to the development plan stage 'introduces significant uncertainty and creates an expectation that development is achievable.' In short, why prioritise GAEP west, a flood plain adjacent to internationally significant wetlands containing high value saltmarsh, when surrounding development land for employment sites to which these considerations do not apply is available and can readily be used?

We support the release of these documents and much greater scrutiny of the VPA's processes on this Avalon project. And can you please produce the documents that you are being asked for in some timely unredacted fashion and do not hide behind the nonsense that you constantly come up with as a reason why you can never produce the documents that are asked for in this chamber. It is totally unacceptable, and you are absolutely –

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** If you have nothing to hide, release the documents, especially those relating to this particular project, and do it in a timely fashion, all totally unredacted. Bring on your motion if you want to change the procedure for how we do documents.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:14): I do expect the Greens to campaign against jobs growth in the regions, but I do not expect the Liberal Party to campaign against jobs growth in the regions. It speaks volumes about where the Liberal Party are that they are standing here today campaigning against regional employment opportunities. But not this government, because this government stands up for regional jobs. We stand up for investing in our regions. And the proof is in the pudding, because the regional unemployment rate in Victoria in December last year was 3.4 per cent. We are creating more jobs in regional Victoria than other jurisdictions.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mrs McArthur, you gave your contribution without being interrupted.

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Regional Victoria has experienced, under Labor, some of the highest jobs growth amongst all Australian states. Across the state regional unemployment is at 3.4 per cent. In December last year the unemployment rate in the Geelong region was 3.3 per cent. It was even lower in Geelong than it was across the state, which is an absolute vindication of the state Labor government's strategy of investing in our regions and supporting jobs growth in our regions.

President, I am sure you are curious as to what effect Labor's investment in regional development has had on the unemployment rate since we were elected in 2014. I can tell you. In the Geelong region, for example, the unemployment rate in October 2014 was 7.1 per cent. 7.1 per cent was the unemployment rate in Geelong when Labor came to office. In December last year it was 3.3 per cent. My maths might not be great all of the time, but I reckon it has halved in that time. I reckon Labor's policies of investing in regional Victoria and Labor's policies of investing in employment growth, particularly in the Geelong region, have seen the regional unemployment rate halve since we were elected. I am not going to listen to the Liberal Party trying to campaign against jobs in regional Victoria, because what this government has is a record of jobs growth in regional Victoria. It has a record of investing in the kind of activity that is going to generate more jobs in regional Victoria. What we see under Labor is a government committed to doing the work necessary to promote employment growth and to promote economic growth in regional Victoria.

The facts do not lie. The facts tell us that in the Geelong region, which is obviously connected to the greater Avalon employment precinct to which the documents being sought under this motion apply, the unemployment rate has halved since Labor was elected. I do not know why we have, from the Leader of the Liberal Party in this place, such a committed campaign to slowing that down. She might want to talk and explain to her constituents as to why she is opposed to jobs growth in regional Victoria, why she is opposed to the kind of work being undertaken that supports that jobs growth continuing, because we can say quite clearly that Labor is the party that supports jobs in regional Victoria. Labor is the party that does the work on the planning, on the environmental controls and on getting industry together to make sure of the jobs growth that we have seen in regional Victoria. The highest rate of regional jobs growth in the nation, a halving of the regional unemployment rate in Geelong over the last 10 years: that is what Labor delivers. That is why we will continue to do projects like this, to keep jobs in regional Victoria.

### **Motion agreed to.**

#### **Construction industry**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (10:20): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) that the *Rotting from the Top* report on corruption by Mr Geoffrey Watson SC, tendered to Queensland's Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU and Misconduct in the Construction Industry includes redacted sections;
  - (b) the significant cost of corruption to the Victorian taxpayers outlined in Mr Watson's report;
  - (c) that Mr Watson has said that had the Victorian government acted earlier much of this cost could have been avoided;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the following documents:
  - (a) warnings or advice from the Department of Transport and Planning, staff in the ministerial office and/or external agencies provided to the Hon. Jacinta Allan MP, now Premier but previously the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, from 1 January 2020;
  - (b) emails, including attachments, between the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure, her office and the Department of Transport and Planning concerning the CFMEU and corruption from 1 January 2020; and

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

10

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

(c) full briefs including attachments of BMIN-1-23-1378 and BMIN-1-23-3809 concerning CFMEU corruption provided to the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the Hon. Jacinta Allan MP.

I am pleased to support this motion, on behalf of the Nationals, put forward by David Davis. It is so important that we have transparency, and that is what this motion is calling for: it is calling for transparency when it comes to the CFMEU issue. This is very significant, what we are seeing happening in this state.

A number of movies come to mind when I consider this matter. The first would be *The Godfather*, because the types of things that we have been seeing happening on Big Build sites involve over \$15 billion going to the hands of criminals. There have been reports of fraudulent shifts, ghost shifts, supervisors giving drugs to workers, top salaries going to criminals, government cars being used and strippers performing shows onsite. This is appalling. I have been contacted by so many people who are furious that this has happened under the government's watch, under the Premier's watch.

An article from the *Age* – and this refers to *The Godfather*-type theme – talks about Watson and his report and what he said. It says 'From there the maths is simple', so he is talking about settling on a rough estimate of 15 per cent, describing it as 'not unreasonable' and 'probably conservative' – that is talking about the \$15 billion:

From there the maths is simple – the leadership of the CFMEU has cost the Victorian taxpayer something like \$15 billion. There is another point to this – as will be seen, much of that \$15 billion has been poured directly into the hands of criminals and organised crime gangs ...

That has been reported in the *Age*. Another movie that comes to mind, I would have to say, is *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. This is reflected well in an article that Jeff Kennett wrote that was published yesterday:

Labor, under Daniel Andrews, won the Victorian election in 2014.

He immediately, as he had committed to, tore up the East West Link contract, costing Victorians \$1.1bn, for which we got nothing.

Money totally lost.

Andrews argued he did so because the project was not justified on a benefit-cost basis. Rubbish.

He was preparing to rip up the AWU/CFMEU protocol and enrich the CFMEU with major government work.

In 2015, Jacinta Allan, as Transport Minister, broke the union agreement and allocated work on the Metro Tunnel to the CFMEU.

Then she allocated the work for the Rail Crossing Removals to the CFMEU.

Jacinta Allan's husband was a senior officer at the CFMEU at the time.

Since then, all major infrastructure projects have been awarded to the CFMEU.

It goes on to talk about other issues, but I think it is very revealing of what has been happening in this state.

Another movie I thought of when thinking about this issue is *Titanic*. It makes me think about what happened with the Commonwealth Games. I remember raising concerns with Senator Bridget McKenzie in Bendigo in April prior to the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, saying, 'Where is the money coming from? Who's paying for this and having some accountability?' At the time –

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, President, this is a very narrow documents motion about the matters before us. I am not sure that a reference to the Commonwealth Games is within the scope.

**The PRESIDENT:** It is a narrow motion. As first speaker Mrs Broad has some latitude, but people that follow with their contributions can respond to the first speaker's contribution.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I just am wondering if history is perhaps repeating itself here, because at the time the Premier was like, 'No. All good, all good,' and soon after that the Commonwealth Games were

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

cancelled, and now we have the Premier again saying, ‘All good. Nothing to see here. The estimates are not accurate,’ but they are not willing to proceed to an inquiry.

Another movie that comes to mind is *Happy Gilmore*, because certainly what we have seen in this state is massive debt and huge taxes being put onto people by this government. A massive debt has been racked up – over \$190 billion – and new taxes have been introduced to pay for that debt, yet here we have the facts on the table that billions of dollars have gone into the hands of criminals under this government. So I will think of another movie, *The Big Short*, because that movie talks about no accountability and concerns being raised, and I think that is what this motion is all about: it is holding the government to account for what has happened in this state. We know that the request for these documents is important, but what is needed is a royal commission, because getting to the bottom of what has happened in this state is so important. To quote from the *Australian Financial Review*:

To offer a real diagnosis of the conditions that gave rise to this corruption – and what the government should have been doing – will require a royal commission-style inquiry. One with powers to compel witnesses and materials, including from government.

...

Ironically, the need for a transparent inquiry arises precisely because of the denials and the refusal to review the government’s own actions and mistakes.

So there we have it. I think it is very clear this motion is needed and these documents are needed, because right now we see that there has been no transparency and we cannot have this continue. An inquiry is needed to make sure that the facts are put on the table for public transparency, because at the end of the day this is Victorian taxpayer money. The government are elected to manage that money and they do not seem to care, and at the end of the day Victorians are paying the price.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:26): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion that was supposed to be moved by Mr Davis but sadly he was not here. It was instead moved by Mrs Broad, some of whose contribution to the debate it seems was a recitation of greatest hits from her local Blockbuster in the early 2000s. Nevertheless the matters that are actually being requested here are significant and they are serious. I do not know whether it is just because Mr Davis let her down and was not in the chamber to give the lead speech on this documents motion – I do not know what he was doing – and she was left in the lurch, but I would have thought that the seriousness of allegations of illegal activity on building sites is something that warranted perhaps a slightly more serious contribution in the chamber today, because allegations of illegal behaviour, wherever they occur in Victoria – whether they occur on our streets or whether they occur on worksites – should be referred to Victoria Police. That is exactly what this Labor government, upon receipt of allegations of illegal activities – upon receipt of allegations of the activities of particularly organised crime on our building sites – has done.

Operation Hawk was established by Victoria Police in July of 2024 specifically and proactively to target organised crime linked to the construction industry, with a transition to a taskforce under the same name a bit later. The taskforce is focused on assessing new intelligence and evidence relating to allegations of criminal behaviour connected to the construction industry, a matter that the government takes seriously and Victoria Police is taking it seriously, and the government has provided Victoria Police with the support and resources that it needs to ensure that these investigations can take place. We have had just under 70 charges be laid as a result of the operations of Taskforce Hawk examining behaviour in the construction industry, including for offences like fraud, threats of arson, threats to kill and assaults, and approximately 17 alleged offenders have been charged. I do not want to go into that in any more detail given those matters would be before the courts at some point and we want to make sure that the interests of justice are served, but what it does demonstrate is the seriousness with which the government is taking action in this area.

The government has also, through legislation that has been brought before this Parliament, taken seriously and given new support, resources and powers to deal with criminal organisations. Reforms

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

12

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

to the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024 have been passed through this place, including things like the changes to the unlawful association scheme, which lowered the threshold for police to issue an unlawful association order to stop criminals associating with each other and to discourage new people from joining. The previous operation of those laws was too high and difficult to enforce. There was also the introduction of serious crime prevention orders to allow police to apply to the courts to impose a range of restrictions on someone who has or is likely to help someone else participate in serious criminal activity, and banning the display of various insignia.

What you have from the government is when allegations of illegal and criminal activity are raised, there are referrals to Victoria Police, and resourcing and support for Victoria Police, with Victoria Police setting up a specific operation and then taskforce to deal with these issues and make arrests. As I said, more than 17 offenders have been identified and nearly 70 charges have been laid as a result of those investigations. On the other side, we have got the government bringing into and passing through this Parliament laws to strengthen controls on criminal organisations, to ensure that Victoria Police have the resources and the laws that they need to deal with serious organised crime, to make sure that unlawful association laws are strengthened and that serious crime prevention orders can be put in place. This government is taking allegations of illegal activity, wherever they may be but including on construction sites, very seriously indeed.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:32): This is a narrow documents motion that seeks certain documents concerning the now Premier, but particularly in the time period when the Honourable Jacinta Allan was Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It seeks warnings or advice from the Department of Transport and Planning and staff in the ministerial office or external agencies provided from 1 January 2020. It also seeks emails and attachments between the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure, her office and the Department of Transport and Planning concerning the CFMEU and corruption from the same date. It seeks a couple of specific briefings that we know exist, and we know they exist through freedom-of-information requests. We know that they relate to two documents that were sent to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in her official capacity by email. We know that the two documents have been refused an FOI, because they are said to contain personal information. The two documents total 27 pages in length, they concern corruption and the CFMEU and they are official documents sent to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure at the time about corruption and the CFMEU. The question is: what did those documents advise? Why will the government not provide those documents? Why should the community not see those documents and see the advice or the warnings or the information that was provided to the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure in official briefings from the department to her, containing as attachments the two documents, the 27 secret pages of advice or material presented to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in her official capacity as Minister for Transport Infrastructure, concerning corruption and the CFMEU.

These, as I say, are very basic steps to seek the information to understand what steps were advised, or indeed if there was not advice – that is telling too. If there was advice, what was the nature of that advice? Was it heeded by the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure or was it ignored or otherwise rejected? These are legitimate questions. Given what has come out in recent days – the Watson report and the material at the Queensland royal commission – the question of a royal commission is a very legitimate one. We will debate that later in the day, and that is obviously a conclusion that many, including Robert Redlich, have come to. But that is for later in the day. This is really a very simple motion about those documents that went to the Honourable Jacinta Allan, as Minister for Transport Infrastructure, in the period after 2020. I think the chamber and the community have every right to see these documents, to understand the decision-making around the documents and to understand whether Jacinta Allan in her capacity at the time made the appropriate decisions to resource IBAC, to strengthen IBAC and to refer in certain ways. All of these are questions that I think will be elucidated by these documents.

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

13

As I said, if one conclusion is that there is a whole tranche of documents that do not exist because there was no advice, that is an issue in and of itself, and I think that is something that the community would want to know and understand. I think it is very much in the public interest for these documents to be made public and for the Leader of the Government to provide these documents to the chamber. As the report from Mr Watson SC makes very clear, the cost to Victorians is enormous. The cost to Victorian taxpayers is enormous. Every step we can take to root out this corruption, to expose it and to get transparency is in the state's interest.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:37): The government have zero tolerance for any sort of illegal behaviour, and we support the independent administrator's comments that any allegation should be referred to the AFP, Victoria Police, the Fair Work Commission or any other relevant enforcement agencies and regulators for investigation. As is convention with short doc motions, the government will not be opposing the motion. Already we have seen, through Taskforce Hawk, the results of 70 charges laid against 15 alleged offenders. The government has responded swiftly off the back of the Wilson review to the allegations of criminal and intimidatory activity. Already the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025 has been legislated, with our commitment to create a new complaints referral service within the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. This complaints service is up and running and provides a safe and effective forum for anyone to raise complaints or concerns about corruption on government sites. It also enables complaints to be made confidentially, investigated and referred to relevant enforcement bodies where appropriate.

We have also passed amendments through the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025 to help target criminal and unlawful conduct in the construction sector, particularly those that operate using labour hire. In Victoria, labour hire businesses must be licensed, and host businesses must only use licensed providers. There are significant penalties for using or providing unlicensed labour hire services, with penalties in excess of \$630,000 for a corporation and \$150,000 for an individual. Our labour hire reforms will strengthen the powers of Victoria's Labour Hire Authority to prevent those with links to criminal organisations from operating labour hire businesses.

In addition to those legislated reforms, the government have also acted to implement recommendations 2 and 7 of the Wilson review. This includes recommendation 2, which sought to establish an alliance involving state and federal law enforcement and regulators and other relevant entities with a role in addressing allegations of criminal or unlawful conduct on Victorian government construction sites. This alliance is up and running and is collaborating on how agencies can best share information, coordinate action and inform government on emerging issues on sites. The alliance is chaired by Victoria Police, with members across a range of organisations and agencies. The Wilson review also recommended that construction policies and contracts include clauses that require principal contractors on government-funded construction sites to report criminal or unlawful conduct. We have updated a suite of standard form contracts and developed model construction contract clauses and other materials to support agencies to implement this recommendation as a requirement on public construction projects. I am out of time.

**Motion agreed to.**

## COMMITTEES

14

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

### *Committees*

#### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

##### *Reference*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:40): I rise on behalf of the Greens today to move:

That this house requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 1 September 2026, on the scale and scope of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes occurring in Victoria, including but not limited to:

- (1) the communication methods of anti-LGBTQIA+ influencers and hate groups, including those sharing far-right, misogynistic, and homophobic ‘alpha-male’ content;
- (2) strategies to counter anti-LGBTQIA+ influence, particularly among young people;
- (3) the adequacy of current responses to preventing these crimes; and
- (4) the adequacy of current supports for victim-survivors and ways to improve public safety and e-safety for LGBTQIA+ community members.

We are here today to progress this inquiry to make our community safer. I want Victoria to be a place where all members of the LGBTQIA+ community are free from violence and safe to live their lives and be themselves. I would hope that all in this chamber support this idea, and I hope there is cross-chamber support for this inquiry into anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes, because violent acts are occurring. This hate exists, and it is causing immense harm. This inquiry is an important opportunity to investigate how we can prevent these crimes and support the community.

While this issue of targeted hate and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community is not new, over the last few years we have seen a particular type of violence that needs to be investigated and understood so that we have a chance to prevent further harm. There have been an awful series of homophobic attacks in Victoria these last few years. Gay and bi+ men have been lured into secluded public places via fake online dating profiles on sites such as Grindr and SCRUFF as well as Snapchat, and they have been violently assaulted. They have arrived to meet someone, only to find multiple people, often young men, waiting to ambush them and attack them violently, including with knives, with machetes and with bats. Some have been robbed or extorted, forced to transfer money to their attackers at the scene. Some have been blackmailed. Some attacks have been filmed and then shared online in hateful forums that glorify this homophobia. These attacks have been incredibly violent. People have been left with lifelong injuries.

These attacks are inflicting a great deal of harm and ongoing trauma on community members, and they have not been limited just to Victoria. Similar incidents have been reported across the country and even overseas in places such as New Zealand, India, Malaysia, the UK and other countries. But in Victoria there have been at least three dozen attacks of this nature, and those are just the ones that have been reported. It is highly likely, if not certain, that due to the impact of stigma, shame and fear, there are others out there who have not reported their experiences. There have now been a number of arrests, I understand, in relation to some of these attacks. These perpetrators need to be held to account. But this inquiry is an opportunity to work out why this is happening in the first place and what more needs to be done to track and document anti-LGBTQIA+ hate in Victoria, and not just those hate crimes where it is occurring against gay and bi+ men, but also to make sure that we are doing everything possible to support victim-survivors of these hate crimes. We need to keep the community safe from further harm.

This inquiry is also an opportunity to investigate hate crimes that are being perpetrated right across our community members who identify as LGBTQIA+. We know that trans and gender-diverse people face targeted hate and violence in their everyday lives. The *Fuelling Hate* report from a couple of years ago found that in the 12 months before the report, 16 per cent of trans participants had experienced anti-trans violence and 30 per cent – one in three – had witnessed violence against their community. I

## COMMITTEES

know that we now have anti-vilification laws here in this state which aim to protect people from hate speech, which the Greens were proud to help establish, but there is much work to be done to prevent and address violence that is targeted towards trans and gender-diverse people.

Transphobia has been on the rise these past few years. Again, there are hateful and divisive online spaces that seek to radicalise people around transphobia and create an environment that fosters violence. The threat of violence facing many LGBTQIA+ people means that many do not feel safe right now in public places. They have to change their plans and change the way that they present themselves in order to feel comfortable and safe in our public spaces. That is not the type of society that I want to live in. To address violence against the LGBTQIA+ community we need to understand the scale of these hate crimes. In 2018 the Human Rights Law Centre recommended in their *End the Hate* report:

Fund further research and improve data collection methods and policies of all government agencies, including Victoria Police, to ensure accurate information on the prevalence of prejudice motivated conduct is available.

It is my understanding that there is still work to be done in this particular space. We need to know truly just how to prevent these attacks and be sure that a government response and resources are available to be adequate in responding to these instances and supporting community members but also adequacy in addressing prevention of these crimes in the first place.

There are already wonderful community-led organisations who are offering support and care to the LGBTQIA+ community to keep them safe and to help them with the trauma and recovery from such attacks. I will not be able to name all of them, but a big shout-out to the amazing organisations that are already out there offering support, like Thorne Harbour Health. I would like to acknowledge that there are many stakeholders out there, some of whom have been instrumental in pushing for this inquiry to come forward. I want to acknowledge Switchboard, QLife and Rainbow Door. I know there are many others, and I thank you all for the work that you do. It is work which is often, in my view, under-resourced or limited to one-year funding cycles. Queer organisations need sufficient and secure funding to be able to plan and grow and offer all the services that our community relies on. I am keen to hear what more would be possible to support victim-survivors with more resources, because I know that there is always more that we can do, and this inquiry is an opportunity to explore those options.

Beyond the important work that must be undertaken to support victim-survivors and to pursue perpetrators, we must focus on stopping these crimes from occurring in the first place. Around the world we have seen the rise of hateful ideologies and the communities who feel the brunt of their hate. It is the LGBTQIA+ community, it is people of colour, it is people of faith, it is women, it is First Nations people, it is culturally and linguistically diverse people – people who are being increasingly attacked just for being themselves. This inquiry is limited in its scope and will be focusing on anti-LGBTQIA+ violence, but I do want to acknowledge the conversations that constructively have occurred across the chamber, particularly with government, that have led to a set of words that I understand will be circulated shortly that can explore the intersectionality in this experience of being LGBTQIA+ and support community and ensure that they are safe. When it comes to this hate – the violence that is being targeted at LGBTQIA+ people – we need to see where the hate begins and tear it out at the source. Should this inquiry progress, I am very interested to hear from the experts as to what the solutions are to prevent the radicalisation of young people online into committing this type of behaviour. I know it is complex and there is no simple way to end anti-LGBTQIA+ violence and prejudice, but complexity should not be a reason for this Parliament to turn away from considering this issue. I know that there are experts out there who can inform the committee and the government about what needs to be done to prevent the radicalisation of people online and to prevent often particularly young men and boys from finding and connecting through violence and homophobic spaces on the internet.

We saw some of these solutions recommended by the 2019 parliamentary inquiry into far-right extremism, and I understand some of these solutions are yet to be implemented. The LGBTQIA+ community is strong and it is resilient, but these attacks cause a great deal of harm and uncertainty,

## COMMITTEES

16

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

and victim-survivors carry enduring physical, mental and emotional trauma. If Victoria truly wants to be the equality state, we need to take action to prevent anti-LGBTQIA+ violence. This inquiry gives us an important opportunity to examine the solutions, and I urge all members of this chamber to support it, as we should all want people in our community to be safe and feel welcome and included. On behalf of the Greens I commend this inquiry motion to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:50): I am pleased to rise to speak on motion 1199 on this very important topic. At the outset I would like to thank Mr Puglielli for bringing it to the house's attention. This is a very worthwhile subject for the Legal and Social Issues Committee, of which I am a member, to be studying. It goes to the heart of our remit as a committee, and it does touch on an issue that has not got widespread attention across the nation but has had a very profound impact on the LGBTQIA+ community, in particular on gay men and on other men who have accessed these types of apps.

I would also like to acknowledge the conversations I have been able to have in a relatively short space of time with colleagues across the chamber – we will be moving some amendments shortly – and indeed the advocacy of organisations such as Thorne Harbour Health who have been at the forefront of this issue and Switchboard Victoria, which is already doing incredibly important work in providing that lifeline, that support service, to people. It was very great to see the Premier and the Minister for Equality out at Switchboard to announce the launch of that service. I understand from talking with Jenna at Switchboard just a few months ago that it has already been very well taken up by the community, which is both a good thing and indeed a very sad thing, because it does speak directly to the need for that service.

As Mr Puglielli said, this is not an issue that is isolated to Victoria. It is not an issue that is isolated to Australia. We have seen a shocking rise in these sorts of attacks across the world where typically men are lured on Grindr or other apps similar to it into a position where they are vulnerable and then they are brutally assaulted, robbed or blackmailed. We suspect we can trace the origins of this to certain online activity that is spreading around the world, but the response to it is going to be as complicated as the origin. That is why I think a relatively short, sharp inquiry, a narrowly focused inquiry, is very important, because it can shine a light on this issue and shine a light on the work that is being done and, importantly, what more needs to be done both at a level that we can control in Victoria but also to inform other efforts across the nation and indeed across the world on this issue.

It is a phenomenon that is nothing new of course. Assaults on gay men have been around for a long time. I think many Australians would, perhaps reasonably, have come to believe that it is no longer an issue in the modern day, and many I know would be horrified to learn that it still is. Many that I have spoken to when I have told them about this issue have been horrified to learn that far from reducing, it has been increasing in the past few years. We are seeing this, and it is increasingly taking place in electorates like mine. It is happening in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. There have been a number of arrests already. I do want to commend Victoria Police and in particular Jeremy Oliver, who is the LGBTQIA+ liaison with Victoria Police, for his work in spearheading the response to these crimes and for the leadership that he has shown both within the police and within the community to address this. I spoke about this in a statement on a report last year on this issue and commented on the fact that our arrest rate has exceeded that of other states, and that is in very large part due to the work of Mr Oliver, so I thank him for that.

There have been a number of discussions and community forums on this issue as well. Thorne Harbour Health conducted a forum in Abbotsford last year that I, along with Mr Puglielli, had the privilege of attending. It was very powerful because we had a number of people attend, many of whom spoke up and shared their stories for the very first time. It was a very moving experience to be listening to their experiences and what they had to say, because these types of attacks rely on shame. Particularly when we have people coming from otherwise vulnerable backgrounds or from families who are not accepting of who they are even in this day and age, the shame can be profound.

## COMMITTEES

The bravery of those people to speak up was extraordinary, and I would like to acknowledge all of those people who have had the bravery to speak up and share their story on this issue. Their voice is one that I hope that this inquiry will be able to, in a sensitive and appropriate way, make heard as well. This inquiry does give us the potential to give them a voice, but it also gives us the potential to look at this issue in a broader context and see what exactly we can do. I can also mention the anti-hate taskforce, which did a power of work in the latter half of last year, including particularly with the LGBTQIA+ community on these attacks, and the work that it is already doing. There is a lot that we are doing and there is a lot that we will continue to do, but it is very appropriate for us to be looking at where those trends are and what we need to be doing better, quite simply.

I repeat the point that this is quite a narrow inquiry. It is not looking into the length and breadth of issues in community, and nor should it seek to do so. We are, of course, as all committees are, time constrained, and it is important that we give this important issue the focus and the attention that it deserves. In the time remaining this year for the Legal and Social Issues Committee, I think it is a commendable use of our time, to be focusing on this issue. In the spirit of focusing the inquiry, I do have some amendments. I move:

That in paragraphs (1) to (4) omit all words and expressions, and insert the following in their place:

- ‘(1) the communication and recruitment methods of anti-LGBTQIA+ influencers and hate groups that endorse anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes, including those creating and sharing online content steeped in racism, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, far-right ideology and unhealthy masculinities;
- (2) current strategies to counter anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes, particularly among young people and how these could be strengthened;
- (3) current anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crime prevention initiatives, and how these could be strengthened;
- (4) existing public and online safety initiatives supporting LGBTQIA+ community members who have experienced hate crimes, including how these supports could be strengthened;
- (5) the role and responsibilities of social media and digital platform owners in preventing and responding to anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes;
- (6) existing empirical data regarding the prevalence and trends of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes Australia-wide;
- (7) the impact of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes on diverse LGBTQIA+ communities, including rainbow mob, people with disability, and multifaith and multicultural community members;
- (8) interjurisdictional strategies and methods to combat anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes across borders; and
- (9) the relevant work of the commissioner for LGBTQIA+ communities, relevant government advisory groups, including but not limited to relevant community, health and law enforcement organisations to combat anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes.’

These amendments, as well as focusing the inquiry I believe will strengthen it by empowering it to look at the specific trends, the prevalence of issues and the exact types of offending as well as those compounding factors that for so many Victorians make this issue all the more damaging in their lives – those factors such as their background, their family environments, the perhaps unsafe situations that many might be living in. For that reason, I do commend those amendments to the house.

I understand that there continues to be a broad range of discussions, and I appreciate the conversations I have had with all members of this place, including our chair of the committee Mr McCracken as well. I understand there may be some further amendments placed before us today by other members. I do want to come back to the point of what I have spoken to, but also what Mr Puglielli has spoken to. As our colleague Mr Davis would say, it is a very narrow inquiry, it is a very narrow motion, because it does go to a very specific and distinct issue that has been occurring in the gay and bi+ communities in Melbourne and Victoria, as across the world. It is appropriate that we give this issue and the suffering of these Victorians due consideration. It would not be appropriate, in my view, to effectively dilute their voice and dilute this inquiry by trying to broaden this out into a wider catch-all of all sorts of grievance and complaints. There are many important issues, and I do not seek to diminish any single one of them. But I think it would do a disservice to LGBTQIA+ community, it would do a

## COMMITTEES

18

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

disservice to these gay and bi+ men if, rather than focusing this inquiry, we were to seek to broaden it out to many other groups. There are many valid lines of inquiry for us to look into on those issues as well, but Mr Puglielli has come forward with the intention of this. I think it is a commendable intention. My amendments seek to strengthen and build upon that and refocus the inquiry and make sure that we are focusing on this critical issue. It is not about those broader things, and I think to do that through any other amendments would be a complete disservice. It would also fly in the face of votes against the very important legislation that we saw last year on anti-vilification laws. They are a big part of this as well.

For the first time, as of this new legislation last year, the anti-vilification framework in Victoria specifically covers members of the LGBTQIA+ community that were not covered before, and many members of this community advocated for decades to have their voices heard. It would be particularly inappropriate for the party that voted against those protections for LGBTQIA+ Victorians and people based on their race, religion or disability to now be seeking to dilute the voices of LGBTQIA+ Victorians in what should be a very straightforward, very relevant and very important inquiry. I am pleased to commend my amendments to the house, and in doing so I would be pleased to commend this motion to the house as well.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:00): I rise to speak on Mr Puglielli's motion, and I thank him for bringing it forward, for the productive discussion that we have had on this very serious issue and for calling for an inquiry by the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I say from the outset that I recognise Mr Puglielli's concern, and there can be no doubt that we are living in a time of lower cohesion and that for a variety of reasons people of different ethnic backgrounds, faiths, creeds and sexual identities are feeling less safe. The issues that Mr Puglielli's motion seeks to inquire to are important, but they are by no means the only groups who are feeling this concern or feeling less safe on our streets in the middle of a crime crisis. I am deeply concerned about the rise in rhetoric and rise in social media content that seeks to demonise communities and demonise our LGBTQIA+ communities but also to demonise Victoria's Indian communities, our Islamic communities, our Jewish communities and many other multicultural communities. In our state of Victoria we have always prided ourselves on being a diverse and multicultural state, and so in that respect this is a worrying concern and worrying trend.

This is something that is consistently raised with me, both in my role as shadow minister and in my community locally, and particularly I would like to speak on the Indian community in my electorate, which is regularly telling me about their concern for the rise in racism and xenophobia, both on the streets and also online. With the rise of artificial intelligence, there is a whole new frontier of malevolent and spiteful content that is being created to demonise the Indian community. It is easy to dismiss this as AI slop when it is not your background or skin colour which is being attacked.

While I acknowledge that there have been hate crimes, we should also acknowledge that this is not limited to the LGBTQIA+ community. Indian temples have been vandalised, like BAPS in Mill Park. The Gandhi statue from our Hindu temple in Rowville was recently stolen, the Lebanese immigrant statue in Preston was also stolen and the Virgin Mary Mosque in Hoppers Crossing had awful language graffitied on it, and I could name so, so many more. This is a crisis worth considering, and if we do not consider this today as part of this inquiry, we are abdicating our duties as elected representatives.

As we enter the holy month of Ramadan this evening it is important to acknowledge the concerns of the Islamic community, who consistently feel this pressure, this hatred, simply for practising their faith. Recently we saw a terrible violent incident involving an imam in Keysborough.

It is vital that this motion also contain reference to antisemitism, the oldest hatred directed at our Jewish community in ways so horrific that we will not mention them all in this Parliament. We have seen awful social media content directed at our Jewish community, the doxing of Jewish artists, graffiti on Jewish schools and Jewish students yelled at by other students at a museum excursion simply because they were Jewish.

## COMMITTEES

In seeking to expand this motion's scope, the Liberals and Nationals want to give all these communities who are under attack a voice in this inquiry so that we can get to the bottom of the problem. We are also seeking to remove references to 'far right' in the motion, in acknowledgement that hatred does not belong to a single side of politics and is equally practised on the left of politics. We have seen that through several left-wing influencers banned from Instagram for anti-Jewish hate – disgusting antisemitism that is festering through algorithms. Similarly we have seen pretty awful racism festering online that has made its way onto our streets.

I have seen many members on the other side express concern about attacks on temples and mosques and individuals, attacks on places of worship with political messages and graffiti and violence and rising hate on social media. I hear it from the other side all the time. Opposing my amendment will show that those words from members on the other side are meaningless because they are not willing to give these issues the time of day in the Legal and Social Issues Committee. They would rather focus on a narrow set of words that are much more political than have a deep dive into this broad issue that affects all communities. It does not just affect one community; it affects all communities. We are seeing the disgusting rise in xenophobia on social media algorithms, particularly affecting our Indian community through artificial intelligence and through the demonising of our Indian community online, and I think that has made its way onto our streets in anti-Indian sentiment and attacks on our places of worship.

On that side of the chamber, when there is an incident, they will put out a media release and they will give statements to the effect. But by voting the way they are voting today, they are showing that their words are absolutely meaningless. They are because they are not willing to look into these issues. I will be personally informing those communities who have raised this with me of the government's voting patterns today. Because you can speak in this Parliament and express your concern or you can take action to stamp it out. When the government had an opportunity to take action, it chose meaningless words. That is what the government has chosen; it has chosen meaningless words. This is a serious issue.

I would also say that the timing of this inquiry by the Legal and Social Issues Committee is not a problem. We can establish subcommittees. We can look at this issue from a broad range of stakeholders and from our peak bodies and still get to the bottom of this issue of xenophobia online, of hate groups, of this anti-multicultural rhetoric and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric that is causing great concern in our communities. But if we do not consider broadening out this inquiry, we are saying to those communities that they are not worth the time needed for an inquiry. We are happy to get up in Parliament and give empty words in Parliament, but we are not happy to look at this issue.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Of course there is anti-LGBTQIA+ content online, but to say and dismiss it as not happening to communities like our Indian community, through your voting patterns in this Parliament, I think is a disgrace. We do need to look into these issues. By voting against my amendment –

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! Mr Galea! Without assistance, Mr Mulholland.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I understand Mr Galea is a bit rattled by this issue because he has to go out to Rowville and explain to the Hindu community there why he voted against looking into –

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, I specifically outlined that there are many concerns that are worthy of debate in my contribution. If Mr Mulholland was not listening to that, that is on him, but I would ask him to refrain and perhaps reflect on the fact that while his party voted against anti-vilification reforms, he has no right to come into this place –

## COMMITTEES

20

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** That is not a point of order.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I will just say that the government members will have to explain themselves to those communities when they are informed of the government's voting patterns in this place today, and I so move:

That:

1. Before paragraph (1), omit the words and expressions 'scope of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes' and insert in their place 'scope of multicultural, antisemitic and LGBTQIA+ hate crimes'.
2. In paragraph (1), omit all words and expressions after 'methods of' and insert in their place 'anti-multicultural, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQIA+ influencers and hate groups, including those sharing misogynistic, antisemitic, xenophobic and homophobic content;'.  
3. In paragraph (2), after 'anti-LGBTQIA+' insert 'xenophobic and antisemitic'.  
4. In paragraph (4), after 'LGBTQIA+' insert 'multicultural and multifaith'.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Mr Mulholland, the clerks need to consult with you about which amendments, so if you can just hold on for a second.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, I believe Mr Mulholland has attempted to move his amendments once his time was already expired.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** If everyone could just hold on, I am just going to consult the boffins.

I do not uphold the point of order, because the amendments were moved whilst he still had some time; there were just some clarifications required.

**Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan)** (11:11): I rise to speak on this motion 1199 in Mr Puglielli's name on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This motion requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report by the 1 September 2026 on the scale and scope of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes occurring in Victoria. This comes in the wake of a spate of hate crimes last year in which members of the LGBTQIA+ community were targeted via dating apps. While the exact nature of the violence varied, one thing was the same amongst all the attacks: a desire to shame and stigmatise gay men. These men would connect with what was unknown to them, which was a fake profile. The profile would then lure them to meet in person, and once they did, these men would then be met with violent attacks, verbal abuse, filming and threats to out them.

In one such recent case in Melbourne's bayside suburbs, a man in his 30s organised to meet with someone he had been talking to online – someone who, at least from their profile, appeared to be who they said they were. But when he got to this meeting spot he was jumped by three men carrying metal bars. They attacked him, laughed at him, called him names and filmed it. He was so badly beaten he almost ended up in intensive care and thought he may not get out alive. This kind of anti-LGBTQIA+ vigilantism is so distressing and has caused a lot of harm to the community. No-one should be set up to go on what they think is a date or a hook-up and end up on the receiving end of violence. At the time of these attacks 35 people were arrested just in Victoria, and many similar attacks were reported across the country. Some of the alleged offenders were as young as 13. The truth is there are likely more attacks that went without investigation because they were never reported; shame, stigma and distrust of police all play a part in distorting these figures.

There was a time when, for many decades in this state and across this country, there were essentially state-sanctioned gay-bashings and killings where police looked the other way and, at times, took part. Perpetrators were typically young men operating in groups like we are seeing today. Our culture continues to reckon with how gay men and the LGBTQIA+ community more generally were treated for far too long. While we have come a long way, we see parts of this culture repeating itself, as this motion has identified. The drivers of this resurgence are complex – a rise in homophobia – and these

## COMMITTEES

kinds of hate crimes do not exist in isolation. Understanding how we have gotten here yet again will help us address these trends before things get even worse.

Another vital part of this motion is an investigation into anti-LGBTIQA+ influencers and hate groups, including those sharing far-right, misogynistic and homophobic alpha male content. In the modern age, perpetrators are equipped with access to the internet and an anonymity that presents its own new risks. At the same time social media has helped to normalise behaviours and attitudes that our society has worked so hard to move into the past. Nowhere is this seen more than in young men faced with challenges to traditional masculinity who are seeking answers and people to blame. This kind of othering for the purpose of laying blame happens all across different groups in our society – to immigrants, to women, to the LGBTIQA+ community. This is a mammoth problem requiring a whole of society response. It will not be solved by this inquiry, but it presents a starting point to address this kind of radicalisation.

Importantly, this inquiry will also be tasked with investigating strategies to counter anti-LGBTIQA+ influence, particularly among young people; the adequacy of current responses to preventing these crimes; the adequacy of current supports for victim-survivors; and ways to improve public safety and e-safety for LGBTIQA+ community members. These are all worthwhile areas of investigation. As a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, I look forward to being part of this inquiry. Legalise Cannabis Victoria will be supporting this motion.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (11:16): At the outset I am pleased to respond to this motion. I want to acknowledge the real distress that recent acts of hate have caused the LGBTIQA+ community and their families. No-one should feel unsafe because of who they are or who they love. I can understand why this inquiry may be important to several of my colleagues, and I thank Mr Puglielli for raising the issue. Many of us share his concerns about the growing influence of far-right, misogynistic and homophobic alpha male content online – certainly it is something that is also intimidating for women – as content that targets young people, can contribute to their radicalisation, and in particular targets young gay males and bi+ community members. There is a deeply troubling pattern emerging where some perpetrators – often very young men – are being drawn into online networks that operate in the shadows and promote division, hostility and violence.

We know that hate crime victims have been targeted using a range of digital platforms. Victoria Police have made at least 45 arrests, and I endorse what my colleague Mr Galea said about that. It is terrific that Victoria Police are on to this, and I thank them for that. I also want to thank those people that have been impacted and have felt in a position to report their experience, because not everybody is in a position to report their experience. Those that do feel that they can play a really important role for those who are not able to report.

It is not difficult to empathise with the urgency on this issue. Discrimination, hatred and violence have no place in Victoria. Every person in this place should stand against this dangerous, divisive and destructive behaviour. We know that LGBTIQA+ people face higher rates of violence than the general population, and it is unacceptable that 65 per cent report experiencing violence in their lifetime. We also know that the Rainbow Mob and other multicultural and multi-faith LGBTIQA+ communities have experienced violence based on who they are perpetrated by overlapping forms of discrimination and hate.

Like many other issues in our society, social media is actively changing that environment. It has fundamentally changed the way hate spreads and the speed at which it can take hold. In the past extremist views were often confined to small, insular groups. Now digital platforms can amplify those same views thousands, even millions, of times within minutes. At the moment digital spaces allow anonymity and distance. We all know this can lower social inhibitions, and people may say or share things online that they would never express face to face. For young users in particular, repeated exposure to misogynistic, homophobic and extremist content can normalise those views over time. What begins as an edgy, provocative material can gradually escalate into more explicit hate and

## COMMITTEES

22

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

consequently violent real-world harm. The reality is these online spaces have become breeding grounds for hate, and when those networks appear to be expanding faster than our laws and systems can respond, it does create genuine concern for our community and is a very, very good reason for lending our minds to this issue in a very specific way. These issues are even more pronounced in regional communities, where not only is coming out for young people often a safety risk but also there can be very, very small gay communities in regional settings. Sometimes there is also a higher risk of family rejection, exclusion and judgement, so it is particularly of interest for regional communities, I think.

Complex issues like online radicalisation, algorithmic amplification and youth vulnerability do not come with simple solutions. But complexity cannot be an excuse for inaction, and neither can oversimplification, broadening and watering down be an excuse for inaction. As legislators we have a responsibility in this space to inquire, to be curious and to understand people who might be different or the same as us and their personal experiences. There has already been significant work in this space conducted by the Allan Labor government, and I acknowledge the leadership of the Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Equality and Minister for Police for their work in addressing anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes. We have banned machetes, strengthened bail laws and made it an offence to post and boast about crimes online. But more important and even more relevant to this are the anti-vilification laws, which were voted against by the coalition, that provide a really powerful support in this space. In December the Premier announced that civil anti-vilification protections will be brought forward to commence earlier – from April this year – protecting more Victorians sooner.

We are committed to actively tackling hate and preventing it from taking hold in our communities, and we are doing this through the anti-hate taskforce and through legislative reform. We have established dedicated support services for victims, and that includes support for LGBTIQA+ people impacted by app-based crime through services such as Switchboard Victoria's Rainbow Door. Victoria has led the nation and we will continue to be curious in this space to understand what we can do as a Victorian Parliament to support this community and their experiences. Another of the reforms that we did was the building of a Pride centre and being the first to deliver our comprehensive 10-year LGBTIQA+ strategy, *Pride in Our Future*, and a range of other strategies as well. It is really important that we do have strong laws and that there is meaningful enforcement. It means education, prevention and support for victims, and it means refusing to be complacent in the face of evolving threats.

Hate has no place in this state. It is more important to respect, to listen and to understand each other than to hate each other. The diversity of our nation is built on respect, and that should be afforded in this particular space as well. Gay bashings have always been shameful and should not be happening now through the manipulation of dating apps or the general rise in overt hatred online. Our responsibility as legislators is to stand firmly for safety, equality and dignity, and we need to ensure that Victoria remains a place where diversity is not merely tolerated but is celebrated.

I want to close by expressing my thanks to people that have been involved in advocating in this space – it is not my area, but I am sure there are many people that have been advocating in this space. For any people who are present in the gallery – I am not sure if there are or not – thank you very much for your advocacy. As I said before, it is really important for those people who do feel they are in a position to advocate in this space to do so for all of those voices who are not able to and who do not feel safe enough to express what they are experiencing. I fully support this.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (11:26): I also rise to speak on this motion, requiring the Legal and Social Issues Committee, which I am the chair of, to inquire into the scale and scope of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in Victoria. Let me begin very clearly: violence against any Victorian because of who they are is wrong. Threats, intimidation and harassment are wrong. I particularly want to acknowledge Mr Puglielli for bringing this and also Ms Payne for what she described, some pretty awful situations that people have experienced, and I think we can all say those situations are wrong. With what we have seen online, I would not say it is just far-right groups, though; I have seen footage of people that support Hamas literally throwing gay people off roofs and hanging them. That is hateful

## COMMITTEES

as well. I look forward, if this inquiry does pass, to exploring those sorts of things as well and how that radicalises the minds of people in Victoria and what actions that might lead them to.

Today, from my point of view, we are not here to vote on whether hate crimes are wrong; I think we can all agree that they are wrong. But as the motion sits – and I guess there are a couple amendments as well – from how I read it, the remit of the wording is a bit broader than that, despite what has been said, and I understand there is a focus on perhaps dating apps and the crimes that can occur around those and the harassment that occurs. The wording that I see in front of me is a bit broader than that. I guess we are voting on whether this Parliament should commission a broad inquiry that risks blurring the line between criminal conduct and what offensive speech might look like.

I do not just talk about this in a theoretical sense; I talk about it from lived experience. Everyone knows that in 2023 I came out very publicly, and within hours social media lit up. There were many messages that were kind and many messages that were supportive, but there were some that were deeply unpleasant. There were tweets that were calling me names like ‘a traitor’. There were comments questioning my integrity, there were people speculating about my motives and there were articles that sought to dissect my personal life. I guess that is the reality of modern political life. If you are in public office, particularly if you step into a cultural debate, you attract commentary. Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad and sometimes it is ugly. But there is an important distinction: I was not assaulted, I was not physically attacked, I have not been denied police protection and I was not left without any legal recourse.

The law protects me, as it should for every Victorian, from violence, threats and incitement. I guess that is the critical point here. Victoria already has criminal law provisions dealing with assault, stalking, threats, incitement to violence and serious vilification. Victoria Police do have powers to investigate hate-motivated offences. Courts already have the ability to treat prejudice as an aggravating factor in sentencing. So before we launch an inquiry we should ask the very simple question: what specific gaps in the law exist? An inquiry should identify a deficiency, not simply respond to the existence of unpleasant speech.

I am concerned that the framing of this motion might lead to that, because it does not ask the committee to examine crime, it asks the committee to investigate communication methods of influencers and hate groups. It asks us to consider strategies that counter influence, particularly among young people. That moves us from a criminal element into the conduct of regulating ideas, and that is a bit of a dangerous territory for me. We have got to be very careful that in seeking to protect minority groups from violence we do not slide into the position where the state begins examining speech simply because it might be offensive to some or it might be conservative or religious or traditional or maybe even unpopular. I have had things said about me that I find repulsive. I have read commentary that I completely and utterly disagree with, but in a democracy the answer to speech is more speech, not less speech. The answer is not necessarily parliamentary committees investigating who is influencing whom online.

I guess there is also the question of consistency. As members of Parliament, on varying levels we would all receive different forms of abuse daily, weekly, monthly maybe – I am not sure. Women in public life receive appalling commentary, religious leaders are threatened, Jewish Victorians have received awful antisemitism recently and Muslim Victorians face hostility as well. If the existence of hostility, whether it is online or in person, is the test for a parliamentary inquiry, we would be conducting them pretty regularly. The proper test must be whether there is a failure in criminal enforcement of victim protection. If there is evidence of rising physical attacks, let us have a look at the data. If there are policing gaps, let us identify them. If sentencing is inadequate, then let us offer forward some reform. But do not equate offensive tweets, however distasteful they might be, with systemic criminal failure – they are not the same thing. My sexuality does not make me a fragile person. It also does not exempt me from any sort of criticism in this place, and it does not require the state to police lawful opinion on my behalf.

## COMMITTEES

24

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

What I require, and what every single Victorian deserves, is equal protection under the law – nothing more and nothing less. Freedom of expression is not always comfortable. Democracy is not always polite. And the internet, as we all know, is rarely a gentle place. But the threshold for state intervention must remain anchored in crime, not simply in whether someone finds something offensive or not. For those reasons I will not be supporting this motion in its current form, not because prejudice does not exist and not because unpleasant commentary does not occur but because our response must be proportionate, precise and grounded in a demonstrable legal need. I believe Victoria is strongest when we defend both safety and liberty, but we must not sacrifice one at the expense of the other.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:34): I also would like to say a few words on the motion brought forward by Mr Puglielli, motion 1199, on anti LGBTQIA+ hate crimes. Let me state from the outset that for any Victorian to be assaulted, blackmailed, robbed is abhorrent, and it should be all of our expectation, for whatever reason, that the police hunt down and prosecute these people to the fullest extent of the law. Regardless of their gender, sexuality or any other thing, no-one deserves that, and the police should do their job on that.

I would like to push back a bit on the insinuation from some of the government members that opposing the government's anti-vilification laws somehow means that you support vilification or that you are somehow harming people. I would like to point out the fact that the government's track record on combating hate is appalling. The government came out with legislative responses to combat far-right extremism. That has made far-right extremism worse, just as I predicted. They have come out with efforts to combat antisemitism; those have failed. They have come out with things to combat racism; those have also failed. There is no empirical evidence by which one could look at the government's proposal of the anti-vilification laws, which have yet to come into effect on the civil side, and think that they will work. In fact one could only form the logical conclusion that it will make things worse, as I believe is what will be the case. But we will wait and see.

But what this committee is seeking to look at in many ways has already been looked at and acted on by the government over the past few years. Let us go back over some of the timeline of what has happened here. In September 2019 the Assembly referred an inquiry into the expansion of these anti-vilification laws. Many organisations made submissions to that and had their say, and they had public hearings and all that sort of stuff. Then the government made commitments to make legislative changes, and there was a big push in the last term of Parliament by many on the crossbench to go forward with that. Many were very upset that the government did not do it in the last term of Parliament, but eventually the government had the first round of consultation into these laws in 2023. Then we went through a second round of consultation in 2024. Then the debate began in late 2024, and the bill passed eventually in early 2025. As noted by the government, the opposition, I and the Libertarians opposed this. I did not oppose it because I do not like gay people or something like that; I opposed it because I do not think it will be effective.

The problem that I see with going into an inquiry at this point, and as has been pointed out by the government and the opposition, is that the civil component of these, which is probably the most significant to what we are talking about here today, has not even come into effect. The government has agreed to move forward that timeline, in response to the Bondi massacre, to April, where it was initially slated to be June. Let us wait and see how these laws work when they come into effect. I am predicting that they will not act in the way that many thought they would work. But nevertheless, let us wait and see.

I would also make the point that there are already a vast number of organisations that deal with support for LGBTQIA+ groups such as the official LGBTIQA+ Taskforce and LGBTIQA+ Justice Working Group, and they met only recently in December. There is also a new helpline, the Rainbow Door helpline, set up by the government. Many councils have standing reference groups. Other groups are LGBTIQA+ Health Australia, Equality Australia, Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council, Transcend Australia, the Equality Project, Switchboard Victoria, Minus18, Victorian Pride Lobby,

## COMMITTEES

Transgender Victoria, Queerspace, Koorie Pride Victoria, the Victorian Pride Centre, and the list could go on and on.

I think that these issues have been explored already by both this Parliament and the government. The government has chosen to act on this through their anti-vilification laws. They have brought them forward not in response to LGBTQIA+ hate crimes but rather in response to a terror attack. Nevertheless they are bringing them forward. The most appropriate thing to do is to wait and see how these laws play out and then see if they help any of this or not. I am predicting not. I hope I am wrong. I hope the laws stop all hate in Victoria and have a wonderful effect, but I do not think that will be the case. I think that they will backfire spectacularly just as many of the government's other actions have in the past. and I think that the government should reflect on their actions and their effectiveness and reconsider that maybe they are not very good at stopping hate in this state and maybe they need to change course.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:40): President, thank you so much for the opportunity to rise today and make a contribution to Mr Puglielli's motion regarding the scale and scope of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in our state. Discrimination, hatred and violence have no place in Victoria, and every person in this chamber should stand against this dangerous, divisive and really destructive behaviour. In Victoria under the Allan Labor government, equality is not negotiable. Every person deserves to live safely, wholly and freely. That is our commitment, and it is as strong today as it ever was. I want to start by acknowledging every victim of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in Victoria, as well as their families, their friends and their loved ones. We recognise the profound distress and trauma caused by these terrible acts. Everyone deserves to live free from violence and hate. Everyone deserves to live their lives with pride, not with fear. This government will continue to work to ensure that all Victorians can live safely and that perpetrators of hate crimes are held accountable for their actions.

Our record on this is clear: Victoria was the first state to establish a dedicated equality portfolio, the first to appoint an LGBTIQA+ commissioner, the first to build a Pride centre and the first to deliver a comprehensive 10-year LGBTIQA+ strategy, *Pride in Our Future*. This strategy is not just a document but a whole-of-government road map that embeds equality across key domains, including equal rights and freedoms to build safe, strong and sustainable communities. We are not just talking about safety; we are pulling every lever available to protect the community. We have passed laws to protect Victorians from the harms of vilification. We have passed reforms that respond directly to the increase in violent attacks, including attacks directed towards members of the LGBTIQA+ community. Our criminal protections for serious vilification, which includes threatening and inciting hatred, commenced in September of last year. And with this, in December the Premier announced that civil anti-vilification protections would be brought forward to commence earlier, from April this year, protecting more Victorians affected by the harms of hate speech.

We are working hard to stamp out hate, whether it is through the anti-hate taskforce, legislative reform or dedicated support for LGBTIQA+ victims of app-based crime through services like Switchboard Victoria's Rainbow Door. We know that hate crime victims have been targeted using a range of digital platforms, which is why we are taking steps to intervene early and hold people accountable for their behaviour online. Some of the pretty sickening practices that are out there were outlined in earlier contributions, and I particularly want to outline the contribution made by Mr Puglielli, who spoke to what is really damaging behaviour. Victoria Police have now made at least 45 arrests connected to app-based violence, and several perpetrators have been rightly sentenced.

The statistics we are dealing with are harrowing and entirely unacceptable. Sixty-five per cent of LGBTIQA+ people report experiencing violence in their lifetime. We know that rainbow mob as well as multicultural and multifaith LGBTIQA+ communities have experienced violence based on who they are, perpetrated by overlapping forms of discrimination and hate. This has no place here, and this government is dedicated to ensuring that all Victorians can live their lives to their fullest. The gravity of that 65 per cent figure cannot be overstated: it actually represents thousands of individual stories of pain, resilience and recovery. When we look at the specific targeting of rainbow mob and multicultural

## COMMITTEES

and multifaith Victorians, we can see how hate often layers upon itself. I, for one, will be spending an iftar dinner, I hope, as I have done many times, with the queer community, celebrating the strength and diversity of our queer mob as they mark the going down of the sun. I think that there are ways that we can show up for these communities and make sure that we hear their stories when we do, and I look forward to that in the coming weeks.

I had the good fortune of speaking to Ingrid Stitt, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, about that only yesterday. You see, our Labor government has led the nation in responding to not only this hate but also gender-based violence with over \$4 billion invested since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, including funding for LGBTIQA+ support. We have invested \$28.8 million over four years in the budget. Importantly, that included continuing Q+Law's specialist LGBTIQA+ legal service, providing a safe harbour for people at their most vulnerable. Victoria Police have also rolled out LGBTIQA+ inclusion training for their workforce, a welcome step that will assist police who are supporting victims of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes. We are also working with community leaders, Victorian police and liaison officers to support victims to report these heinous crimes. I have had the good fortune of meeting some of these liaison officers in the inner north. I know the sheer volume of work that they are having to deal with, and I give them my thanks and gratitude.

While this inquiry proposed before us is focused on anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes, we know that hate incidents cause real harm and distress for affected individuals but also communities, and we will continue to work with LGBTIQA+ Victorians who have experienced hate incidents to access appropriate reporting pathways. By bringing forward the civil anti-vilification protection scheme to April, we are making sure that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission can assist those impacted to make complaints, access referrals and seek support.

We also know that there is some intersectional hate that we are seeing, including antisemitic individuals and groups that have attacked and vandalised both the Holocaust museum and a dedicated LGBTIQA+ venue in Melbourne with homophobic and antisemitic graffiti. We are going to explore the relationship between these really harmful ideologies and how they contribute to further hate crimes. No-one in this place should be fostering any environment where bigotry, intolerance and hate are normalised. I have got a lot to say about those opposite. I am not going to get into it, because I could end up just as fired up about it as my colleague Mr Galea. There is so much that those opposite should be reflecting on: the behaviour of not only themselves but their leaders and their role in community to keep everyone safe.

Can I finish off my remarks by saying I will continue to keep fighting for a Victoria where everyone can walk down the street, use a dating app, attend a community event without fear, love who they love where they live and live free from hate. Making sure that all Victorians can do that is something that keeps me going each and every day. I commend the motion and our proposed amendments to the house.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:48): I recall last year when some of these despicable attacks occurred. I should not have been surprised, but I was surprised perhaps at the extent of it. Maybe that was just my naivety, maybe it was the fact that I do not see it or interact with it that frequently in terms of the people who make those threats and perpetrate those sort of crimes. But I sort of remember thinking to myself how despicable they were, the people who perpetrate it, clearly. How people in this day and age can continue to target another person for any attribute, much less their sexual preference, was to me just an absolutely abhorrent idea, and it remains to this day to be that. It also occurred to me at the time that there seemed to be, as you point out here in your motion, Mr Puglielli, a proliferation. That did and does concern me greatly, because what is going on? We in this place must ask insightful questions when we see patterns occurring. I would hate to think that what we saw last year was the norm, because if that is the norm, then we are a pretty sick society in need of some pretty urgent help. In part, we know that is true. It is probably a glass half empty view, but we want the glass half full view of the world. But the truth is if we go around just thinking that, we are not going to address the real problems that are out there and exist for people. Understanding more is absolutely

## COMMITTEES

imperative, because how do we prevent it in the future? Do our police police this to the extent that they should? I gather they do, but I do not know that. Are the laws adequate to prevent the perpetrators from doing these things? And when they do these things, do they actually ensure that there is a sanction that provides enough of a deterrent to both punish them and prevent them perhaps from doing it again? I can guess that the answer to that is no, because they seem to do it time and again with frequency.

Then there is the age of the perpetrators, between 13 and 20 as a generalisation. I am sure it falls outside that age bracket as well, but what are 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds doing actively targeting others with hatred, despicable acts, intimidation and violence? It is just sickening. What are they doing with their time? What I would not want to do to them in a sanctioned, better-behaved way to teach them a lesson. If I had my choice, I would be locking them up for a very, very, very long time, because I just think I have got to the point in my own life, personally speaking, where I have no tolerance for violence whatsoever. I have always pretty much been of that view anyway, frankly. To see in society that people cannot freely speak to one another, cannot freely flirt with one another, cannot freely seek partners any which way they wish in a lawful way, free of intimidation and fear that they are going to be targeted by some so-and-so is just a despicable place to be, I think.

While there will be arguments today – and everyone has their perspective and their point of view, and I respect their right to have those points of view – there are aspects here, I think, that require our continued vigilance. If we are not vigilant, if we simply look away time and again, then what does that do for our most vulnerable? I feel it does not help them very much at all. In fact the last thing we want to do is give anyone an amber let alone a green light to conduct themselves in this way, whether they be far right wing, far left wing, far whatever the hell they want to call themselves. I think one of the ironies here is that these people are not so intelligent as to actually have an ideology at all other than one of hatred and disrespect and disgusting vitriol and violence. It speaks obviously about them, not of their victims. I will leave my comments at that, because I know there will be others who are keen to also make remarks.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:53): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion moved in Mr Puglielli's name, which is about a referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 1 September 2026 the scale and scope of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes occurring in Victoria. I would like to start by thanking Mr Puglielli for bringing this motion. It is an important issue not only to him personally but also to many people that are our shared constituents in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region and of course many people more broadly right across Victoria. I have had the benefit of listening to some of the contributions, and I might just address some of those points in a moment.

I firstly want to start my contribution as well by acknowledging all victims of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crimes, their family, friends and loved ones and the distress that those distressing events have caused. Because as we know, for someone who is a victim of those acts – often targeted acts – not only does it affect them, but it can affect their friends and family as well and cause distress and continue to cause great distress. Of course everyone in Victoria, no matter who they are, who they love and who they want to be, does deserve to live free from acts of violence and hate. They are entitled to live as their authentic selves without fear as well.

I know some of the discourse in this debate – Mr Limbrick's comments as well – has been about our government, and I will talk about our record in a minute. Our government has introduced many reforms to work on driving down acts of hate and vilification in this state. But I have to say that sometimes – oftentimes – when you are trying to address these sorts of crimes the work can never be done. Sometimes when you drive down one aspect of hate or vilification something else pops up in its place. And so really the work is never done.

We know that LGBTQI+ people, for example, face higher rates of violence than the general population. Sixty-five per cent of those people report experiencing violence in their lifetime. They are a population of people who do get targeted by groups in a range of ways, and we do see new ways of

## COMMITTEES

28

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

perpetuating hate and violence pop up all the time, particularly with technology. That of course is not just confined to LGBTIQ+ populations. Women are also subject to those same threats of violence. Whether you are in overlapping communities, different populations et cetera, all of those acts are completely unacceptable.

Our government is dedicated to ensuring that Victorians can live their best lives. Our government led the nation in ensuring that we responded to gender-based violence, with over \$4 billion invested since the Royal Commission into Family Violence. That included dedicated funding for LGBTIQA+ support as well. We invested \$28.8 million over four years in the 2024–25 budget to support integrated and early intervention legal assistance, including continuing Q+Law, a specialist LGBTIQA+ legal service. Also, Victoria Police, importantly, have rolled out mandatory LGBTIQA+ inclusion training for their workforce, which is going to assist them in becoming more acutely aware of the forms of hate that that population experiences. This is a welcome step, and it will directly assist police in supporting victims of this type of hate.

One of the things that Mr Limbrick talked about was that, whilst all of these reforms have happened, his view was that, whilst these actions were designed to drive down hate, he felt they had made these things worse. That is why an inquiry like this is actually a good thing to do, as we get an opportunity to inquire into and examine that. I am not sure I agree with Mr Limbrick's assessment of that, because I do not think we are qualified to make that assumption here in the chamber, particularly without any evidence about that. Mr Limbrick, you are entitled to your view and your observations about that – they are all valid – but again, before embarking on that, we should make sure and hear from the people who are directly affected by these sorts of things.

We also get an opportunity to examine not only the effectiveness of the laws and the reforms that have been put in place but whether we need to do more based on the experiences that people are seeing. Like I said, I know that sometimes it is really difficult to keep up with technological advances, and perpetrators can be very, I guess, nimble in adopting all sorts of platforms and whatever to enable them to perpetuate their hate. So again, I think that is why, if I look at the terms of reference in Mr Puglielli's motion, point 3 was the adequacy of the current responses to preventing these crimes but also the adequacy of current supports for victim-survivors and ways to improve public safety. I think whenever we do any reforms that are designed to drive down hate, it is always critically important to listen to victims of any sorts of hate crimes and violence that have occurred.

We also want to look at e-safety for LGBTIQ+ community members, which is something I mentioned just now. As I said, technological advances are sometimes quite frightening. We are very slow to keep up with them. That is not unusual; most people are, sadly. If only perpetrators would use their levels of ingenuity for good things rather than bad things, but we cannot change some people. What we can do is continue to work on driving down hate.

As I said earlier in my earlier remarks, the work is never done. To think that once we implement reforms we can just not continue to monitor those things is kind of short-sighted. It is a bit like whack-a-mole: you drive down something and something else will pop up in its place. We need to continue to work on those things, and as I said, an inquiry of this nature does provide an opportunity to do that. It gives an opportunity for people to make submissions, gives an opportunity to come and talk to the committee about their lived experiences and gives people an opportunity to have their say, but also then gives us important insight from people who are victims of hate et cetera. I have got 5 seconds, so I might leave it there. By the time I sit down I am sure you will segue straight into question time.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Housing**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1221) My question today is for the Minister for Housing and Building. Minister, the Commonwealth has announced it will sell off surplus defence land, including sites in Victoria. These land parcels are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver well-designed homes with open space and supporting community infrastructure. Minister, can you confirm whether you have written to the federal minister to request that defence land being sold in Victoria be prioritised for housing including good design standards, adequate green open space and community assets like sporting fields et cetera?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:00): Thank you very much, Dr Mansfield, for that question. Sorry, I do apologise: thank you, Ms Copsey. Apologies, Dr Mansfield, for attributing perhaps words to you in this chamber that were not your own. I want to take this opportunity in answering this question perhaps to look to the government's work in making the most of government land and the purpose by which Development Victoria and government are doing these projects and engaging with community in order to address that unmet demand and to ensure that, as we are delivering housing and open space and as we are delivering better ways for people to be able to afford and to find a home closer to either the city or to the areas where they want to live or where they grew up, they have opportunities to do so. As the government's property developer, Development Victoria does deliver a range of projects through that urban renewal process, and this also includes discussions on unused government land.

I have not sought any process of engagement with the Commonwealth and nor has Development Victoria in relation to unused defence land. I do want to make sure, though, that in giving you this information, I can confirm an unwavering commitment to making good use of land, and that land may often involve extensive works for remediation and decontamination. This is something, Ms Copsey, that you would absolutely be aware of in terms of an unused former defence site. The Fitzroy Gasworks is one example of the sort of work that we need to do in the rehabilitation of land before we can actually see any contemplation of housing. The Fitzroy Gasworks site, which is the site of 1200 homes, as you know – 20 per cent of which are social and affordable homes – is about making sure that we are doing so and doing so safely. Defence sites, as we know, are really, really complex sites. There is a lot of work to be done in that space, and I know that the local member has been really involved in the work around what that looks like and the impact that it will have on communities. So we will continue to do the work within Development Victoria's remit and the priority around the portfolio to continue to deliver housing.

As part of the 2024–25 financial year, Development Victoria supported more than 5000 jobs, and the portfolios generated about a \$498 million spend and investment in property development and infrastructure. There have been 142 housing sales, with 40 per cent to first home buyers and 34 per cent to those on incomes eligible for affordable housing. That site is not part of the work that Development Victoria is undertaking at this time. Our book is already full of a lot of work that is continuing. I would like to see that work go through to its logical conclusion to bring more housing and more homes to government lands as they become available.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): Minister, will these sites contain public housing?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:03): Thanks, Ms Copsey. The answer is perhaps guided by my previous answer in respect of the work that we are doing across the inventory of unused and surplus government land. At this point in time, there is no work being undertaken by Development Victoria in respect of former defence land at the sites that you have identified. Having said that, I do want to be clear that we have a pipeline of sites that are being

developed at this point in time, and that is for a mix of different housing. So going back to the earlier example that I provided you of the Fitzroy Gasworks, there will be 20 per cent affordable and social housing, and again, that is part of making sure that we are providing housing in a range of circumstances for a range of different people, including key workers, who are a focus of the affordable housing space. That is then also taking pressure off other parts of the market and bringing therefore downward pressure to bear on the private rental market, which can keep people in housing and not expose them to the vulnerabilities of social housing reliance.

### Construction industry

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:05): (1222) My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. In October 2025 in this place in answer to a question about CFMEU meetings with Mick Gatto, you said:

We have responded comprehensively to the allegations of criminal and intimidatory behaviour involving the CFMEU, including commissioning the Wilson review.

Notwithstanding the compelling evidence now in the public domain about the biggest corruption scandal in Victoria's history, are you still confident there is nothing more your government can do to stop this corrupt activity on Victorian government Big Build worksites?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Mrs McArthur, I certainly would not say there is ever nothing more to do when you are dealing with serious issues. But what I would point to, and I stand by the comments that I made that you have repeated back to me in relation to acting when the information came to the government's attention. As I said yesterday, when I came into the role as Minister for Industrial Relations the Wilson review had been commissioned, and it has been my responsibility as the minister to continue to implement those recommendations – recommendations such as setting up the complaints function to specifically deal with concerns around corruption or misconduct on government construction sites, which is now taking calls within the Workforce Inspectorate; establishing an alliance of state and federal industrial and law enforcement agencies to better enable collaboration and information sharing on matters of corruption; and introducing reforms to our labour hire scheme to strengthen the powers of the Labour Hire Authority to prevent those with links to criminal organisations from operating labour hire businesses.

As I said yesterday, Mrs McArthur, in relation to the report that has been the topic of the questions that you have put to me, there is not one single bad actor from the CFMEU that has been detailed in that report who is currently still with the CFMEU. The administrator has taken action to ensure the removal of those individuals. They have left, and indeed some of them have been prosecuted.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:07): Minister, on 15 October 2024 you told this house:

The construction industry is a fantastic industry for people with criminal records to get a chance to get employment.

Do you still stand by this phrase?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): So what you are putting to the chamber, Mrs McArthur, is that anybody that has been charged with a criminal offence has no right in the state of Victoria to obtain further employment. I am sure that the Minister for Corrections would love to jump up and intervene in this. We want to have training opportunities in our prisons. We want to have TAFE qualifications for people that have come into contact with the criminal justice system. We want to turn lives around. Of course we want jobs for people to have better opportunities and stay on the right side of the law, Mrs McArthur. That is an extraordinary position for the Liberal Party to put, that if you have been charged with a criminal offence, you can never work again in Victoria. Great policy position. Congratulations.

**Ministers statements: Pick My Park**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:09): Thank you very much for the opportunity to stand up today and talk about Pick My Park. Now, here on this side of the chamber we know how important parks and open spaces are for Victorian families. We know that as our city grows, free and accessible parks, playgrounds and green spaces need to grow as well. That is why on Sunday I joined my good friend Mr Batchelor at the Clarke Reserve in Elwood. That is in Mr Newbury's seat, but unfortunately he was unable to attend to announce the 97 winners of the first round.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Can the clerks please reset the clock. I do not believe the minister was being provocative there to have provoked so much noise.

**A member** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** If she gets there, maybe; if she gets to that point. But she has not yet, so let us hear her in silence.

**Harriet SHING:** I will miss the enthusiastic endorsement of all parts of this chamber as I get to my feet today to talk again about how important parks and open spaces are for Victorian families, and I want to take this opportunity to talk about the Pick My Park program. As our city grows, we know that free and accessible parks, playgrounds and open spaces need to grow as well. That is why on Sunday I was delighted to join my good friend Mr Batchelor at the Clarke Reserve in Elwood – again, unfortunately Mr Newbury, the member for Brighton, was unable to attend – to announce the first 97 winners of the first round of Pick My Park.

**Nick McGowan:** On a point of order, President – it really is a point of order – just on truthfulness, I am just keen to know that Mr Newbury was invited to join you, Minister.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Nick McGowan:** I would not want the chamber to be misled into thinking he received it. The point of order is that it is not appropriate for a minister to mislead the house if the member was not in fact invited.

**The PRESIDENT:** The only way that you can accuse any member of misleading the house is by substantive motion. You can do that thing which I think we set a precedent for a number of weeks ago where if you want the house to take note of the minister's statement on the next day of meeting, feel free to move that at the end of her statement.

**Harriet SHING:** Scheduling conflicts notwithstanding, it was really, really wonderful to be able to announce the first 97 winners of the first round of the Pick My Park program. Clarke Reserve in Elwood in the seat of Brighton will receive \$250,000 from the Pick My Park program, along with \$320,000 in a partnership with the Port Phillip City Council, for new play equipment, improved accessibility and expanding the park's greenery.

These 97 investments come directly from listening to the community, who were able to nominate their local park for an upgrade. As we heard from communities, well-designed and inclusive spaces are important, with plenty of trees and shade, modern safe play equipment, well-lit public areas and seating spaces to connect with others. Round 1 projects are receiving funding of between \$20,000 and \$250,000. Labor knows that time is money, and making sure that Victorians have support with the cost of living, with safety and also with opportunities to connect across their communities is helping people to spend less time travelling and more time with their families and loved ones. We also know that improving community safety with passive surveillance and lighting improvements is particularly important. That includes Frankston, it includes Wyndham and it includes so many parts of the city.

Get on board and see if you cannot start supporting this work that is improving communities across the board.

**Alcohol and other drug services**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): (1223) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. The *Victorian Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy 2025–2035* sets out a 10-year plan to reduce alcohol- and drug-related harms across the state. A significant focus in this strategy is harm reduction in Victoria's health-led, evidence-based approach to alcohol and drug use. The strategy also spruiks the decriminalisation of public intoxication, yet the strategy is essentially silent on the continued criminalisation of small amounts of illicit drugs – a key component of a health-led response to drug abuse. So can the minister advise why decriminalisation is not a key feature of the Victorian alcohol and other drugs strategy?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:14): I thank Ms Payne for her question and for her interest in these matters. I was very pleased late last year to be able to launch our 10-year alcohol and drugs strategy, which is the first of its kind in Victoria, and it was the subject of a lot of consultation with the sector, the workforce and also those with lived experience of drug and alcohol dependency. I am proud that we are part of a government that takes a very health-based response to these challenges. Everybody deserves to get that support in a stigma-free, compassionate way. In our drug and alcohol service system here in Victoria there are wonderful people that are assisting people in the community day in and day out – around 40,000 people a year access our drug and alcohol services. But it was high time to have a broad and overarching strategy for the sector. There are a few key priorities in the AOD strategy that I know you are aware of, including better information and easier access to services, stronger and increased flexibility in harm reduction and treatment options, and culturally safe and determined responses for Aboriginal Victorians. There is a section in the strategy around system innovation and continuous improvement, and greater coordination across some of those other key parts of service systems like mental health, housing, justice and other areas.

We certainly have been quite clear that the strategy does not consider approaches to individual substances, including cannabis. It is a kind of system-wide, holistic view of the sector, so its focus is really more on delivering that compassionate, coordinated and connected system. We have been clear as a government about our views on decriminalisation in response to the inquiry that the Legalise Cannabis Party led in respect to their private members bill. In our response to that committee report we did outline that the government has got no plans to decriminalise use and possession at this time.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): Thank you, Minister, for your response. You have touched on this already, but I may as well just clarify. By way of supplementary, another glaring omission in the Victorian alcohol and other drug strategy is cannabis, so my question is: will the minister advise how cannabis fits into this strategy?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:16): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary. I am not sure I would agree with the way you have characterised it, as a glaring omission, because as I was explaining earlier it is intended for this strategy to be a broad, systemwide view of harm reduction, and I would certainly argue that it does not matter what substance you are talking about, the principles of harm reduction remain the same. It was certainly clear, in the government's response to the inquiry that your party led, our position in relation to cannabis.

**Construction industry**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:17): (1224) My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Minister, in November 2024 your own Wilson review, which you quoted yesterday, flagged that health and safety representative positions:

... have been misused and have enabled criminal and unlawful conduct ...

Yet the government's review into the powers of employee representatives only commenced in August 2025 and to date has only delivered an interim report. When is your government going to get serious about the loopholes that allow these criminals to work on and infiltrate Big Build sites, or under your definition of zero tolerance will you continue to insist that this just is not your problem?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:18): I thank Mr Welch. Mr Welch, I take issue with the last part of your question, because you are accusing me of not wanting to take responsibility for what you quote as my job when you continue to put issues to me that are not in the remit of my portfolio. The question as you proposed it – actually, when you are referring to the review and the report that you are referring to – is a matter for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and that is the Deputy Premier. So the concern –

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: I am getting there as well, but it would be a much better use of your time and the chamber's time if you confined your questions to the responsible minister, because you conflate issues, and then you are concerned about the answers that you get. In relation to the action in the remit of my portfolio, in relation to –

**Richard Welch**: 'Not my responsibility.'

**Jaclyn SYMES**: Mr Welch, I will pick up that indigestion – interjection. It is giving people indigestion. In this place there are standing orders. I accept that you are a relatively new member of this place and it does take some time to get into the groove of things, but you cannot have interjections saying 'You are saying it's not your job' when you are asking the wrong minister, repeatedly, the wrong question. It has taken Mr Davis many years to master this. But this is the problem that I have, Mr Welch, with the questions that you pose. Perhaps in your supplementary question if you confine it to my portfolio I will do the very best to provide you with the information that you seek.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:20): Of course you know you are losing an argument when you have to deflect it to insult the person with it. In terms of safety, it was reported that bikie Jonny 'Two Guns' Walker was given dispensation by the parole board to work with criminals on Big Build worksites for Labor Party donor CCL. He was appointed as a CFMEU health and safety representative despite serving time in jail for manslaughter and was given justice department permission to travel to Queensland when you were Attorney-General. Are there any people associated with organised crime still working as union OH&S representatives on Big Build sites?

**The PRESIDENT**: I am struggling to see how that is a supplementary question to the substantive, but I am also struggling to see how that falls within the responsibility of the industrial relations minister. I actually appreciate it for the chamber's sake when ministers are prepared to take questions that I struggle with and maybe they should not. Yesterday I did do that and put the question to a minister, and then there was a motion to take note of that answer on the next day of business, so I felt like I had set a bad precedent by doing it. Mr Welch, if you want to try to reframe that so it is a supplementary question in any way, I will give you a go.

**Georgie Crozier**: On a point of order, President, I just draw you back to the substantive question where Mr Welch did reference occupational health and safety representative positions. His supplementary goes directly to that point, so it is within the remit of question time and how it is relevant.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

34

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Crozier, I 100 percent agree that any member has the absolute right to ask any minister any question they would like to, but then the minister has the right to respond that it does not fall within their remit under the general orders. That was her answer. I think I will just rule out the supplementary, and we will move on.

### Ministers statements: Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:23): The Allan Labor government is expanding training and employment opportunities for people with disability. Last week I joined the member for Geelong Christine Couzens and the member for Lara Ella George to turn the first sod at the Gordon TAFE’s Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion. This important development was made possible by a \$36 million investment from the Allan Labor government, and it will be life changing for students with a disability. It will create a workforce pipeline of people with a disability to be employed by Geelong-based services such as WorkSafe, the TAC, the National Disability Insurance Agency and of course the local health sector. This will mean people with disability using lived experience, expertise and training to deliver services to other people with a disability, because you cannot be what you cannot see. A co-creation team of past and current students with disability helped to design the new centre of excellence to ensure it was fit for purpose. Best practice developments from this centre will inform the Victorian TAFE network. It will set the benchmark for providing accessible vocational education and training. It will develop real skills to take advantage of participation opportunities across Victoria. The centre will include best practice inclusive learning environments for a range of courses, including a state-of-the-art nursing laboratory.

More than 22,000 Victorians with disabilities have benefited since Labor introduced free TAFE in 2019. That is why we have introduced a bill to protect free TAFE and the benefits it delivers for Victorians now and into the future against more Liberal cuts. We are guaranteeing a minimum of 70 per cent funding to TAFE so that no future government can wreck TAFE, close campuses and cut funding like those opposite did.

### Bushfires

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:25): (1225) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services. 9 January 2026 was declared a catastrophic fire day for many parts of Victoria. This caused all state and national forests and parks to be closed. In my region of Northern Victoria, many homeless people utilise these as places of shelter, especially along the rivers and lakes. It has been raised with my office that very little information was given to these people about where they could go to seek shelter on catastrophic fire days. This caused homeless constituents much confusion and panic when they were told they must leave the area. Minister, what are vulnerable residents without accommodation supposed to do on catastrophic fire days?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:26): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her question. This of course is a question for the Minister for Emergency Services, and I will refer that question to her for a response.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:26): I thank the minister for passing that on. Catastrophic fire days are concerning enough for people with stable accommodation; for homeless people, this concern is multiplied by the lack of information available to them regarding services and places to go. With approximately 30,660 homeless people in Victoria, safety planning must be a high priority during catastrophic fire days. Minister, how do housing services and emergency services coordinate safety planning for homeless people?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:26): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her supplementary question. The fact of the matter is that there are a number of levels of government that are involved. There are local ICCs. There is a lot of preparation work that goes into the events leading into what is considered to be a catastrophic day. I am advised that right across the state on this occasion and in recent weeks it has worked really, really well. I believe that the

Minister for Emergency Services will be absolutely delighted in demonstrating to you what was put in place and of course what the learnings might be as a result of what has occurred.

**Suburban Rail Loop**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:27): (1226) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, Fair Work Commission general manager Murray Furlong has warned that workers and union delegates with links to bikies and organised crime have allegedly infiltrated the Suburban Rail Loop. Are there outlaw motorcycle gang members or organised crime groups on SRL sites right now?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:28): Thanks, Mr Mulholland, for the opportunity to talk to the importance of safe workplaces that are free from criminal, unlawful or dangerous work. Mr Mulholland, I want to be very, very clear in the answer that I give you today: it is my expectation that anybody with any concerns, complaints or allegations about criminal, unlawful or unsafe behaviour on Suburban Rail Loop sites will report and escalate that immediately as a matter of urgency.

Mr Mulholland, when Mr Furlong gave his evidence to a Senate Estimates Committee, he made a number of claims and assertions. He expressed a number of opinions, as he also did when he was engaged by the ABCC, and in doing so he did this backing in a draft report which was ultimately not approved by the independent administrator of the CFMEU – a union placed into administration not by the Morrison government, not by a coalition government, but by Prime Minister Albanese in taking decisive action to not only identify criminal, unlawful or unsafe behaviour on construction sites but to stamp it out and to prevent it from occurring again. Now, as has been made abundantly clear time and time again, it is our expectation that any allegations of criminal or unlawful –

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Harriet SHING**: You do not want to hear the answer, Mr Mulholland?

**Evan Mulholland**: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I have given the minister plenty of time. The question was about whether there are outlaw motorcycle gang members and organised crime groups on SRL sites right now.

**The PRESIDENT**: I believe the minister has been relevant to the question. Also, there is the level of detail, which has been a precedent as well.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: When I am externalising my thoughts as far as precedents and what is inside the standing orders we all voted on at the start of the term, I do not think I need all the groans. I do not care really, but I do not probably need them, because I am trying to be honest with the chamber. I am open to points of order on externalising my thoughts about previous rulings and what is in the standing orders. I believe the minister has been relevant to the question, and I will ask her to continue.

**Harriet SHING**: Thank you, Mr Mulholland. It is a shame that you described my description of the general manager of the Fair Work Commission as an insult when in fact it was your government that introduced the ABCC in the first place. But let us just be very, very clear: there is zero tolerance for criminal, unlawful or unsafe behaviour on worksites. As you would be aware, Mr Mulholland, Victoria Police is empowered to investigate criminal behaviour. Outlaw motorcycle gangs have been banned from attendance at any government sites. That has been very, very clear from legislation that we have passed in this place. Victoria Police is empowered to remove anybody from these sites where those issues are raised. In addition to that, we have raised fit and proper person tests in relation to government sites, and the Victorian Labour Hire Authority and a range of other authorities, including Victoria Police, are empowered to take action where any matters of that nature might arise.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

36

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Mr Mulholland, if you have any evidence, if you have any concerns or complaints or if anybody else has any concerns, complaints or allegations, I would urge them to raise these matters with Victoria Police, particularly on the basis that they may well contravene the banning of outlaw motorcycle gangs from any construction sites in Victoria.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:32): Minister, in addition to reports that gangs and criminals have moved on from the Metro Tunnel to the Suburban Rail Loop, it was reported in the *Age* yesterday that a major Big Build subcontractor had allegedly gifted expensive utes and jet skis to project managers on the Suburban Rail Loop. It is reported that contractors were removed from the project. Were the project managers removed also?

**The PRESIDENT:** I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:33): Thank you, Mr Mulholland. We have traversed this ground on a number of occasions, but I am very happy to go there again. There is zero tolerance for any criminal, unlawful or unsafe conduct on any government site, including the Suburban Rail Loop. Now, there was correspondence issued by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority to head contractors in August 2024, Mr Mulholland, in relation to the zero tolerance for any of these behaviours on construction sites and emphasising the Suburban Rail Loop Authority's expectations in relation to the prevention of behaviour and the requirement to report any matters of this nature to Victoria Police, which as I indicated in my answer to the substantive question, is empowered through the outlawing of motorcycle gangs on Victorian government sites and the capacity the Victorian government and Victoria Police have to ensure that these people are removed from any sites. The Anonymous Speak Up hotline, the VIDA Stopline, the construction complaints referral service, WorkSafe and other bodies exist. I would encourage you to urge anybody with these complaints to escalate – (*Time expired*)

### Ministers statements: kinder kits

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting our youngest Victorians. Last week I was delighted to join the member for Albert Park Nina Taylor to distribute this year's kinder kits at Ada Mary A'Beckett Children's Centre in Port Melbourne. Every child starting a funded three-year-old kindergarten program in Victoria is eligible to receive a kinder kit, as well as children enrolled in Early Start Kindergarten and with access to early learning programs. Kinder kits are backpacks made from recycled materials filled with educational toys, books and activities, provided by the Allan Labor government. Products in the kit are designed to be shared and enjoyed as a family and to set children up for a lifetime of learning by encouraging them to engage in creative play-based activities. This year all products in the kit are either made, designed or printed in Victoria, written by a Victorian author or produced by a Victorian business. Each kit contains two books and 10 educational toys and games, including a beautiful *Bugs in the Bush* colouring book, a set of stackable crayons, Play-Doh, stamps and felt stickers. The kit also includes a guide for families with tips and ideas to help parents and carers support their child's learning at home. The guide is translated into 31 languages, ensuring more families can get the most out of their child's kit.

Since 2022 over 300,000 children have taken home a kinder kit, and this year alone more than 70,000 children will receive one. Of course kinder kits are just one of the many ways that the Allan Labor government is supporting children and their families as part of our Best Start, Best life reforms. Under this government free kinder is available to every three- and four-year-old in Victoria, and as of this year families are saving almost \$2700 per child per year. Since free kinder began we have put almost \$1 billion back into Victorian families' pockets. On this side of the house we believe that no family should have to choose between paying the bills and supporting their child's early learning, because every child deserves the best start in life.

### Child protection

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:36): (1227) My question is for the Minister for Children and Minister for Disability. Yoorrook heard that where the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has concerns around an unborn Aboriginal child at risk of family violence, they will wait until the woman gives birth and then formally report to child protection. Rather than addressing the protective concerns and offering support to set the new mother up for success, she only finds out about the report when a child protection officer turns up at the maternity ward. Recommendation 11 of the Yoorrook report states that where the department receives a pre-birth report, the pregnant Aboriginal woman is informed of the report by people capable of responding appropriately and offering a range of culturally safe support options. Can the minister inform the house on the implementation of this recommendation?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:37): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and indeed for his interest in these matters. I was pleased to give evidence at the Yoorrook Justice Commission and speak to the very issues that he is speaking about now, and indeed just last week I was meeting with services to talk about these same issues.

The reality is that until a child is born, there is no child to make a report for. We all in this place can have views about where life begins and ends. I think my views on that are well known in this chamber, but until the child is actually born, there is not a child for which a report can be made. That said, there is a process of wrapping around supports, and there are great examples of this right across the state. The example that I often use when talking about the supports and services that should be provided to expectant mothers in order to assist them in preparing themselves and their family for the birth of their child, whatever their circumstances, is that of the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative. The work that they do with expectant mothers is absolutely, in my view, nation leading. I often, in my Acknowledgement of Country when I am visiting children's services, talk about how we still have so much to learn from Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing when it comes to caring for children and families. This is indeed one of the examples that so often is forefront in my mind. I do not want to quote statistics, because I am not sure what they are as of today in relation to this particular program at BDAC, but certainly in the time that they have had this program, and certainly when I first became aware of this program, the success rate meant that there were actually no removals. I think if there have been any, those numbers at the moment are still very low because that work in working with families who are expecting children and supporting those families is first-rate. There are other examples across the state in Aboriginal and in non-Aboriginal organisations about what is best practice when it comes to working with families to help them be in the best position to keep their family together.

Our overall objective is how we can better support families to stay together. Indeed in the other place just today we are debating the stable and strong families bill. I am pleased that broad support for that has been indicated, because that is also about making sure that all families receive the services and support at whatever their point of vulnerability is in order to ensure that they can provide for their children in a way that enables their family to stay stable, to stay strong and to stay together. So the work – *(Time expired)*

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:40): I do have that slight feeling of living in a parallel universe sometimes with these responses, because I do not think we actually got to responding on the Yoorrook recommendation. But anyway, Aboriginal mothers subject to these pre-birth reports are often left to navigate the complexities of the child protection system with little access to independent legal advice or guidance. Recommendation 12 of the Yoorrook report states when a pre-birth or a child protection report regarding an Aboriginal woman is made:

... the Department must automatically notify a Victorian Aboriginal legal service provider –

such as Djirra for mothers and VALS for other caregivers. This would equip the mother with more knowledge and the confidence to engage with the process and lead to less children being removed. I ask: when will the government establish a child protection notification system to Aboriginal legal services, as recommended by Yoorrook? Or is the government intent on creating a new stolen generation?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:41): I do not know which part of that question to take issue with first, but I absolutely will start with rejecting the last statement that Mr Ettershank has made. Indeed I take great offence at it. I also take offence at the patronising tone in which he suggested that my answers represent a parallel universe when I spoke very specifically to the work that can happen when we are talking about supporting expectant mothers, both Aboriginal expectant mothers and other expectant mothers, and their families in providing services that help them and their families to stay together. As I said in my remarks to Mr Ettershank's substantive question, I was very pleased – and my evidence is available on the record – to speak to the Yoorrook Justice Commission about these very specific issues. And as I have said –

**David Ettershank:** On a point of order, President, I would really appreciate it if the minister could come within spitting distance of the question. I have specifically asked about the implementation of recommendation 12 of Yoorrook. We have a few seconds left and you have not come near there yet.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister answered your second question immediately she got to her feet. If you ask a number of questions, the minister has a right to pick one. Minister, do you want the 3 seconds? No.

#### Construction industry

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1228) My question is to the Treasurer. Victoria's debt is forecast to hit \$192.6 billion, Treasurer. Cost overruns on the government's major projects have exceeded \$40 billion. Police stations are operating on reduced hours. Major hospital redevelopments face continued delays. Our state is a financial basket case. Yet yesterday in question time, in answer to a question about the billions that have gone to organised crime on your government's watch, like the Premier, you deflected and denied. You repeatedly said that lost money was because of labour shortages and the cost of raw materials and threw shade at esteemed integrity expert Geoffrey Watson's work. Why won't you accept the truth about the flow of taxpayer funds to organised crime?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:44): I thank Ms Crozier for her question and the opportunity to revisit the answers that I gave yesterday. Ms Crozier, yesterday I was asked about a \$15 billion figure. That is a figure – there is no evidence to support the claim in which it has been made. What I wanted to point out was the escalation in costs in the construction industry is well known. It is around wages and conditions predominantly driven by labour shortages, and that is not unique to Victoria, also the cost of raw materials following the pandemic period. Again, because you scoffed at my description of these cost drivers, I did point out some economists and their view of these things. Saul Eslake said the engineering construction implicit price deflator, a measure of price growth indexed by the ABS, shows costs in Victoria went up 36.8 per cent between December 2014 and December 2025. What I did not go on to say is that he has also pointed out that this is lower than New South Wales, at 37.4 per cent, and the national figure, at 41.7 per cent.

Ms Crozier, to the issues that I went to yesterday. The cost drivers in the construction industry I have set out. In relation to any criminal conduct that has resulted in any funds being extorted or being subject to bribery, they are matters that are being investigated by Victoria Police. We should leave them to do that business. Around 60 charges have been laid and around 15 individuals have been arrested. It is important work. I stand by that work. We want to make sure that Victoria Police are well resourced to ensure that they can conduct that important work. Again, given some of the commentary here, if

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

39

anybody in here or outside knows of any criminal activity or allegations, there is the opportunity to report that and bring it to the attention of the authorities – you can do it anonymously if you like – because these are important issues. But also what is important is ensuring the safety of workplaces, having appropriate wages and conditions and ensuring that we are delivering the infrastructure needs that Victoria relies on.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): Treasurer, an extraordinary denial again – I mean, Mr Watson is one of the nation's leading corruption experts, and your government continues to dismiss him. Your answers in question time yesterday showed a complete abrogation of your responsibilities as Treasurer of this state. This is taxpayers money, not the personal piggy bank of the Victorian Labor Party. Yesterday you refused to accept the \$15 billion figure, and you have done so today again. You refuse to take on board the corruption experts. So what work are you undertaking to uncover the true cost of Victoria's Big Build corruption, and when will you make this public?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:47): Ms Crozier, I have addressed these questions. I have explained to you some of the issues in relation to the cost drivers in the construction industry, and I have outlined the percentage increases that economists have brought to the public domain in relation to this. In relation to any founded corruption –

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, the minister did respond to my substantive around the cost overruns. We have already gone through that argument. This was a very specific question around the corruption costs, and I would ask you to draw the minister back to that.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister to continue her answer.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Ms Crozier, I was bringing to the house's attention the views of the independent administrator.

**A member** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The author of the report has also concluded that the estimates are rough and crude. We will go by the administrator and the experts that I have quoted today.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): Extraordinary. I move:

That the minister's response be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Jaclyn Symes:** On a point of order, President, like yesterday, Ms Crozier has called me corrupt. I deny that, and I would like it to be withdrawn.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Ms Crozier, could you please withdraw?

**Georgie Crozier:** President, again, for you, I withdraw.

### Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:49): I would like to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting regional businesses. Last week I was delighted to be at the Logic industrial precinct in Wodonga, which is the premier industrial hub in regional Australia, where I visited the new headquarters of O'Brien Logistics. Strategically located on the Hume Freeway and on the rail freight corridor, Logic is a major national logistics hub capable of reaching more than two-thirds of Australia's population within just the next day with transport.

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

40

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

The Logic precinct is home to 800 workers and a wide range of businesses from advanced manufacturing to transport logistics and industry training sectors. I met with Mark and Dean O'Brien, who shared how support from this government has allowed O'Brien Logistics to establish a new multimillion-dollar facility that has created 30 new local jobs and brought 140 jobs across the border from Albury to Wodonga – a real win for Victoria and an indication of our business-friendly conditions when you come just south of the Murray. I also launched the new \$15 million Trunk Infrastructure Fund –

**Melina Bath** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** A Regional Development Victoria grant, Ms Bath. Trunk infrastructure such as water, power, sewerage, road network connections and NBN access is essential obviously for enabling new business investment in our regions. Grants between \$500,000 and \$2 million are available to help develop or expand key sites, including industrial estates and employment precincts. Investment in trunk infrastructure can enable significant economic benefits and job growth for local and regional economies, which is clearly demonstrated by the Logic industrial precinct. These projects are all about economic growth, and that means jobs for country Victoria. We will continue to invest and talk up Victorian businesses on this side of the house.

### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:51): I thank Minister Tierney, who will get responses from the emergency services minister in line with the standing orders for Ms Tyrrell.

#### *Constituency questions*

#### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2142) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the new youth Myki scheme. I have spoken to many constituents who have been very happy to take up this service. Indeed just a little while ago I was at Berwick station filming perhaps a video on this topic and had some schoolkids come up and ask me about it. They were very, very excited about what it means for them not just for getting to school but for going about on the weekend for any jobs that they might take up and just for socialising. For constituents like the ones I spoke to recently at Berwick station I would like the minister to please tell me how the government is making public transport cheaper for them and what the effects on my constituents would be if the Liberal Party cut this program.

#### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:52): (2143) My question to the Minister for Education relates to school bus provision in the Geelong region, which has declined to the point where a basic, dependable service for families is now unreliable, unsafe and in some cases simply non-existent. Students from Lara have been left stranded at North Geelong Secondary College. On routes to St Joseph's and Clonard students are routinely standing on buses travelling at 80 or 100 kilometres per hour. In the rapidly growing suburb of Fyansford, families are told there is no school bus service, forcing car pools or costly rideshares. I have met with the school principal and student bus captain to discuss these failures. How did the department fail to plan for demographic change? Minister, in the shadow of recent serious school bus crashes in Western Victoria, what immediate action will you take to fix capacity and safety?

#### Eastern Victoria Region

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:53): (2144) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. I have received concerns from some of my constituency regarding the Bairnsdale Speedway. The Bairnsdale Speedway has held events for 40 years and represents an important social part of their local community. Recently the speedway requested permission to construct an expansion; however, this expansion remains entirely within the speedway itself. The expansion will see a new

driving pad constructed that will allow for driver training, emergency services exercises, community events and a burnout pad and also a larger area for other community events. My constituents are concerned about the possibility that, despite the speedway existing for 40 years and the expansion being entirely within the speedway itself, this upgrade could be blocked by one or two people. Will the government ensure that the Bairnsdale Speedway is able to construct this expansion?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2145) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. How is the Allan Labor government's power saving bonus helping eligible constituents in Southern Metro save on their power bills? Almost a quarter of a million eligible households have already knocked 100 bucks off their energy bills thanks to the power saving bonus. I have had several constituents come through the door of my electorate office, and we have been able to provide them with help in making those applications. Millions of dollars of savings have been provided to Victorians to help with their power bills. Eligible Victorians – those with a pensioner concession card, a healthcare card or Veterans Affairs card – can claim their bonus through the Victorian Energy Compare website. Applications close at the end of March. Apply now and make sure you get your cost-of-living support from the Labor government. We are there to help Victorians with the cost of living.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2146) My matter is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the hazardous state of the planning changes that have been proposed for the new four-storey and six-storey zones that overlap with heritage overlay 191. What is clear is that there is a very significant overlap between these four- and six-storey zones, and I am going to put the map reconciling this up on my website if people want to look at this. What I am asking the minister is will she make a statement that says that the heritage overlay area will be protected and that those streets and homes will not be torn down and four- and six-storey buildings put in their place? Either the heritage protections are going to count – but it does look like they are not going to count, so I ask her to make this statement to say where those heritage protections will apply.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2147) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment. Starting next week, local residents, sporting clubs and recreational users will be locked out of Albert Park for weeks for yet another expensive government gift of special treatment to the Australian Grand Prix Corporation. During the extended lockout of Albert Park, wildlife lovers fear that there is no help available for sick birds suffering from avian botulism and that collection will be slower for dead birds. I have been alerted to this fear by Lake Alive, an active local group for recreational park users and local wildlife, and I thank them for their continued advocacy on this matter. Minister, given that the number of bird deaths has increased significantly after last year's one-week lockout, what additional and special measures will you be taking during this year's three-week lockout to ensure that the avian botulism type C outbreak is contained, or do you expect the lockout to exacerbate the outbreak?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2148) My consistency question this afternoon is directed to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. I was delighted to just hear in her ministers statement the minister speaking about Pick My Park round one grant recipients and that they had been announced. It is an initiative that puts power back in the hands of the local community to decide how local green spaces are improved, and it really is a wonderful example of community-led processes. The interest and enthusiasm in Northern Metropolitan Region is quite strong. I understand that under the program residents aged 16 or over have the opportunity to propose and vote for a park project that matters most to them, whether that is a new playground, an upgraded walking track or

more shaded seating for families. With a significant investment into our suburbs, this program ensures that local parks reflect the actual needs and vision of the people who use them every day. Knowing how successful it was last time and hearing significantly from constituents, including Janet from Clifton Hill, a great number of times, my question is: which successful projects happened in the Northern Metropolitan Region?

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:58): (2149) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and concerns the 2023 Keilor Plains works. Can the minister please update constituents as to why the shelter structure at Keilor Plains station was not upgraded as part of the 2023 works, leaving the old, inadequate shelter in place? Residents have raised concerns about the run-down condition of the station and the lack of proper protection from heat, rain and wind. The current open shelter leaves passengers exposed to the elements, as we saw during the hot weather recently. The community is simply asking for a basic enclosed waiting area to keep commuters protected from the elements, like in nearby Moonee Ponds. I look forward to the minister updating constituents.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2150) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. Several constituents from across my electorate have approached my office with concerns about their safety at home. These concerns have arisen from neighbours in public housing who have repeatedly engaged in threatening, aggressive and violent behaviours. Affected residents have followed procedures of incident reporting to the housing office as well as police reports and in some cases even intervention orders. Despite this, the behaviours often reoccur and victims are frequently forced to relocate for their safety. We understand that housing is in high demand and these behaviours are part of a larger health issue; however, everyone deserves to feel safe in their home. So my constituent asks: will the minister ensure that public housing policies effectively respond to cases of aggressive and violent tenants in the South-Eastern Metro Region?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:00): (2151) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and I want to start by commending the minister and the Allan Labor government for the ongoing work to deliver more social and affordable housing for Victorians. With the investments being made through the high-rise redevelopment program, they will create fit-for-purpose, safe and energy-efficient homes. My area of Southern Metro is home to several public housing estates that are part of this program, including sites that are in Albert Park, St Kilda and Prahran. These estates have long provided affordable houses close to services and community needs to maintain stability and long-term security for residents. My question to the minister is: how does the government plan to support those people in my community of Southern Metro that rely on public or social housing during the necessary redevelopment?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (2152) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A constituent has contacted me regarding a road sign at the intersection of the Northern Highway and the Seymour-Tooborac Road in Tooborac. The sign was damaged in a storm prior to November 2024, which is when my constituent first contacted VicRoads to advise this, which is now more than 15 months ago. He has since reported this issue on three occasions and been provided three different reference numbers. My office has also reported it to VicRoads. Driving across Northern Victoria I have also noticed many state road signs that need to be cleaned due to lichen. Concerns have also been raised about obscured road signs due to overgrown vegetation, which cause a safety risk. Could the minister please ensure that this road sign is fixed and advise what programs are in place to ensure state road signs are promptly repaired and maintained?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:02): (2153) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Local residents in St Kilda have raised serious concerns regarding a rough sleeping encampment in Albert Park reserve, which has now persisted for 10 months. They report rubbish piling up, fires burning, damage to revegetation works, vandalism of seating and graffiti of artwork. An escalation in antisocial behaviour has left members of the public too scared to enter the area. Volunteers who have been restoring the parkland for community use have been warned by Parks Victoria rangers to stay away. This location is 500 metres from the Australian Grand Prix track. Parks Victoria has confirmed that there are no plans to move on any people in the camp before the grand prix, despite the large crowds and heightened safety requirements for that major event, which is to commence in just two weeks time. Minister, what risks to the community have been identified if no action is taken to remove the camp and relocate these people before the grand prix?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:03): (2154) My constituency question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and it relates to the Newhaven Jetty, which was closed in May 2024. Last November after a very hard fought campaign the government made an announcement that it would fund \$5.5 million to have it upgraded, refurbished and reopened. I congratulate the community for their ongoing advocacy – and I have just been speaking with community members – but since that time there has been no further discussion, no announcement and no conversation. We hear about consultation from this government, but what we see is you are consulted after the event. There needs to be open and transparent conversation, there needs to be a design and communication and there needs to be feedback from the community. I am asking the minister: will you engage with the community, and will you keep them abreast each and every step along the way to this reopening?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:04): (2155) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister invest in maintenance and renewal of unreadable arterial road signs in Northern Victoria? It is not just roads that are falling apart under the Allan Labor government. All across Northern Victoria the directional signs that guide drivers are faded and cracked with lettering that has shrunk or is peeling off. This can actually be very dangerous. For example, there is a fork in the road on the exit lane where the Goulburn Valley Highway joins the Hume Freeway. One side goes to Wodonga and the other side curves around to join the Hume towards Melbourne. But it is hard for unfamiliar drivers to know which side of the fork to take, because the text on the sign is unreadable. Victoria's road signs desperately need to be renewed, but the Allan Labor government is penny pinching on vital maintenance jobs because it has spent all its money on tunnels in Melbourne and wasted \$15 billion on CFMEU construction sites. So will the minister invest – *(Time expired)*

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:05): (2156) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. Minister, my constituent wants to know why the Allan Labor government has allowed organised car thieves to openly buy key programming devices online to steal Victorians' cars with impunity. On Sunday Victoria Police confirmed that a serial offender used these devices to steal 25 vehicles across Melbourne, including in suburbs like Narre Warren and Frankston. In fact I believe they were at Fountain Gate shopping centre, where car theft is already surging. Yet under current law these sophisticated devices can still be purchased by anyone, not just licensed locksmiths, and this is a flaw in the current legislation. After I tabled a petition last sitting week calling for locksmiths to be properly defined under the Private Security Act 2004, will you finally act and restrict the sale of these devices to registered locksmiths, or will you continue to leave Victorians exposed to crime, higher insurance premiums and loss of property? Victorians are sick of rising theft and registered locksmiths – *(Time expired)*

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:06): (2157) As Minister Shing just said, ‘Labor knows that time is money.’ Therefore my question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Due to your time blowouts on the Bald Hill Road upgrades, businesses are going broke. They have gone for months and months longer than they should have. They have absolutely lobbied the government for respite, and they have not received any. My question is: what compensation will you provide to these businesses who are going broke because of your project delays?

**Sitting suspended 1:07 pm until 2:07 pm.**

*Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Reference*

**Debate resumed.**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:07): I thank all members for contributing as part of this debate today. At the outset I would implore the chamber to not follow the direction of Mr Limbrick and take a ‘let’s wait and see’ approach towards this issue. We are talking about something that is quite severe and that is affecting many LGBTQIA+ people – just how many is part of what will be investigated should this inquiry proceed.

Unlike what members of the opposition backbench have said, this is not a matter of freedom of expression. This quite firmly is a matter of violence that is facing community members who identify as LGBTQIA+. They are being lured into public spaces and set upon and attacked, often by groups of people, often young men, with weapons. As I highlighted in my opening remarks for this debate, it is terrifying to them and to many other community members, and the rippling effect this has across the community more broadly is quite distressing to many people. I have no doubt we will be hearing from them as part of this inquiry process.

As Mr Galea from the government highlighted in his contribution, this is a matter that attracts a lot of shame and a lot of stigma. For many people part of the reason we may not see them come forward to seek support or to notify authorities about what has happened to them is that their families and their communities do not currently accept them as they are. In doing so they would be publicly identifying themselves and their associations, and that to them is quite a confronting prospect and not something that is safe for them at this time. I think there is complexity here that we have to go into, but that complexity should not be a reason that we shy away from this important work.

As I acknowledged in foreshadowing earlier, the Greens will be accepting the wording changes that have been put forward by the government with respect to the terms of reference. That is a product of a number of constructive conversations that have taken place across various parties in this chamber to make sure that the scope is appropriate for what the Legal and Social Issues Committee can manage in this remaining part of the parliamentary term and also keep a sufficient focus on the issues that are the impetus for which I have brought forward this inquiry motion on behalf of colleagues.

To connect with the proposal that has been put forward by the opposition, the wording that we are seeking to agree on with government is about the intersectionality of experience with being LGBTQIA+ – someone who may be of a multifaith community and also identifies as an LGBTQIA+ person. It is those intersections where we can explore those experiences and the compounding effects that may have in someone that has experienced this type of behaviour, this offending, that we are talking about in the terms of reference. It is about that intersection of those experiences rather than the addition of other communities’ experience to the scope, noting of course there are no doubt experiences being faced by many community members from other communities that do need the scrutiny of the Parliament. This is not the particular inquiry where we seek to do so.

## COMMITTEES

We heard in contributions just earlier, before question time and then the break, about this alpha-male content, this type of content that is proliferating online. While I do not hold all the answers as to what particular content is leading to this offending, we are seeing where this hate ends – people going out and committing violence against people who are themselves or who love who they love as members of the LGBTIQA+ community. But I want to be really clear: targeting LGBTQIA+ people for being who they are or for loving who they love does not make you more of a man. It does not. We have to tackle this hate at its source. That is what this inquiry brought by the Greens today will seek to do. I commend it to the house.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** We will now move through the amendments in the order the proposed changes occur in the motion. Mr Mulholland's amendment 1 appears first in the motion. This amendment tests his remaining amendments.

### **Council divided on Evan Mulholland's amendment:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

### **Amendment negated.**

### **Michael Galea's amendment agreed to.**

### **Council divided on amended motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (15):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

### **Amended motion agreed to.**

#### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

##### *Reference*

**Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:25):** I want to make a statement at the start of this just to put on record for full transparency that I have a perceived conflict of interest on this matter and will be sitting out the debate and will not be voting on the matter, so I will be abstaining. That conflict relates to a family member having a role at the TAC that may be relevant to the subject matter of this motion.

**David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:26):** I move:

That this house requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 11 August 2026, on issues related to claims made through the Transport Accident Commission, including but not limited to:

- (1) processes around legitimate claims, including disputed claims;
- (2) circumstances and systems related to fraudulent claims; and
- (3) interactions with other services, such as the national disability insurance scheme.

When a motorist pays the registration on their car, part of that registration goes to fund their insurance through the TAC. I think even libertarians agree – I would hope – that if you are going to drive a car on the road and you have an accident and someone gets hurt, there must be some means of rectifying and fixing that harm. That is what happens through the TAC. It is a bit different to other states. In New South Wales they do not have a monopoly running it, but nevertheless in Victoria we have a monopoly that runs it. I also expect that when motorists pay this fee through their registration, the legitimate claims that are made when an accident does happen – unfortunately accidents do happen – are paid out promptly and fairly to rectify whatever problem has happened. I do not doubt that in the majority of cases that is exactly what happens. But unfortunately sometimes there are problems for people either through dealing with the TAC itself or through dealing with the interactions between the TAC and other services such as the NDIS, which is also part of this motion. Many of these people have problems with things like claims that they feel are legitimate being denied or claims being challenged, which takes up a large amount of effort in what in many cases can be extremely traumatic circumstances or incidents. It can be that maybe they have a claim which is legitimate for a period of time but then, for reasons, the TAC decides that it is no longer going to pay out. Or in some cases it can be simply that someone is shuffled from case manager to case manager to case manager for a long period of time, and every time they need to explain their situation to the new case manager and this can be a problem.

This was brought to my attention by a group of people. Many of these people that have these problems feel alone and feel isolated. They feel distressed, they feel traumatised and they feel alone. What many of these people have done – as people do when they feel alone – is seek out others who might be in a similar situation to themselves. In fact that is what has happened: a group of people, some of whom are in the gallery with us today, decided to share their experiences with each other, and they decided to approach my office and ask for assistance. I met with them last week – my office had met with them earlier – to hear some of their stories. Some of their stories are indeed tragic and awful and you would not wish them on anyone. Firstly, there is the accident itself and people being involved in these accidents, but then there is the retraumatisation of having to go through these very difficult processes that have unfortunately happened.

I do not think that these sorts of things are insoluble. I think that it is possible through the format of an inquiry to air these problems, identify them and hopefully come up with recommendations – constructive recommendations – from the committee that the government and the TAC could potentially act on to improve this situation, stop this trauma that happens to people and make it easier for people who have legitimate claims. I think that this is a very worthy thing for the Legal and Social Issues Committee to be looking at, because I am convinced by this group that organised on social media. I am informed that there are over 180 people in this group – certainly a significant number of claimants. I obviously have not gone through every one of their stories, but I have certainly heard enough to convince me that there is a problem worth looking at. So that is what I am asking this chamber to do – to refer it to an inquiry and to refer it to the committee.

There are also many people who are injured through accidents. These can cause lifelong disabilities, and of course that can mean that you end up with interactions with other services such as the NDIS, and something that has been brought to my attention is that interface between the state and federal government services. This is a common thing, especially in anything to do with health: you end up with these sorts of problems with the interface between federal and state government services. I think that it would be very worthwhile for Victoria to look at what these problems are, and maybe we can fix them. I would like to thank the government for their constructive approach on this with me. They have actually suggested some other federal and state government interfaces, and I believe the government will be moving amendments to that effect. I am supportive of this. I think that they are constructive amendments that identify other issues, and indeed we have socialised that with the group of people that we are working with, and they also agree that these are constructive amendments. So we do not object to expanding the scope of that at all. In fact we think it is a good thing.

## COMMITTEES

Some of the other things that we have put in this motion are circumstances related to fraudulent claims. Unfortunately, not all claims are legitimate; in fact there was a recent IBAC report about medical practitioners fraudulently making claims on the TAC. I do not think anyone in Victoria wants that. I think that is something else that the committee can look at, because we do not want funds of the TAC being drained and used for fraudulent purposes. I think everyone in Victoria would prefer that those funds and resources are used for legitimate claims for people who are victims of accidents – car accidents or other types of accidents.

I have spoken about the TAC before in the past, and maybe one thing that the committee might look at is the issue around capital repatriations. I am a motorist myself, as I guess most people are in here, and I think that most motorists, although they may not like paying their registration fee, feel that if they are paying for this insurance it should be used for that purpose. I think that the idea that registration would keep going up or legitimate claimants would not be paid out whilst the government is repatriating capital from that fund is not what we expected. I would expect that most motorists would think that if all of the legitimate claimants are being paid out and there are excess funds in there to cover projected future claims, then maybe those savings could be returned to motorists through a cheaper registration, but that is another issue altogether.

I think that with these stories of these people – and I would like to thank them for bringing this issue to my attention and sharing their stories with me and indeed bravely sharing some of these stories with the media also this morning – I will not detail their stories individually, but suffice to say that these are serious enough that I think they warrant investigation, and therefore I urge the members of this house to support this investigation into what I think is a very worthwhile and hopefully constructive act through which we can improve this system for Victorian motorists and victims of accidents.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:34): I am pleased to speak on motion 1252 brought by Mr Limbrick, and I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this issue into this chamber. I would like to endorse his appreciation of those who have shared their stories as well. I share the concerns that it is important that this vital work of the Transport Accident Commission is done as effectively and efficiently as possible and with respect for the people making claims. The economic and social costs associated with road trauma make the issue of road safety a major concern for our community, and it certainly has been for decades. I think what we are increasingly starting to talk about is the further burden caused by complex systems and across different levels of government et cetera that can actually make the recovery process even more difficult than it already is.

As a regional MP the cost and social impact of car accidents is certainly of particular interest to me. The Victorian government's lives lost summary for 2024 found that rural roads accounted for 50 per cent of our annual road deaths, even though only 24 per cent of Victorian drivers live in rural areas, and 36 per cent of serious injuries occurred in rural or regional areas. The work of the TAC for my electorate is incredibly important, and for all regional electorates. Much of the work also happens in my electorate because of the TAC being based in Geelong. In 2024–25 the TAC supported 43,255 clients and funded \$1.87 billion in healthcare recovery supports and compensation to help Victorians injured in a transport accident get their lives back on track. The no-fault scheme is purposefully designed to ensure that it can provide care to injured Victorians for as long as they need it, from those with short-term needs to those who experience lifelong consequences from their accidents. Just as important is their work to prevent accidents happening in the first place. Again from a rural perspective, I am sure that many of us in this chamber will still vividly remember the very first early TAC television advertisements on road safety in the 1980s and 90s. The second of those ads featured a young driver on country roads with a group of friends, cheerful and distracted, and it showed an accident occurring – well, not the accident, of course.

The number of lives lost on our roads each year across Victoria is less than a third of what it was back in 1989, and the way they measure that is through deaths per 100,000 in population. In 1989 there were 18 deaths per 100,000 in the population, and in 2024 there were four deaths per 100,000 people. If you think of the number of deaths in 1989 and you consider how many more cars are on the road in

## COMMITTEES

48

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

2024, that is why they measure it that way. The TAC's work has been a major contributor to this. In fact the Victorian Transport Accident Commission has really led the way in road safety strategies. I think some of us remember the introduction of seatbelts in the late 1970s, and I think we were the first in the world to do that. Again, that was on an evidence base, and it has been proven that that works. These reducing figures of deaths per 100,000 are really result of a lot of work and a change in cultural attitudes across our entire community. We have all got a lot to be proud of, I suppose, in that regard.

In 2024–25 the TAC invested \$11.8 million in sponsorship and community engagement activities to broaden its reach and promote road safety messaging through community-led avenues and voices. A number of these were in my region and across the entire state. The L2P program – most people would know about that program, I think – is a TAC-funded program. It matches learners from 16 to 21 years of age with a fully licensed volunteer driver, and they get to practice driving under supervision. Again this is another small contribution to the reduction. For young people, particularly in regional communities where they have no choice and they have to drive to work or to study, this has proven to be a really important program. There is sponsorship of different clubs as well. I think there has been sponsorship of AFL clubs, if I remember rightly too – maybe Richmond or Collingwood; I am not sure. Locally, participating clubs have been Port Fairy Football Netball Club, North Warrnambool Eagles Football Netball Club and Portland Football Netball Club, but there are many, many more.

Mr Berger, when he gets to speak, will be putting an amendment. It will not be me, but Mr Berger. This will broaden out the investigation to make sure that it looks at the cross-government approach. I think these conversations have been had between the different federal and state governments and also regarding that interaction with the NDIS. I think that is a really positive augmentation. I think there have been good discussions to make sure that that can happen.

The procedural burden for those navigating the system can be very stressful and lengthy. In this chamber, in this place right here, I have acknowledged the impact of the judicial system on survivors of sexual assault and family violence. It is almost just as bad, again, the judicial process, and I think this is a phenomenon that happens across sectors and across judicial systems and entities. I will be very interested to hear what the inquiry comes up with in that space, because I think the trend is for it to be more referred to as 'system abuse' – you know, does the system abuse further?

Just before I finish up, I want to say that I appreciate those that have been advocating in this space. As I said earlier this morning, not everybody can speak up. It can be very distressing. For those in a position to speak up and tell their story, that is very much appreciated by this chamber but also by the community of other people in similar situations who do not feel in a position to speak up for one reason or another.

In closing I thank Mr Limbrick for raising this issue and thank those that came to his office and raised the issue. I think it is a really important issue, and I am very interested in the outcome achieved through the inquiry as it progresses.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:44): I am pleased to rise on Mr Limbrick's motion 1252, a motion which I support and which requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into TAC claims, legitimate and disputed claims, fraud and intersections with other systems of government, including the NDIS. I think it is one of those edifying occasions where a community concern – an acute community concern – has found its way. We are not going to solve anything today, but we are at least making a constructive step, and you can see that the system actually works, to some degree, and that we can move things forwards. In essence the TAC exists for a pretty specific set of purposes: to support Victorians injured on our roads to recover, to get treatment, to get care and to rebuild their lives. When the system works, it is one of the state's most important institutions. When it fails, people who are already injured are forced into a second injury, a bureaucratic one.

An inquiry is warranted for three reasons. First, because the claims pathway increasingly looks like a system under strain, not only in volume but in conflict. Second, because fraud, while it may represent

## COMMITTEES

a small fraction of overall claims, corrodes trust and drives harder rules that punish honest people. Third, because the boundary between TAC supports and other schemes, particularly the NDIS, is complex enough that confusion becomes a cost in itself for injured Victorians, for providers and for taxpayers.

This motion is properly scoped in my view. It does not assume outcomes. It asks Parliament's committee system to do what it is meant to do: examine how a system behaves in practice, where it fails and where reforms are required. I think that is a good thing. I think that is exactly the kind of pointed examination Council committee inquiries should seek to do. I know that we have something of an amendment, an incremental amendment, to the motion. We will get to that later, but I think that is a solid incremental amendment.

There are legitimate claims and disputed claims. The TAC itself acknowledges that people have multiple avenues when they disagree with a decision: complaints, internal reviews and dispute pathways. That is normal for any scheme. The question is whether those pathways are working as a fair and timely safety valve or whether they are now becoming a parallel system of friction within the system. The TAC's annual reporting shows that the dispute load is material and rising. In 2024–25 TAC reported 2278 dispute applications lodged under the no-fault dispute resolution protocols, up from 1753 the year prior. That is a 30 per cent increase in a single year. For an injured person a dispute is not a number. It is time without certainty, time without treatment approvals, time without a plan. The annual report also shows a substantial volume of review activity. There were 583 requests for informal review in 2024–25. That is up by just under 100. It took an average of 62 days to resolve informal reviews. It also reports that the TAC's original decision was maintained in 62 per cent of the informal review cases.

None of those figures prove wrongdoing, but they do prove something important. Dispute and review pathways are heavily used, and for many people the first decision is not the end of the matter. The committee inquiry should test in a sensible and evidence-led way what categories of claims are most likely to be disputed and what the main failure points are – evidence requirements, clinical reports, internal thresholds or inconsistent decision-making. Are the dispute pathways being used as intended to resolve issues quickly, or are they becoming a slow second lane of the system? Do delays in dispute resolution produce avoidable downstream costs – worse recovery, a longer time away from work and a greater need for care? That is not theoretical. If disputes are rising, and the stats say they are rising and increasing, Parliament has an obligation to understand why.

The second limb of this motion is fraud. Fraud exists in every compensation system. It is not the dominant story of the TAC, but it has an outside consequence because it shapes public confidence and drives higher compliance settings. Here the inquiry needs to be a little bit careful. The goal is not to inflate fraud or demonise claimants. The goal is to make sure the system can detect and deter fraud without increasing friction and suspicion for the honest. The TAC annual report provides some detail on fraud case load. As at 30 June 2025 it reported 22 matters before the courts alleging fraud of just over three-quarters of a million dollars, plus 15 matters where the prosecution was endorsed but not yet progressed representing another quarter of a million dollars. That is not good, but again this is not the dominant cost line of the scheme. But it is enough to justify some scrutiny of the systems and the incentives that allow fraud to occur and the systems that detect it, which is probably the most important thing.

The committee should examine where fraud occurs most often – claimant fraud, provider billing irregularities, organised fraud or weak controls; whether detection is proactive or reactive; how the TAC balances fraud control against claimant experience so the honest are not treated as suspects; and whether the system has proper information-sharing mechanisms with relevant agencies while respecting privacy. Fraud hardens systems. If we do not address it intelligently, the cost is not only a dollar cost but a trust loss, and the burden is almost inevitably shifted onto legitimate claimants.

## COMMITTEES

50

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

The third limb of the interaction is the interaction with other services, particularly the NDIS, and the TAC itself states plainly that the NDIS does not change arrangements for Victorians injured in transport accidents. Compensation for transport accident injuries remains the responsibility of the TAC. That is the principle; in practice the boundary can still be very, very messy as to who funds what support and what happens when the person is on an NDIS plan – what recovery rules apply when accident compensation and disability supports overlap. Separately the National Disability Insurance Agency's own guidance does attempt to make clear that where compensation is involved there can be recovery or adjustment mechanisms, but it is not simple, so the inquiry should look at where the most common gaps are and what the overlap boundaries are between them.

I have only got a couple of minutes left, so I am going to push forward a little bit. The state scheme is only sustainable if it retains public confidence, and public confidence depends on three things: legitimate claimants are treated fairly and disputes are resolved in a reasonable time; fraud is detected and deterred without punishing the innocent; and the boundaries with other systems do not create gaps, delays or cost shifting. The TAC's own reporting tells us the system is dealing with substantial dispute volumes and complaints: 647 formal complaints a year – that is two a day. That is probably two too many a day. So it is not a criticism, it is a systems signal.

When a system touches tens of thousands of lives friction points matter, and if we ignore them, costs rise and legitimacy falls. At the end of the day when a compensation scheme becomes politically fragile, reforms tend to come in the form of blunt instruments with less nuance, tougher thresholds, narrower entitlements and longer delays. It lands equally on fraudsters and the honest – it lands on them both equally – which is not fair. The inquiry is the opposite of a blunt instrument; the inquiry is actually a precision tool, we can say. It is Parliament doing oversight before crisis and before bad policy, so it is good management.

We support the motion because it is responsible and proportionate. It does not assume the TAC is broken; it asks whether it is operating as it should across critical dimensions: legitimate claims and disputes; fraud; and system interactions, particularly with the NDIS. If the system is working well, an inquiry will validate that and strengthen confidence. If there are weaknesses – and many people believe there are – the inquiry will be the best way to identify reforms that protect injured Victorians and protect the sustainability of the scheme. For those reasons we will support Mr Limbrick's motion.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:54): I rise on behalf of the Victorian Greens to speak in support of Mr Limbrick's motion calling for an inquiry into the Transport Accident Commission. The Greens support this inquiry because we want to ensure that people who are injured in transport accidents are well supported in their medical care and their rehabilitation as well as provided with income support. It is important that all clients of the TAC are offered appropriate and timely care and resources, and we must ensure that the claims process is straightforward and patient focused.

As I am sure many of us in the chamber have, I have received a number of emails from people who are struggling to seek support currently through the TAC. There have been really concerning stories of the challenges that people are facing, and I thank them for contacting their representatives and for some of them being here today. People have mentioned having to fight every step of the way for their basic needs to be met or fight tooth and nail to secure and maintain basic support from the TAC. People have told us that having their claims denied has significantly impacted their ability to move beyond the trauma and the stress of the accident and has also contributed to hindering their recovery as well as prolonging distress and, in some cases, adding to trauma from the process itself.

These stories go on, and once again I want to thank people who have had the courage to persist and want to see a change not only for themselves but for future claimants under this scheme. We want to make sure that this is a scheme that completes its important role and continues to provide a service to the people of Victoria. That is a really important one. We want to see a system that is working for those who have endured transport accidents and for their families. We want a system that can identify

## COMMITTEES

and refuse fraudulent claims where those are occurring but also one that treats those who are coming in good faith with legitimate claims with the care and the respect that they deserve. I will conclude my remarks there. We are supportive of the motion and look forward to the issues that will be explored in the inquiry, and we commend the motion to the house.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:57): I rise to speak on the motion to refer to the Legal and Social Issues Committee an inquiry into the TAC. Road trauma is something that no-one expects to affect them personally, but we know the profound impact it can have on individuals and communities. The Allan Labor government recognises the critical role played by the Transport Accident Commission, the TAC, in supporting every Victorian injured on our roads. Prior to entering this place, as many of you already know, I served as a branch secretary and national president of the Transport Workers' Union. In those roles I worked across the transport sector with drivers, operators and logistics workers throughout Victoria and nationally. Transport workers, including truck drivers and couriers, spend long hours on Victoria's road network. They are the most exposed to road accident risk. I closely worked with workers who had experienced serious transport accidents and were navigating recovery, compensation and return to work. That experience provided me a practical understanding of the importance of effective injury support systems, timely rehabilitation and strong road safety frameworks. I saw regularly how policy decisions relating to road safety enforcement and injury support intersected.

In this vein, whilst the government is very supportive of Mr Limbrick's inquiry, we believe there is scope for the terms of reference to be strengthened. My amendments will ensure that the committee can consider a broader health disability ecosystem, which the TAC operates within, as well as provide opportunities for Victorians to advocate to the Commonwealth on actions that can ensure that all TAC clients receive the care and support they deserve. I ask for my amendments to be circulated to the chamber. I move:

1. Before paragraph (1), after 'Transport Accident Commission', insert '(TAC)'.
2. After paragraph (2), insert the following new paragraph:

'(3) private provider discretion to set fees exceeding the Medicare Benefits Schedule rate;'
3. In paragraph (3) omit 'Scheme.' and insert the following in their place:

'Scheme (NDIS), and how TAC clients have been impacted by federal reforms to:  
(a) the National Disability Insurance Agency and the NDIS; and  
(b) restrictions on health privacy and information sharing between state and federal agencies.'

The TAC is a statutory authority established under Victorian legislation. It is responsible for supporting people injured in transport accidents and contributing to road safety initiatives aimed at preventing such injuries. In 2024–25 the TAC supported 43,255 clients and funded \$1.87 billion in healthcare recovery support and compensation to help Victorians injured in transport accidents to get their lives back on track. The scheme covers drivers, passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and other road users. Eligibility and entitlements are determined in accordance with the Transport Accident Act 1986 and associated regulations. The powers of the TAC include the authority to assess claims, determine eligibility for benefits, fund medical and rehabilitation services and manage long-term care for individuals with serious injuries.

The scope of the TAC's support is broad and encompasses a range of benefits. Early access to treatment and coordinated support is a large component of the TAC improving long-term outcomes for injured workers. The TAC works with healthcare providers, rehabilitation specialists and employees to support recovery and, where possible, facilitate return to work. This focus reflects an understanding that recovery encompasses not only physical healing but also social and economic participation.

The TAC was established with the passing of the Transport Accident Act 1986, with operations commencing in 1987 under a Victorian Labor government, instigating a shift towards a no-fault

compensation system for transport accident injuries in Victoria. The creation of the TAC introduced a more structured and accessible system designed to provide support regardless of fault, promoting rehabilitation and recovery. The move to a no-fault system reflected the policy objective of ensuring that individuals injured in transport accidents would have timely access to medical treatment and financial support, purposefully designed to ensure that it can take care of Victorians for as long as they need it from those with short-term needs to those who experience lifelong consequences. The introduction sought to reduce uncertainty for injured persons while also improving efficiency and predictability within the compensation system.

Despite significant advances in vehicle safety and road design over recent decades, road trauma continues to have a profound impact. Forty-three lives were lost on Victorian roads last year and many thousands more individuals sustained serious injuries requiring medical treatment, rehabilitation or ongoing support. These figures underscore the importance of both prevention and effective recovery support. Prevention forms a significant component of the TAC's work. The TAC develops and delivers public education campaigns addressing high-risk behaviours such as speeding, drink and drug driving and driver distraction. It also contributes to research, data analysis and initiatives aimed at reducing road trauma across the state. The TAC works in partnership with transport agencies, law enforcement and community organisations as part of Victoria's broader road safety strategy. This collaborative approach recognises that reducing road trauma requires a coordinated action across multiple sectors. The number of lives lost on Victorian roads each year is less than a third of what it was back in 1989. Victoria now has one of the best road safety records in the world.

Since its establishment nearly four decades ago, the TAC has evolved in response to change, community expectations, medical practice and transport patterns. In 2024–25 the TAC implemented a range of programs to support improved client outcomes. The injury support program was piloted in a partnership with Honeysuckle Health designed to complement the client's existing treatment and support by applying values-based healthcare principles to deliver better outcomes. It addresses barriers to recovery and gaps in care, providing proactive, evidence-based care coordination while building a client's capacity to self-navigate the health system. As of June last year, more than 700 clients have completed the program, reporting improved recovery outcomes and high satisfaction levels. Administrative and digital improvements have been implemented to streamline claims processes, improve accessibility and enhance communication with claimants. A new client connect service was implemented in November 2024, with the aim of improving client outcomes through TAC's phone channel. As a result, real-time feedback scores from clients improved from 6.9 to eight out of 10. Eighty-four per cent of clients reported that their claims adviser demonstrated a clear understanding of their needs.

The TAC also invests in a range of programs to achieve the best client outcomes, including more than \$700,000 in grants to improve autonomy and healthcare outcomes for patients after a transport accident and to improve the lives of TAC clients and Victorians living with a disability. The TAC has powers relating to the collection and management of funds required to sustain the scheme. These powers are exercised within the legislative framework set by Parliament and are subject to established review and oversight mechanisms. Funding for the TAC scheme is derived primarily from compulsory charges included in vehicle registration in Victoria. These funds are directed into the transport accident scheme and used to meet both current and future liabilities.

The TAC has an obligation to review all requests for treatment and benefits for liability, reasonableness and whether it is clinically appropriate. Because of this, the TAC relies on cooperation and information from a range of external agencies and health professionals such as hospitals, doctors, allied health providers and federal agencies, including the National Disability Insurance Agency, NDIA, and Medicare. This means that claim decisions can be affected by factors outside the TAC's control. This may cause delays to occur due to incomplete or missing documentation and the need for additional clinical advice for highly complex cases.

## COMMITTEES

Many private providers also continue to charge well above the Medicare benefits schedule, leading to TAC clients receiving medical bills above the TAC's rate, which aligns with the MBS. The TAC is actively working to improve the flow of information between clients and providers; however, recent federal reforms to the national disability scheme and the health information sharing and privacy rules impact the TAC's ability to best support their clients. My amendments seek to empower the committee to consider the broad range of federal health and disability reforms impacting on TAC's ability to support Victorians injured in a transport accident in a timely and efficient manner.

TAC makes around 9000 decisions every month relating to client services support requests. Seventy per cent of these decisions are made within 10 business days. I wish to also note I have carefully read the emails I have received from my constituents in my community of Southern Metro, and I acknowledge those views and experiences that have been shared with my office. Public safety, specifically on our roads and transport networks, remains a matter that I hold with high importance. I appreciate those in my community taking the time to reach out to me and share their stories. The Allan Labor government has committed to deliver actions towards Victoria's long-term road safety, and with that I will conclude my remarks.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:06): I also rise to support Mr Limbrick's motion requiring the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into TAC claims, including legitimate and disputed claims, fraud and interactions with other systems such as the NDIS. Having had this as part of my portfolio a couple of years ago, I know how important the work of the Transport Accident Commission is but also that this is a particular area in which we have a surplus of funds. The Transport Accident Commission is not merely another statutory authority, it is a lifeline for Victorians that are injured on our roads. For thousands of Victorians the TAC provides stability after trauma, funding for rehabilitation, medical care, income support and long-term assistance. This profound responsibility demands the highest standards of integrity, transparency and accountability – standards that are currently under question.

The TAC is funded by compulsory premiums paid by Victorians when they pay their motor registration. It is a social insurance scheme built on trust that legitimate claimants will be supported, fraud will be pursued and the system will operate efficiently. Today I want to focus on three critical dimensions: legitimate claims and disputes; fraud; and system interactions, noting that this is inclusive of the use of the NDIS.

On legitimate claims and disputes, for those with spinal injuries, traumatic brain injuries or life-changing injuries, the TAC is central to recovery, yet concerns persist about delays in approvals, growing administrative burdens, disputes and the need for legal intervention to access entitlements. The scale of injury highlights the importance of a responsive system. In the 12 months to June 2025, for instance, 296 people lost their lives on Victorian roads – a 3.1 per cent increase from the previous year; and 279 fatal crashes occurred – 14 more than the prior year. For serious injuries requiring hospitalisation in the 12 months to December 2024, there were 5299 TAC claimants that were admitted within seven days of a crash – a 4 per cent decrease from the prior year; and 675, at 12.7 per cent, stayed more than 14 days – up from the previous year. Every delay provides risks for poorer recovery outcomes and higher long-term costs. The purpose of the TAC is recovery, not resistance.

In terms of the fraud and scheme integrity, fraud by claimants, providers or organised networks threatens the scheme's sustainability. Allegations of improper billing or exaggerated services must be investigated transparently. Fraud diverts funds from genuinely injured Victorians. It can lead to an increase in premiums for motorists, and it erodes public confidence. In the TAC's annual report there is some detail on its fraud caseload, with figures as at 30 June 2025:

Throughout 2024–25, the following enforcement action was taken:

- Seven prosecutions that were finalised through the Magistrates Court resulted in a finding of guilt. A total restitution amount of \$300,326 was awarded to the TAC.

## COMMITTEES

- At the end of the financial year, 22 matters remained before the courts, with the TAC alleging fraud against the scheme totalling \$785,377.
- There were 15 matters where prosecution was endorsed and yet to be progressed within the courts, totalling \$254,541.
- There was one matter related to a TAC client wanted on warrant with charges yet to be served. The total fraud amount outstanding is \$27,373.
- In cases that did not meet the prosecution threshold, 33 warning letters were sent for breaches of the *Transport Accident Act 1986*, which related to fraud and clients providing false information to the TAC.

Robust auditing, clinical oversight and enforcement are essential, but anti-fraud measures must not create unnecessary hurdles for legitimate claimants. Suspicion should never outweigh support for those genuinely in need.

In terms of system interactions, particularly with the NDIS, the interface between the TAC and the NDIS is increasingly complex. Issues include cost shifting between schemes, delays due to judicial disputes, duplication of assessments and participants caught between systems. The TAC is a no-fault accident scheme; the NDIS is a disability support framework. Without clear coordination, injured Victorians face confusion, delays and uncertainty. Effective collaboration requires clear responsibilities, transparent cost sharing, streamlined assessments and coordinated participant experience. These three dimensions – claims, fraud and system interaction – are central to the TAC's sustainability. Delayed claims worsen recovery and costs. Unaddressed fraud raises premiums and erodes trust. Poor system coordination drives inefficiency and undue stress. The TAC must remain financially sound, operationally independent, transparent and focus strictly on its statutory purpose. Motorists pay their registration premiums in good faith and expect that funds support injured Victorians and prevent road trauma – nothing more, nothing less. Safeguarding legitimate claims, preventing fraud without harming the innocent and ensuring seamless system interaction preserves the TAC's integrity, and Victorians deserve nothing less.

Before I finish up, the question must be asked as to whether Victorian motorists are getting value for their hard-earned dollar, especially when premiums costs are increasing during a time of cost-of-living hardship. I think it is important to remind the Allan Labor government that this is not its own personal piggy bank or cash cow to fund other government desires. What is more, after visiting over the summer parts of regional Victoria where my colleagues Mrs McArthur, Dr Heath, Mrs Broad and others in this chamber are from I could see firsthand what many of my colleagues in the opposition say about regional Victoria's road safety issues. I can say that even as I drive around in parts of the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region which I represent there is more money that needs to be spent to keep Victorians safe on our roads.

With that, I want to finish up and say that this is an important motion. We do need to have this inquiry. I stand in support of Mr Limbrick noting that the TAC needs to be looked into. We need to be keeping our eyes on what is going on, and we need to do what is fair and right and reasonable for Victorians who need to access that money and access it in a hurry.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:14): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's motion seeking a referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Council to make inquiries into the operation of claims made through the Transport Accident Commission, including around claims processing, fraud and, because of the nature of the scheme and what it provides, how it interacts with other schemes that provide other forms of insurance, including the national disability insurance scheme.

Obviously we know that road trauma has significant impacts on those who are affected. Successive governments in the state of Victoria have taken a range of often, at times, world-leading measures to reduce the harm from road trauma, and at its core the Transport Accident Commission has an incredibly important dual function of both supporting prevention of further harm but then also providing, through the insurance principles at the heart of the scheme, support to those who do find

## COMMITTEES

themselves harmed and injured as a result of accidents on our roads. The advent of the Transport Accident Commission and the TAC insurance model here in the state of Victoria has provided an incredibly important piece of support through the insurance scheme that underpins the TAC and provides assistance with a range of costs, including but not limited to medical, rehabilitation and other support services, and is an exceptionally important part of the social safety net of supports that exists in the state. I think we should recognise that the principles that underpin the TAC, providing that sort of no-fault insurance arrangement, are really important to our community, and they are valuable and should be valued because of the reassurance that they should provide to those who are injured and the capacity that they provide us collectively to ensure that supports are available.

I think that one of the reasons that we know that the TAC is so important is that road trauma is something that we hope will never happen to us and that many of us think will never happen to us, but the reality of our lives is that we spend a lot of time on and around roads and that accidents happen as a result of being transported around on our roads, which is critical. There is a cost to the individual, but there are broader economic and social costs associated with road trauma, and the insurance model that underpins the TAC is an important part of addressing that. Reductions in road trauma, reductions in death by road trauma but also reductions in serious and other injury by road trauma are important parts of keeping our whole society and our whole community healthier and safe, and the efforts to reduce, particularly the lives lost on our roads, have been considerably successful over the course of a generation. Whilst it is an ongoing task and we have got to get towards that zero figure, we have made significant progress.

In underlining the importance of the TAC as a no-fault insurance scheme, we cannot ever be blind to the issues that emerge in its administration. It would be foolhardy of us to expect that in every circumstance, in every instance, an insurance scheme, even one that is as valuable and important to us as the TAC, acts and treats every individual with the kind of care, support and respect that individuals deserve. It is a good scheme, but it is not always perfect. I think what Mr Limbrick, in sending this proposed terms of reference for an inquiry to the Legal and Social Committee, is really attempting to do is for us collectively, as members of this place, is to examine ways that we can understand where the fault points are in the no-fault scheme and figure out how we can improve them, both on the claims-processing and claims-handling side, to ensure that those individuals who suffer trauma and do have legitimate claims are given the support they need in a timely manner, and that it is adequate support, but also that the system is robust enough to have sufficient protections against fraud, misuse and abuse.

Over the course of the scheme there have been some very notable examples of where, unfortunately, people who seek to make personal gain out of collective good have taken advantage of the scheme. There is always a task for the TAC to ensure that fraud is not part of the scheme. We have seen some particularly high-profile cases in the past where significant action has been taken to address practices that have undermined the integrity of the scheme.

Mr Berger, on behalf of the government, has moved some amendments relating to a range of matters, particularly where the TAC is funding medical costs. A large part of the support that the TAC provides to victims of road trauma is with assistance in their medical costs so that the cost of road trauma is borne by the contributions paid into the insurance scheme by road users rather than solely having to be paid for by the public health system and the public hospital system in particular, funded out of consolidated revenue. That means, however, that obviously there are interactions between the way that the Transport Accident Commission operates and how those other funding arrangements for health care work. In particular what Mr Berger's amendments to this set of proposed terms of reference seek to do is examine a little further some of those interactions, particularly with those on Medicare benefit schedules and rates. They also, particularly on the claims handling side, seek to examine the interaction on a range of health privacy and personal privacy information and how that operates between Commonwealth and state and the impacts on TAC clients of changes being made to the national disability insurance scheme. I think that it is very clear that at a systems level this is a set of quite complex interactions that can exist and can operate. You have got state-based insurance models that

## COMMITTEES

56

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

provide benefits largely in the healthcare and rehabilitation spaces. Then you have got their interaction with how the public hospital system works, funded by the state health department, and the role of the federally funded Medicare benefits schedule and federally funded, now, disability insurance services. They are complex systems, and their interaction in particular is something that will be important for this inquiry to get to.

At its core, what I hope comes out of this inquiry – and I am sure this is what is at the core of motivating Mr Limbrick and others – is to make sure that the experience of those who need to rely on the TAC because they have been injured on our roads is a high-quality one, one that is free from unnecessary administrative burden and one that is free from unnecessary and burdensome interactions that traumatisise victims. I know that there will be quite a lot of work in there. The TAC is a very important part of our system of care in this state, and I commend the motion.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:24): I rise as well to support Mr Limbrick’s motion, which requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report on issues related to claims made through the TAC. I just want to start by stating the obvious about why this matters so much and why we need to get this right. I think, unfortunately, just about every one of us has been touched in some way, shape or form by road trauma. One of my most vivid memories as a child was hearing my dad talk about his brother dying in a car accident. It is like life was just going one way and then it just changed in the blink of an eye. It absolutely gutted his life and sent it in a different direction.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I remember, as a young teenager during the school holidays, my friends were coming home from their caravanning trip and one of them did not make it home, Justine, and her sister Libby has lived with incredible and horrific injuries ever since. Life has never been the same. I remember hearing my aunt talk about how she was in a car accident with her mother. She walked away and she is okay, but she never got to grow up with her mum.

I just want to put on the record exactly why these things matter and why it is important to look into and inquire into how this system is working, because your life can be heading in a certain direction one day and then you might need life-changing care or help the next. That is something that we must get right. I think it is a core business of government to try to keep our citizens safe, and that includes having decent roads, decent road maintenance and investment into our road system, because that is the state’s biggest asset. The biggest asset is not our hospitals, not our stadiums, not any of these things; it is our road system, and it is one that is failing at the moment.

At a time when there are rising complaints, rising disputes and unfortunately a rising road toll, the government has ripped \$900 million out of the TAC over two years. That is not because the situation is getting better. They have not ripped that \$900 million out because the roads are safer than they were before. No, the roads are worse than they were before. They have not ripped that money out because there are less people getting killed on the roads than before. No, in fact that is not the case. And they have not ripped it out because there are less disputes and complaints. No, that is not the case. The reason they ripped it out over two years was to give the illusion of a budget surplus, and I believe this is something that needs to change. I think the government has ripped money out of this area to give the illusion of a budget surplus. They have put in one of the most crippling taxes, the emergency services and volunteer tax, that they had to do to cover up a mess of a budget. This just has to stop happening, because when the government cannot manage money it is everyday Victorians that pay the price and it is things like this that begin to fail.

The Labor government has drained the TAC surplus for budget repair purposes rather than reinvesting it into road safety and keeping lower premiums. Victoria recorded 295 road deaths in 2023. That is 295 stories like my friend Justine, whose family has never been the same, and like my friend Libby, whose life has never been the same and who never went on to achieve her childhood dreams because of road trauma. It is devastating to see that number. Even though there was the highest road toll in

## COMMITTEES

15 years, sadly, the road toll has remained elevated ever since. The TAC's mission includes reducing road trauma. It invests nearly \$100 million annually into marketing and road safety campaigns. It invests this amount because it has a goal of reducing road fatalities by half by 2030. That is four years away. Unfortunately, the trajectory is going backwards. It is going the other way.

I am going to use this time, as a regional MP, to talk about the state of our roads in the regions. It is not bad here. It is probably a balance of infuriating and entertaining when city MPs talk about the state of their roads. I think maybe they should, as Mrs McArthur would say, get outside the tram tracks and see what the rest of the world is like. The reality is that chronic underfunding of road maintenance has contributed to the elevated road toll and the TAC's infrastructure contributions have been completely insufficient to compensate for that. I just want to put a few things on record because this is a very important issue, and it is important because at the end of this issue there are human lives, and that is exactly why we have to get this right. We want to reduce road accidents and we want to be able to make sure that if that situation has not been avoided, people that are involved in road accidents and are involved in road trauma receive the care, the support and the assistance that they need. Whether that is the medical care they need or whether it is the in-home support and adaptations that they need for their house, we want to make sure that those things are covered. I commend this motion to the house.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:31): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and make a contribution on this motion brought forth by Mr Limbrick regarding a proposed inquiry into the Transport Accident Commission. At the outset of my contribution I would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who have taken the time to reach out to my office to share their personal stories of recovery and trauma and their interactions with the TAC. These stories are often deeply personal and serve as a vital reminder of why we must ensure that our support systems are as robust and efficient as possible.

No-one thinks road trauma will happen to them, but we know the horrible and often permanent impact it can have on individuals, their loved ones and the entire community. Just this year so far 33 people have lost their lives on the road, and last year 290. It is because of this impact that our government recognises the vital work performed by the TAC in supporting every Victorian injured on our roads. The TAC's no-fault scheme is designed purposely to ensure care is available for as long as it is needed, whether that is for short-term recovery or for those facing lifelong consequences following an accident. The scale of this support should not be overlooked. In the 2024–25 financial year alone the TAC supported over 43,000 clients and funded over \$1.8 billion in health care, recovery supports and compensation. This funding represents a direct investment in helping injured Victorians get their lives back on track. From the hardworking staff down in Geelong to the various providers across the state, the focus remains squarely on the best possible support for those impacted by road trauma.

Beyond individual support, the TAC holds the unique and vital role in also promoting road safety. The economic and social costs associated with road trauma are major concerns for the community, and rightly so, because preventing crashes does more than just save lives, it significantly reduces injuries and provides savings to Victorians. Its record is clear: the number of lives lost on Victorian roads each year is now less than a third of what it was back in the late 1980s. This progress is due in part to the TAC's ongoing commitment to education, community engagement and the reduction in road trauma. It is thanks to that work that Victoria now has one of the best road safety records in the world and that every year thousands of Victorians receive life-changing support.

This government will support this inquiry, and we believe it provides an important opportunity to examine the broader health and disability ecosystem in which the TAC operates. Our proposed amendments, which I believe were moved by Mr Berger earlier in the debate, seek to empower the Legal and Social Issues Committee to investigate how federal health and disability reforms are impacting the TAC's ability to support Victorians in a timely and efficient manner. The TAC, as is known, is a state-owned enterprise funded through the transport accident charge collected via Victorian vehicle registrations. As such, it has a clear obligation to ensure that all requests for treatment and benefits are viable, reasonable and clinically appropriate. To do this effectively the TAC relies on

## COMMITTEES

58

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

cooperation and information sharing with a range of external agencies. These include hospitals, doctors and federal bodies like Medicare and the National Disability Insurance Agency.

We know that recent federal reforms to the NDIS and changes to health information sharing and privacy rules are currently impacting the TAC's ability to support its clients. When decisions are delayed, it is often due to factors outside of the TAC's control, such as incomplete documentation or the need for additional clinical advice in some really highly complex cases. On top of this, we are concerned that many private providers continue to set fees well above the MBS, or the Medicare benefits schedule, and their assigned rates. This leads to TAC clients receiving medical bills that exceed the TAC's funded rate, which is aligned with the Medicare benefits schedule. This inquiry will provide a platform for Victoria to advocate to the Commonwealth for actions that ensure that all TAC clients receive the care and support they deserve without facing unreasonable and often very damaging financial gaps.

It is also important to highlight that the TAC has implemented several innovative programs to improve client outcomes. We have seen the pilot of the injury support program, which applies value-based healthcare principles to coordinate proactive, evidence-based care, and it is designed to complement a client's existing treatment and support and to address barriers to recovery and gaps in care, while building their capacity to self-navigate the health system. As of June last year more than 700 clients have completed the project. We have also seen the introduction of the Client Connect service, which has improved the TAC's phone channel responsiveness. Additionally, there are trials of proactive approaches to joint medical examinations, which have allowed the TAC to make decisions up to six months faster in some cases, while collectively saving over \$800,000 in fees. This scale-up of the restorative justice program has also provided a pathway for healing and closure for those affected by road trauma, with 101 client referrals recorded by mid-2025. The TAC continues to invest in a broad range of programs aimed at ensuring the very best client outcomes, including with more than \$700,000 in grants dedicated to improving autonomy and healthcare results for patients following a transport accident, as well as improving the lives of Victorians living with a disability.

It is because of these investments that the TAC is reporting significant performance improvement through the financial year 2024–25, including, very pleasingly, a reduction in client wait times for decisions on complex matters, such as surgery requests, by up to six weeks. The commission has recently reduced duplication for 40 clients per month through an improved referral process and has decreased the effort required to manage dispute resolution by 40 per cent. But there is still more work to be done, and that is why I join with other members in this chamber in welcoming this inquiry. You see, in addition to direct client support, the TAC's investment in community safety is essential. In 2024–25 the TAC invested \$11.8 million in sponsorship and community engagement to promote road safety messaging. Another \$3.5 million was awarded in grants to local governments, clubs and local organisations that target safety-on-the-roads initiatives. These include the popular club rewards programs, which work with local football and netball clubs across the state to raise awareness about the dangers of driving while fatigued, speeding and drink and drug driving.

The TAC's commitment to integrity is also important. Appropriate and compliant billing practices are critical to protecting the public revenue and ensuring that payments are correctly made to eligible clients and providers. While the TAC does have robust controls to identify billing irregularities, it is worth acknowledging that in reality some providers may deliberately attempt to defraud the system. The forensic group at the TAC monitor payments daily, and they take appropriate enforcement and recovery steps whenever noncompliant invoices are discovered. Specifically regarding surgeon billing, the TAC is currently working with the Department of Health to reform how services are funded in Victorian public health services. You see, this reform is a direct crackdown on noncompliant billing by individual providers. It is not a reflection on the high quality of clinical care provided by the vast, vast majority of medical professionals who bill appropriately, rather it is about ensuring these funds are used ethically and responsibly.

## COMMITTEES

The range of supports in fact provided by the TAC under the act is extensive. Any Victorian injured on our roads can apply for assistance with medical treatment, ambulance transport, allied health and mental health services. Support extends to family members for travelling and counselling as well as home modifications, income support and return-to-work services. The TAC even funds driving modifications, education support and specialised rehabilitation programs like pain management. I would like to reiterate the story shared by those affected by road trauma and that they reinforce the need for a system that is delivering the very best possible care, transparency and equitability. By supporting this inquiry and these amendments, we are ensuring that the TAC can continue to provide life-changing support that Victorians depend on while navigating a complex and changing federal landscape.

I again thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this motion before us calling for this important inquiry. I join with others in commending this motion to the house with the amendments as tabled earlier by Mr Berger.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:41): I am also pleased to speak on this motion, which has been put for us today by Mr Limbrick. It is a certainly an important topic, and I do thank him for bringing it to the chamber's attention. It is a topic that we have discussed many times in this place when it comes to road trauma, and I think it is probably timely that we do have an inquiry along the lines that is being proposed into the TAC. We have come a long way from the staggeringly high levels of road trauma in the 1970s, but that is of course cold comfort to the many thousands of people who are still faced with the tragic consequences of road trauma, fatalities or injuries in our state each and every day.

As of the last financial year, I understand that the TAC had an active rota of 43,255 clients, and just in the financial year before that alone, 5617 people were injured on our roads in Victoria and required support through the TAC. It is a very important body because it does provide that guarantee of care to everybody and anybody who is injured on our roads, and it is important that it is part of, for example, the registration payments or other various costs that we all pay each year so that we can have that system that guarantees that cover for everyone.

I do want to acknowledge as well that there has been a large number of people who have been advocating for this inquiry, and I want to thank them for raising their concerns in this place through Mr Limbrick. I also want to thank them and acknowledge them for reaching out to, I presume, all of us, but I have received a number of emails from many people. I have not yet had the chance to respond to each of them, but I have read each and every one of them over the past few nights, and each and every one of these cases is a very troubling story. As Mr Limbrick said in his opening remarks, this is not to say that every case before the TAC has issues, but there are certainly a large number of people who are having great hardship with their approach and what they have found as an outcome of dealing with this scheme. So, as with any scheme, it is appropriate that from time to time we do take a bit more of a step back and do a full appraisal of it – look at what is working of course too, but in particular look at what is not working, what can work better and what we can do to make it work better.

For me, apart from supporting constituents in various cases, I have not had a great deal of interaction with the TAC, and not in my previous life. However, in my previous life as a union organiser, I was in near constant contact with the WorkCover scheme, and I do see some parallels – though of course circumstances are different – with representing my members who were dealing with issues, be it with case managers, case managers changing or in some cases not getting back to people for extended periods, being unaware of appointments, being let down by the system and falling through the cracks. In the same way that I could very easily identify hundreds of issues at that time with the WorkCover system, there are no doubt countless examples that we have now seen in the TAC. With that parallel in mind I am very much alive to the fact that when these issues happen, it is not just as simple as saying, 'Oh well, this was missed. I will get back to this or try and fix this another way.' These have or can have profound impacts on people's lives – not just on their recovery but on their emotional and mental wellbeing as well.

## COMMITTEES

60

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

For people in WorkCover and people in TAC, in some cases the determination or the success or otherwise of a particular small decision, or what might be a regular or routine decision for case managers, no doubt many if not most of whom are exceedingly professional, a particular outcome of what to one person might be a routine or mundane decision can have life-changing and profound effects on others. So it is important that we take that step back to examine this properly.

I do want to acknowledge those people who have reached out to me and I know no doubt to others as well and those who have engaged in this process and who are attending the Parliament today. I also note that for many people, whether it is an issue with TAC or WorkCover or another service that they have dealt with, often when they come into this place with these issues they are rightly seeking for it to be fixed for themselves or for their loved ones, but so often we see that they are actually bringing it in to be fixed for the next people who will have to deal with it. It would be great if we could go back and retrospectively fix these things, but we cannot always do that. But what we can do is be better, is to learn, is to learn from people's experiences and to listen when people talk to us and to use that to inform better outcomes for others in the future. I sincerely hope that that is what this inquiry will achieve.

As has been touched on by Ms Watt and I understand by previous speakers as well, my colleague Mr Berger in this place moved some amendments earlier today, and I will also be supporting those amendments, in particular as they relate to the TAC's relationships with the federal scheme, whether it is Medicare or whether it is with the NDIS, which of course was not a scheme when the TAC was established. It is much, much more recent. We need to be ensuring that where there are those multi-agency approaches to cases people are not falling through those cracks, and there will no doubt be things in that relationship that we can look at and I am sure recommend to the TAC that they do their job better in managing that relationship. I am quite sure there will be some things that we will identify that will be the responsibility of those federal agencies or others outside the remit of state government to be fixing. Even if we cannot make that direct recommendation to government, we can certainly highlight and put sunlight on that issue so that that can inform government's advocacy or indeed the Parliament's advocacy to our federal colleagues for them to fix those issues as well. Having that holistic approach I think is very important, and I welcome those amendments.

As a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee I understand that I will be one of the ones diving into this issue, and I am very much looking forward to it. It is a very important issue. I will note – and I have flagged my concerns privately with this too – that I do believe that the appropriate committee for this referral is actually the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. It is that committee that previously did an inquiry into a bill amending the WorkCover scheme in this term. Many committee schedules are already very full, and I understand that there is a need to find a way to get this through, but I think perhaps it is a discussion for the next or for a future Parliament to be considering the demarcation or the break-up between these committees to ensure that we are doing them as evenly and as appropriately as possible. Nevertheless, the proposal in the motion that is before us today is for the Legal and Social Issues Committee to look into it, and irrespective of the technicalities of whether we are the right committee or not, fundamentally this is an important inquiry that in my view, from the conversations that I have had and certainly from the emails that I have read over the past few days, clearly should take place by whatever committee should do so irrespective of the original intention of that committee.

I do wish to again acknowledge and thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this to the chamber. And again, for those people who have raised this to the Parliament, as a member of that committee I certainly hope that we can do our best for you, in the limited time that we do have this year of course, to make some substantive and substantial recommendations to further improve and reform the TAC.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:49): I would like to thank everyone that contributed to this debate today: Ms Ermacora, Mr Welch, Ms Copsey, Mr Berger, Mrs Hermans, Mr Batchelor, Dr Heath, Ms Watt and Mr Galea. In particular I would like to thank Mr Berger for

## MOTIONS

putting forward these amendments. I think that these are very worthwhile and legitimate expansions of the scope of the terms of reference for the inquiry, and I think that these are good things.

I would also like to very much thank the people that have brought this issue to my attention. Members of Parliament would be very aware of the fact that when people approach MPs' offices, sometimes they are at the end of the line. They have gone through all of the other channels and now they seek political action. But I think what is commendable, as Mr Galea has pointed out, is that these people are not just trying to solve their own problems. My belief is that they want to solve these problems for future people so that other people who are unfortunate enough to be involved in car accidents, have some sort of road trauma and become claimants can have an experience that is as good as it can possibly be.

It is in the interests of all Victorians that this scheme has the confidence of the public. It is in the interests of motorists who pay the insurance that covers this, and it is in the interests of everyone that the scheme is run efficiently, that the experience of claimants is as good as possible, that it is financially prudent and that fraud, whether it is on a provider or claimant side, is minimised to the maximum extent possible. I am glad that the committee will have the opportunity to look at these issues. I look forward to taking part in that committee as a participating member when this inquiry goes ahead.

### **Amendments agreed to; amended motion agreed to.**

#### *Motions*

#### **Construction industry**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:52): I move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the *Rotting from the Top* report on corruption by Mr Geoffrey Watson SC tendered to Queensland's Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU and Misconduct in the Construction Industry;
- (2) the commentary on Victoria by Mr Watson was redacted from the released report despite indicating that up to 15 per cent of payments on Victorian Big Build sites may have been corrupt payments;
- (3) these corrupt payments would see the loss of billions of dollars of taxpayers money;

and calls on the Allan Labor government to institute a royal commission into corruption on Victorian government Big Build sites.

This is a very straightforward motion in one sense. It lays out the history of the release of this report to the Queensland inquiry by Mr Watson SC. He is an exemplary individual. He laid out the cost to Victoria and took very serious estimates. Those costs have since been supported by federal figures, by federal authorities. They indicate clearly that there have been state discussions by those federal individuals as well. It is not Mr Watson alone, but he is the most authoritative when it comes to these matters.

But we have all known for some time that there is a very serious problem with the CFMEU and its behaviour in Victoria and in particular its behaviour on Big Build sites. Good projects are dragged down and the costs explode because of this corruption. Good workers, workers who are doing the right thing, get naturally dragged in unfairly where these issues arise and where corrupt or other behaviour happens on sites. That is not what should be occurring.

The state government knew and did not act early enough, but that is not the primary point of this; the primary point is that we are in a position now where there needs to be several steps taken. There is no question that IBAC needs to be strengthened. Mr Redlich has been out. Others have been out. IBAC, the Ombudsman and others have called for additional funding. They have also called for additional powers. The state government reduced powers at IBAC in 2019.

**Ryan Batchelor:** No, it didn't.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, it did, and it was wrong.

## MOTIONS

**Ryan Batchelor:** What powers? Name them.

**David DAVIS:** Go and have a look at the restoration of powers bill and you will see the precise detail of it. That bill actually had wide support in this chamber. The point I would make here is that powers for IBAC need to be expanded – there is no question about that – and the follow-the-money power in particular is a power that needs strengthening, and the Integrity and Oversight Committee has called for that. Others have called for that; IBAC has called for it. New South Wales has greater powers. Equivalent groups to IBAC have got greater powers, and that is one part of it. But that is not enough alone: we also need a full royal commission to deal with the scale of what has gone on here – the corruption, the frank corruption, that has occurred in this state.

I am conscious of time here – I want to make sure everyone gets the opportunity – but today I want to particularly quote Robert Redlich in a number of his contributions over recent days. On Sky News with Laura Jayes on the 17th of this month he said:

... and the second is there needs to be a board of inquiry or royal commission because this is such a broad and wide-encompassing area of corrupt conduct which has now spanned a very long period of time. And that's beyond the capacity of IBAC.

That is what Robert Redlich said. He went on:

IBAC can't conduct 60 or 70 different investigations into each of the specific allegations that have emerged from Geoffrey Watson's report. This is something that a royal commission needs to do and which the royal commission can look much more broadly at issues like how the Labor Party has managed the conflict of interest it has with unions.

He talks at length on that. When you have got third-party relationships, he says:

... where you're particularly close to those third parties ... you've got to handle those conflicts of interest carefully. And that hasn't been done with the CFMEU.

He spoke on ABC radio on 18 February. Raf Epstein, the interviewer, asked:

You think a royal commission is needed. Can you explain why you've come to that?

He said:

Well, I think two things are needed. One, as you've mentioned, is that IBAC powers need broadened to enable a dollar to be followed beyond public officials to private contractors, the union and those who are dealing with major infrastructure construction. But second, we need to have a royal commission.

That is Robert Redlich saying that. He went on:

Why? Because, as many have said, including one of your recent listeners, the problems in the construction industry in major builds has been an acute one for a long time and it continues.

He goes on to say:

It's not as though we're talking about some past event; as we speak we continue to haemorrhage our public funding because there is no –

**Harriet Shing:** So why didn't he do anything about it?

**David DAVIS:** He did. You may want to attack Robert Redlich and his time as commissioner, but he did a very good job. He suffered under real pressure from –

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis pointing across the chamber, and I believe that is against the standing orders.

**David DAVIS:** It is, and I am sorry. I was provoked, and I will avoid pointing. The truth is that I was provoked, and I am trying to restrain myself. I am not going to allow Robert Redlich to be attacked in this place in this way.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

## MOTIONS

**David DAVIS:** Oh, you were. You were attacking Robert Redlich, and I want to say it is a part of the cover-up that you are engaging in.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, it is.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I take offence at the insinuation that Mr Davis has just presented to this place, and I ask that he withdraw.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** There is no point of order. I ask Mr Davis to continue.

**David DAVIS:** I will resist the interjections. Mr Redlich said:

A Royal Commission can look at not only the more interesting and juicy questions like the involvement of criminal gangs or bikies ...

but it can look at the culture of the construction industry. He said:

It needs to explore how government manages dealing with affiliated unions with whom they have a conflict of interest. And then the question arises for the Royal Commission have those relationships been properly managed?

Mr Redlich said:

Have the unions been able to take advantage of their relationship with government? Has the situation got beyond control? What sorts of remedies are required?

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am quoting Mr Redlich on ABC radio with Raf Epstein:

The donations question, which now has been articulated in the speech, raises questions which the Royal Commission must look at. So it's a very broad question that the Royal Commission would have to undertake.

I must say I agree with what Robert Redlich is saying. He is drawing a direct distinction between the work of IBAC and the specific new and additional powers that IBAC requires, and the opposition is very supportive of those steps and the advisements that he has made. But at the same time, he draws a clear distinction and says there needs to be a royal commission as well, and he explains why the depth of what is going on here needs specifically a royal commission. He goes on to say:

... it's far from the complete solution. I mean, we're dealing with a multitude of issues here and no particular body, whether it's ... Victoria Police or IBAC, can address all of those problems. What's important is that if an examination of the construction industry is fully undertaken, one can identify the various aspects of the problem, all of which need to be addressed ... We know from past history that when the climate is right to have a Royal Commission because government accepts ... there is a pressing need for it and a Royal Commission effectively undertakes the exploration of the issues, more often than not, the government of the day is then encouraged and willing to implement those recommendations.

He goes forward to make it very clear that there is a direct distinction. He draws closely on the material of Geoffrey Watson, who he believes has written a powerful report. That is what he called it. There are those who want to quibble about the \$15 billion. He goes on:

But whether it's \$10 billion or \$20 billion, it's a massive loss of income, of public funding that should never have been sustained. And if a figure like that is accurate, then it's one of the worst scandals that Victoria has ... faced whether it's the worst or not I think matters not the point is it's an outrageous scandal and it needs to be stopped.

And he is quite right on that. With Tom Elliott, he said similar things:

The Act's very explicit that IBAC's role is to investigate misconduct by ... public officials ...

He drew a very strong case with Elliott about the need for IBAC changes, and they are a key point of what needs to be done.

## MOTIONS

64

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

My motion today, though, is about a royal commission, and it says that there has been this important report by Mr Watson SC that lays out the problems that have occurred here and that more needs to occur here in Victoria. We need a royal commission that can look at this closely, make the proper decisions and take the proper steps. I think Mr Redlich has nailed the issue here. It is not enough for IBAC alone to investigate. IBAC will not be able to manage the scale of what is required here, as the former IBAC Commissioner points out so clearly and cleanly. But he does make it clear that IBAC does need to be strengthened, and the opposition, the Liberals and Nationals, are minded to support such an approach and say that we do need to strengthen IBAC. This government has nobbled IBAC, has held back funding from IBAC and has made it very difficult for IBAC to do as much work as it should. Be that as it may, we have also tried. I have tried twice in this chamber to amend the budget bill that comes for Parliament and to actually insert additional money for IBAC. On each occasion, Labor voted against that. Labor voted down more money for IBAC, and we know why – because they have got a lot to cover up, and that is the truth of the matter.

I want to indicate here that I think Robert Redlich was one of the very best public officials. He is a person of enormous integrity. That is why I will not brook any criticisms of him in this place or elsewhere. He is a person of integrity. He is a Labor man, actually, from historical times. He was a Court of Appeal judge and did an amazing job on the Court of Appeal, but he was also a very, very competent, very, very grounded and very, very sensible IBAC Commissioner. He did, it is clear, have difficulties with the way the government was treating IBAC, the way the government was trying to nobble IBAC and the way the government tried to strip powers from IBAC and strip money from IBAC. I for one agree with most of his points on these occasions. When he has given evidence in this place formally or when he has presented to a group of crossbenchers and opposition members, as I was part of arranging on a number of occasions, he was able up, in the Legislative Council committee room, to step through a number of issues and explain them to members of Parliament. I have high regard for him and his integrity and the incisive way he is able to look at these issues and make the points.

On those matters, I intend to stop my contribution to make sure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to speak. I regard it as beyond question that terrible corruption has occurred in this state under these arrangements, and I thank Mr Watson SC for blowing the whistle so sharply on that. We do know from what was going on earlier that there were deep problems, but the scale of this has been pinged by Mr Watson SC in his contribution. I think Robert Redlich understood the significance of that. He understood that only a full royal commission with full investigative powers, powers to go and ask for people and documents, will work out exactly what is going on and why and provide solutions, as outlined by Mr Redlich in those quotes I just read from his radio contributions. A royal commission is incredibly important. We need that, and that is what this motion calls for.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:07): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion. At the outset I will say that, to give Mr Davis some credit, the wording of the motion that is before us is actually in some language that does not seek to misrepresent or overblow the claims that are made in the Watson report. It is probably credit to his 30 years of service in this chamber that in drafting a motion he does so in this way. I want to give him credit for it because some of the language that he uses is not as declaratory as others have used, including those on his side and also the Greens, which definitively makes claims that Mr Watson has made statements as absolute fact and truth. On its terms, the motion here does put the qualifiers that are appropriate, and I think that is worth noting at the top.

The revelations of illegal criminal activity on Victoria's building and construction sites, particularly those building civil infrastructure, are alarming and disturbing and deserve the full force of the law being used to investigate them. That is exactly what this government has done in response to those allegations being made public in 2024. When these allegations were made, Victoria Police set up Operation Hawk, which merged into Taskforce Hawk. For the last 18 months it has had a laser-like focus on the task of investigating and bringing criminal proceedings – charges – against those who

## MOTIONS

have committed illegal activity on our building sites. As we can see, as a result of that effort, we have more than 17 offenders who have been arrested and nearly 70 charges brought on the basis of the investigations into the corrupt activity – the illegal activity – by organised crime in particular on construction sites. That is working.

The government, alongside that, has introduced a range of measures. I went through some of them in my speech earlier today on the short-form documents motion, so I will not go through the changes we have made to strengthen laws around criminal organisations and their responsibility, but we have put in place new laws, in particular to better regulate things like labour hire and licensing. The government has acted on those claims.

What I want to just take a moment to go to in this speech – and it is really not long enough, just 10 minutes, to go through all of the issues – is that we have obviously had some explosive claims made in a leaked draft report provided to the Queensland commission of inquiry into the CFMEU, claims that the author describes as being a bit rough and a bit crude. The author himself acknowledges that the calculations and the claims that have been made are a bit rough and crude. There are two components. Many have sought to extrapolate from what was tendered in that draft report to some sort of concrete proof that somehow \$15 billion has ended up in the pocket of organised crime. The administrator did not agree because he looked at those figures and said that they were unfounded and needed further work.

The other big element in this report that bells the cat on the unreliability of those claims is not just that the denominator is a bit dicey but the numerator itself in the equation that is used to calculate this figure is based on money that has not yet been spent. The \$100 million that they claim is the total cost that is subject to this analysis includes programs of work and includes money that has not yet been spent. The very foundation of the calculation, the first set of numbers that are being used in this discussion, are ones that the author of the report himself says:

By the time it is complete –

so not now, not ‘has been spent’ but ‘by the time it is complete’ –

more than \$100 billion will have been spent ...

not ‘has been’ but ‘will have’.

And again, there are no timeframes around any of this. There is no detail on any of this. In the words of the author, it is a bit rough and a bit crude. As the independent administrator of the CFMEU says, that number is unfounded and needs to be further tested.

I think people engaging in this debate, whether in this chamber or outside it on social media or in front of the media, need to be really careful with their words, because those who participate and take claims and extrapolate them without all the qualifiers are misleading people. They might be doing it deliberately for their own political purposes – that is up for them to say. But there are significant qualifiers from the author himself on the figures that they are bandying about to make claims and accusations. Truth matters. People should take care in what they say.

I want to say a couple of things just in response to the quite extraordinary contribution that Mr Davis made. I know there are, quite rightly, a lot of people, including the government, who are concerned about illegal activity on our construction sites. I think we have detailed pretty comprehensively the action that this government has taken, particularly the action that Victoria Police is taking right now, to make sure that does not continue and that those who have broken the law are subject to the full force of it. The problem is that when claims that are rough and not fully tested are then relied upon by others, and those others are held up as paragons of virtue in this debate, we find it a little hard to take.

Mr Redlich, invoked by Mr Davis, did have an extended period as the head of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, including a lot of the time that Mr Watson’s report covers. He will need to explain what he did during that time. What I do know is that the last time Mr Redlich

## MOTIONS

appeared before this committee of this Parliament he could not recall a report from three years prior that was critical of his actions as commissioner in the mishandling of very serious claims of police-perpetrated family violence that put the lives of victim-survivors at risk. I encourage everyone to read the transcripts of evidence that were presented at those hearings and form their own judgements on what happened. But if Mr Redlich wants to come out and join this debate about matters that have occurred in the past and who knew what when, I think it is perfectly legitimate for us to recall what he could not recall when he last appeared before the Parliament.

The other points we will make –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** He made a submission to the inquiry, Minister Shing, but the matters that he now talks about as being required within the remit of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission were not included in the submission to the inquiry that he made last year. These are serious issues; they require a serious response. Victoria Police is making arrests and laying charges. Laws have been strengthened to prevent this sort of activity. We all want to see criminal activity on construction sites ended.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:17): I also rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion 1253 regarding the CFMEU and misconduct in the construction sector. I will start off by saying that I support this motion. There are disagreements about what number we are talking about. I actually agree with Mr Batchelor: we do not know if it is \$15 billion, whether it is \$1 billion, whether it is \$100 million or whether it is \$30 billion. We actually do not know. But whatever it is, it is a lot of money, and it is a lot of money that is being diverted to organised crime. If the figure does happen to be \$15 billion, that is talking about almost 15 per cent of our state's debt that has been diverted to crime. I do not know that that is true, but if that is true, that is outrageous. If it is half of that, whatever it is, it is a very large amount of money that needs to be looked into.

I know that the government have taken action: they have strengthened up laws about association with people on building sites and labour hire regulations and things like this. But one of the things that no-one seems to be looking at are the incentives that were set up by the policy settings of the government that have incentivised this crime in the first place. It is very clear, when you look at both the reports from 2024 and the more recent reports, that the vectors for organised crime to infiltrate these sites have been enabled by government policy. I will give you some examples. The Gender Equality Act 2020 set up things that companies needed to do – they needed to have gender equality action plans and all this sort of stuff – in order to get government projects. What organised crime ended up doing was they set up labour hire firms to provide whatever was needed for these companies to meet those procurement requirements – so we had companies that would provide women to work on sites, other ones were Aboriginal labour hire companies. They would set up these companies to provide these requirements in order to qualify for government contracts. Then what was happening was these companies had apparently corrupt agreements with other agencies and were infiltrated and run by organised crime, and you ended up with ghost shifts and this sort of thing. Ultimately, the procurement policies of this state need to be drastically overhauled in my view. In fact the procurement policies should be the best company at the best price with the best reputation, regardless of all these other factors, because all that these other factors – they have not achieved the objectives that the government intended – have achieved is providing new vectors for organised crime to get involved in the construction industry, and it is totally wrong.

I think that we need to look at the utter failure of these initiatives that have been brought forward by this government and the results, because they have not resulted in what they were intended to do. We also need to look at the interfaces between this construction crime that we are seeing and other organised crime in this state. The one that I have spoken about many times is the tobacco wars. These are not separate entities; these are the same organisations that are doing it. In fact they are vertically integrating their organisations. They do not just see construction sites, apparently, as a vector for

## MOTIONS

organised crime to get involved in; they see them as a new sales opportunity for illegal tobacco, for vapes, for drugs, for everything else. They see them as a vertical integration opportunity for organised crime. It is just totally out of control in this state. The government says that they are doing all these things to stop organised crime. Anyone with eyeballs in their head only has to walk down Bourke Street and see all of the illegal products being sold – totally uncontrolled by this government – to know that organised crime controls large sectors of entire industries in this state. Anyone with eyeballs can see that.

The other thing that has not been looked at a lot – there has been a little bit of reporting on this – is where this money is going. Where is this money going? Where is it being laundered? Because clearly some of these people are involved with foreign hostile state actors like the Iranian regime. We know that there are connections between the tobacco distribution networks and the terror attacks that have been carried out. This was said by the AFP, that this was controlled by the Iranian regime. This money, when it is going overseas, where is it going to? Where is it going? Because I know that the owner – I have said this many times in here – of the number one brand that seems to be sold on the black market is located in Syria. It is all exported out of UAE. What is going on here? What have we gotten ourselves into with this? It needs to stop, but simple enforcement without addressing the underlying policy decisions that this government has made, that have incentivised and created opportunities for organised crime to get involved, must stop.

The biggest thing that will stop or at least cut back organised crime is the size of government itself. The pure scale of these projects that the government is putting forward in the Big Build and the SRL means that the government simply cannot maintain control of something this big, and it creates more and more opportunity. If the government wants to control organised crime, maybe they need to think about controlling the size of their own government, because the bigger it gets, the more opportunities it gets, the more difficult it is for the government, the police and our authorities to get control of this. They have clearly lost control. Every morning we wake up to an arson attack, and they are not just tobacconists. Many people forget the fact that there have been arson attacks on construction sites and other mysterious arson attacks on many other businesses that have nothing to do with tobacco, apparently, but we do not know what is causing this. We know that there have been assassinations. These are only the crimes that are visible and that we know about; imagine what is going on that has never been reported, because a lot of people do not talk about this. A lot of people keep their mouths shut when they know what they are dealing with. As we have seen from some of these reports, people that do speak out get bashed, they get intimidated, they get threatened. There is a culture of making sure that people stay quiet. The government has created the opportunities here; they are the ones sloshing around all this taxpayer money into all these projects, and when you have got that much money sloshing around, you have got to wonder how good it is going to end up in the end.

The final point: we have talked about where this money is going. It has to be laundered somewhere. There are strong indications from some reporting I have read that a lot of it is being laundered, or at least has been attempted to be laundered, through the property market. I think that a royal commission is appropriate to look at this. Maybe we will discover that property prices being high is not just a reflection of zoning, not just a reflection of immigration, but maybe a reflection of the involvement of organised crime money.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:25): I thank Mr Davis for bringing this motion to the house. I suppose it is no surprise that Labor's response to the biggest corruption scandal in our state in recent history is to deny, deflect and pretend it is not happening. As Mr Ettershank said in question time, it sometimes feels like we are living in a parallel universe. The only explanation for the approach of those on the other side is their fundamental belief that everything they and their political associates do is justified, necessary, essential and incorruptible and so by definition any opposition to it, any criticism, is incorrect, misleading, just political stunts. We have had the whole range of responses over the last couple of days: outrage that we are even asking, ridicule that we have got it wrong, condescension that we do not understand the issues, sanctimony that they are doing the right and

## MOTIONS

honourable thing for the state and we are simply slinging mud. It is pretty breathtaking. You might dispute the actual amount lost in corruption, but as Geoffrey Watson said, he had already adopted a very lowball estimate.

Labor act as if the figure is zero, as if the problem does not exist. We have asked them: if you do not accept \$15 billion, then what is the actual figure? They will not tell us. We asked them: will you investigate it and publish the figure? They reject the idea as if it is utterly, shockingly unreasonable. And what about getting the money back? What is the government doing to reclaim this \$15 billion? We have had no commitments, no enthusiasm. Frankly, they could not seem to care less. The money has been written off as if it is just the cost of doing business with the unions. The Premier likes to call the \$15 billion figure untested and unfounded, so test it. Find the figure. Just flat out denying it and pointing to a two-year-old IBAC referral, which was dismissed merely weeks later, is not going to cut it. This is not 15 per cent of \$1 million – that would be bad enough. It is 15 per cent of \$100 billion. You can do a lot with \$15 billion. You could bid for and fail to hold the Commonwealth Games 26 times for starters.

The Premier's position on the IBAC referral has really encapsulated the whole problem. She keeps pointing to it, but IBAC has confirmed that it rejected her 2024 referral within weeks because it fell outside its jurisdiction. Her office has acknowledged that advice of IBAC's rejection was received through the Department of Premier and Cabinet in October 2024. She said in the press conference that she does not have the exact date for this, as if that is some kind of answer. It does not matter what the date was. What matters is that she was told – she did know. Former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich was fairly polite. He said if she did not know, she should. And what happened when she knew? Nothing. Months passed, no royal commission, no expanded powers, no urgent legislative reform to give IBAC the follow-the-money authority it lacks – just a letter, forced out of her. Mr Redlich described it as 'disingenuous' to produce that letter and say, in effect, 'Look, I've done all I could.'

My colleague Mr Newbury in the other place has called the whole referral process nothing more than a scam and a hoax. It is hard to disagree. Let us be honest here: there was no attempt at accountability or transparency here. The Premier's IBAC referral was just a talking point, a political deflection tactic when she found herself in hot water. And we know it was, because even what she said in July 2024 was completely, hopelessly, obviously false. She claims, as Labor ministers do every single time this comes up, that as soon as allegations against the CFMEU were brought to their attention they were reported.

As I showed on 23 July 2024, Premier Allan, then the minister responsible for transport infrastructure, was sent an email about the CFMEU on 28 March 2020, more than four years before. I will read it here:

Dear any one who can help,

I own a medium size business. We currently employ about 40 staff. We are obviously in severe distress at the moment due to the coronavirus, but the truth is we haven't been doing well for some time ... we have an EBA with the CFMEU, and they have been vehemently opposed to what we have had to do, regardless of the circumstances. They have now taken to entering our workplace, intimidating the remainder of the staff and ordering them to down tools, and they have been extremely intimidating to myself and my business partner ... even taking videos of him and posting them on facebook. They are citing safety issues in our workplace but these are completely fabricated and proven so by Worksafe inspectors who have visited our site to review the "suspected" breaches.

Can you please make an effort to end this absolute thuggery so we can do the best we can to keep our business viable. I find it an absolute disgrace that the CFMEU want to close our business down and make 40 of their members and the rest of our staff unemployed.

On behalf of myself and my partner and all our employees, I thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Well, there was no assistance, I am sorry to say, because according to Labor, there is nothing to see. That is the shameful pattern. A small business owner emails in desperation – there is nothing to see.

## MOTIONS

A contractor complains of intimidation – nothing to see. Costs blowout by billions – nothing to see. A former IBAC commissioner calls the Premier’s referral misconceived – nothing to see. An eminent corruption barrister gives evidence suggesting at the lowest 15 per cent of payments may be corrupt – nothing to see. This is Mr Ettershank’s parallel universe.

You do have to wonder what would count as evidence in the eyes of this government. Perhaps they need the CFMEU to send invoices to the Treasury with the heading ‘Corruption: 15 per cent’, because short of that, every concern is brushed aside as politics. That is why we need to pass Mr Davis’s motion. Labor have shown they cannot be trusted with this most basic responsibility of government. The Premier either does not care or is incapable of reforming the system she helped build. This week in this place, the Treasurer and the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop have shown they simply reject the premise of the question. They are marking their own homework, with a little help from a generous President, and we cannot allow it to go on. The sums are too large, and our debt is too high. We are no longer rich enough to pour \$15 billion down the drain. The time for an independent, public, forensic royal commission is now.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (16:33): The government has zero tolerance for any sort of illegal behaviour, and we support the independent administrator’s comments that any allegations should be referred to the Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police, the Fair Work Commission and other relevant enforcement agencies and regulators for investigation. I just want to pick up on some of Mr Limbrick’s comments in reference to procurement policies. He was trying to lasso procurement policies in with the broader debate. He went on to talk about house prices and various things. I will just touch on this briefly before I go back to the rest of the debate. It is critically important that traineeships and apprenticeships are tied into new construction projects. He particularly talked down large construction projects, but (a) we need them, and I will come to that, and (b) it is an opportunity to get new people into trades. We need trades, and we know what happens if we do not get enough people into trades: we get labour shortages, which have been outlined in aforementioned reports.

I think it is also really important that we do make efforts to get more women onto worksites that have traditionally only had men on them because it does improve the culture. With diversity, you get better outcomes. I just wanted to make that point from the top – that I would hate to see this debate used as a way of talking down training young Victorians and increasing diversity on the worksite.

Construction is critical to our economy. Mr Limbrick made comments effectively that government should not get on and build major infrastructure. We know that whether it is public transport such as the Metro Tunnel, massive road projects that have gone on around the state, hospitals like those in Frankston and Footscray, 100 schools, 100 level crossing removals – all of these are critically important to our state and they are of generational importance. But with public works large and small, Victorians should expect value for money. The companies that deliver these projects, which are incredibly complicated and big projects, take on the risk of performing that work, so they should expect a rate of return.

At the same time, we have workers in construction. Construction is a difficult and risk-prone industry. Its workforce is often out of bed long before many in our community in the morning. Job locations move around. There is not security of employment for many. And of course it is done in all conditions. Many workers in construction have a transient life that many workers do not need to experience. These conditions are not easy and, if unchecked, can be unsafe. All of this impacts on workers, families and loved ones, and those workers and families deserve to receive an income that acknowledges and appropriately rewards their efforts. Construction unions play a critical role in representing these workers and ensuring that those rights are represented.

It is important in this debate that the workers that have delivered the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and all those other projects I spoke about are acknowledged, and I do that now. But at the same time, we cannot have criminal activities occurring in Victorian construction, and the government has responded swiftly and comprehensively to allegations of criminal and intimidatory activity,

## MOTIONS

commissioning the Wilson review in order to provide an independent assessment of how we can strengthen government bodies' ability to respond to allegations of criminal and other unlawful conduct in the Victorian construction sector. The complaints referral service was brought in with the passage of the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, which legislated to create a new complaints referral service within Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. The complaints service is up and running and provides a safe and effective forum for people to raise complaints or concerns about corruption on government sites. It also enables complaints to be made confidentially, investigated and referred to relevant enforcement bodies.

We have also passed amendments to labour hire legislation to help target criminal and unlawful conduct, particularly those bodies that operate using labour hire. In Victoria labour hire businesses must be licensed, and host businesses must only use licensed providers. There are significant penalties for using or providing unlicensed labour hire services, with penalties in excess of \$630,000 for a corporation or \$150,000 for an individual. So labour hire reforms have strengthened the powers of Victoria's Labour Hire Authority to prevent those with links to criminal organisations from operating labour hire businesses.

In addition to those legislative reforms, the government has acted to implement recommendations 2 and 7 of the Wilson review. Recommendation 2 was to establish an alliance involving state and federal law enforcement and regulators and other relevant entities with a role in addressing allegations of criminal or unlawful conduct on Victorian government construction sites. The alliance is up and running, and it met several times last year to collaborate on how agencies can better share information, coordinate action and inform government of emerging issues. The Wilson review also recommended that construction policies and contracts include clauses that require principal contractors on government-funded construction sites to report criminal or other unlawful conduct. There have been updated standard form contracts developed, model construction contract clauses and other materials to support agencies to implement this recommendation as a requirement on public construction projects.

Outside of the Wilson review, the government has acted to strengthen Victoria's unlawful association scheme with the passage of the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024, which bans members of specified organised crime groups from entering Victorian government worksites, and it also supported the work done by the federal Labor government, which included the appointment of the administrator to the CFMEU.

I do not think it has been touched on in this debate – it might have been touched on earlier in the chamber today during question time – but we have heard independent commentary about overruns. We have had global inflation off the back of the Ukraine war that has impacted much of the Western world, or indeed much of the world, in materials and equipment costs. I think we heard earlier outside of this debate economist Saul Eslake said the engineering construction implicit price deflator, a measure of price growth used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, showed costs in Victoria went up by 36.8 per cent between December 2014 and September 2025. This was lower than New South Wales at 37.4 per cent and the national figure of 41.7 per cent.

Operation Hawk, established in 2024 to specifically and proactively target organised crime linked to the construction industry, has focused on assessing new intelligence and evidence relating to allegations of criminal behaviour in the construction industry. It has resulted in 17 offenders being processed and charged, including approximately 70 charges laid, including for offences like fraud, threats and so on.

I have stepped through the responses that the government has made. I just want to come back to a couple of the points that we have heard thrown around the chamber of the importance of ensuring that the next generation and pipeline of workers are given the opportunity to work in construction projects and given the training they need, so that they, amongst a diverse workforce, can be the workforce that we need for future generations of Victoria.

## MOTIONS

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:44): I rise to speak in favour of this motion today. The Allan Labor government has long been on the record that it will not support a royal commission into Big Build corruption, an inquiry that may very well uncover its own deliberate ignorance of billions of dollars of misspent public funds. The potential scale of this corruption is unprecedented in Australia. As a point of reference, consider that former Indonesian president Suharto is widely seen as the most corrupt leader in modern history, personally embezzling an estimated US\$15 billion. That is getting close to the amount alleged to have been embezzled by organised crime figures on Big Build sites. These squandered funds could have instead covered the \$2.4 billion in delayed Gonski funding for Victorian public schools, it could have built thousands of public homes, it could have lowered the cost of public transport and energy bills for everyone or saved thousands of lives through the soon-to-be-scraped VicHealth – and all of that with plenty of change left over. Because while we often measure the price of corruption in dollar figures, the real cost is felt in the everyday lives of Victorians. For 18 months the Premier has pointed to her IBAC referral as proof that she has taken the necessary action on Big Build corruption. That ruse is now over thanks to IBAC’s announcement on Monday that it had informed the government that it did not have the power to investigate.

We have seen IBAC referrals used as a substitute for accountability before. It must not happen again. Without anticipating any further debate that may or may not happen this week, all of us in this place should be looking to effect recent recommendations from the Integrity and Oversight Committee to strengthen IBAC to fight all forms of corruption. If armed with expanded power, as has been recommended, IBAC could have the powers of a standing royal commission and apply these powers to root out not just systemic corruption on Big Build sites retrospectively but corruption across all levels of politics and public office. IBAC could start this investigation immediately. Unlike a royal commission, which would take time to set up, it could start that investigation immediately, and it would also be able to investigate any future incidence of corruption. There have and will be many other scandals that will no doubt need similar levels of scrutiny. What is more, a powerful standing anti-corruption commission will prevent any of these scandals from happening. That is why we need a systemic fix, and reforming IBAC is the best way to do that.

The government has contested many of the reports that we are hearing in the media. We have heard some of that from contributions today, including the estimates of public funding that have been caught up in corruption. If they are correct about this – and I, for every Victorian’s sake, hope that it is the case that these numbers are incorrect and that there has not been this scale of corruption that is been reported – if that is the case, if they can stand by those claims that it is incorrect and that the figures are wrong, then they have nothing at all to fear from a potential IBAC or royal commission investigation. We need real action on corruption, not just more symbolism and pretending, but given that the government has to date refused to make the changes to IBAC that are necessary and have long been called for, we will support this motion and call for a royal commission.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:47): I rise to support this motion by Mr Davis. This is a really important motion because this is the largest corruption scandal in Victoria’s history. Jacinta Allan and Labor knew about corruption on their infrastructure project sites and they turned a blind eye. The *Rotting from the Top* report by respected integrity expert Geoffrey Watson SC found that there was no doubt that the Labor government knew about the corruption. It was equally clear that the Labor government did nothing about it.

Fifteen billion dollars of taxpayers funds have flowed to bikies and to organised crime figures. This equates to more than \$5000 for every household in Victoria. It is effectively a tax on every household; a tax to give money to bikies and organised crime figures. The Premier cannot hide from this. She cannot say that she did not know. The Premier was the Minister for Transport Infrastructure during the period that this corruption took place, and she is now the Premier. The CFMEU has underpinned her factional base within the ALP for decades. There is no doubt that she knew, there is no doubt that Labor knew and there is no doubt that they purposely turned a blind eye.

## MOTIONS

72

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

As I said, every household has effectively paid a \$5000 corruption tax. That \$15 billion could have funded 130,000 police officers, nurses or teachers. This shocking waste explains why dozens of our police stations have closed or had their hours reduced, why ambulance response times are now 5 minutes slower than they were a decade ago and why Victoria has the lowest funded public schools in the nation. It explains why our roads are just crumbling before our eyes, and it explains why our fire services are starved of vital equipment.

It is also money that could have funded important local projects in every electorate around the state. More specifically, in my electorate it could have funded vital projects in the seat of Shepparton, where it could have funded the measly \$5 million that the council is asking for for our sports stadium. In fact it could have funded the whole project of \$32 million. It could have funded stage 2 of the Banmira Specialist School redevelopment. This is a school for kids with disabilities, where they are being disadvantaged because the government will not finish the redevelopment of their school. It could have funded the bypass of Shepparton, the bypass of Rutherglen or the bypass of Kilmore. But back to the Shepparton electorate, it could have funded a clinical health school at Goulburn Valley Health; it could have funded a new school crossing at the Kialla primary school, where a family was involved in an accident again the other day; and it could have funded the completion of the GV Health redevelopment.

In the seat of Yan Yean it could have duplicated Donnybrook Road. It could have built the flyover over the Hume Freeway. It could have got families home sooner and made those communities safer. It could have funded the Mernda pool. It could have funded additional police to ensure that those police stations are open 24/7, whereas the Mernda and Epping stations have been reduced to only 8 hours a day Monday to Friday and Whittlesea station is only open two days a week. And it could have funded a new police station at Wollert.

In Macedon it could have funded an upgrade of the Urquhart Street and High Street intersection in Woodend. It could have funded planning and construction work for the Hanging Rock to Daylesford rail trail. It could have redeveloped the Daylesford hospital, and anyone who has ever visited there – a hospital in the Minister for Health’s own electorate – knows how vital it is to fund that redevelopment. It could have funded the Lancefield Park redevelopment. It could have done a whole lot of things. It could have funded additional money for bushfire recovery and for flood recovery – we know that has been underfunded.

It could have funded things in the Premier’s own electorate: the most dangerous intersection in Victoria, according to the RACV, at the corner of Howard Street and the Midland Highway; the intersection at the Calder Highway and Maiden Gully Road; and Epsom Primary School, which has been asking for over a decade for an upgrade to their drop-off and pick-up point. It could have funded an education youth foyer that would have provided additional support for young people who can no longer live at home.

Robert Redlich has uncovered this corruption. He has said that two things are needed: IBAC’s powers need to be broadened to enable the dollar to be followed beyond public officials to private contractors, the union and those who are dealing with major infrastructure construction, but he also said we need a royal commission – and we do need a royal commission into this scandal and into many other Labor scandals.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:53): I rise to speak on this motion relating to the recent report on the behaviour of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union. As someone who spent nearly 40 years in the trade union movement before I came to this place, this is an issue that I care deeply about. Ensuring that the trade union movement acts with integrity is critical to ensuring that it continues to be able to represent and fight for the best interests of Australian workers. Union members deserve to be represented by unions which are run cleanly and with integrity. When they are not, it is their members that suffer. This happens in much the same way that corruption in

## MOTIONS

businesses takes away from the ability of businesses to serve the interests of customers and the broader community.

The long history of the union movement in this country reaches back to the colonial era, and arguably it is the most important reason why Australia is one of the best countries in the world to be a worker – from when the freemasons in this city walked off the job and began to fight for the eight-hour day for themselves and for succeeding generations; to equal pay for women, which ended a long history of pay; to the 1980s, where the union movement put the national interest first and won the social wage, most notably the creation of Medicare and other programs, in exchange for wage restraint.

Today the broader union movement continues to fight for workers rights and better pay. While the theme of today's motion relates to the alleged illegal activities at one particular union, one of the most important functions the broader trade union movement plays these days is ensuring that private sector giants follow the law and holding them to account when they do not. I do not want to spend much time on this point because the theme of today's motion is the CFMEU, but I do want to return more specifically to that very important issue and give it the time which it deserves. Take, for example, in recent years when the Transport Workers' Union took Qantas to court and won, holding a corporate giant to account for its illegal behaviour when it unfairly impacted on workers. The illegal sacking and outsourcing of 1800 workers damaged people's lives and livelihoods and led to Qantas paying the largest employer fine in Australian history.

People who had done nothing wrong, many of them having worked for Qantas for decades, were suddenly sacked for no good reason. What was even worse was that they did this in the height of the pandemic, at a time already defined by economic uncertainty and strain. This is not the sort of behaviour which we want to encourage in business. It demonstrates contempt for workers and it undermines important principles of a healthy economy, like the idea that an honest day's work should be rewarded. The Transport Workers' Union fight for accountability goes to demonstrate the valuable role that trade unions have in upholding the rule of law and fighting against illegal behaviour and corruption. Qantas mocked them when they first announced that it would be taking them to court. They did it, and it took them five years to get a result. They won a victory which did not just get their members compensation they deserved but also sent a warning to all employers around the country that illegal behaviour would have consequences.

As I have already said, this sort of illegal behaviour from organisations, whether a union or a business, also hurts the organisations they are supposed to be serving. Sacking 1800 experienced staff and replacing them with outsourced workers has led to worse service for Qantas customers. In this country we follow the principle that nobody, however wealthy, however powerful, however well connected, is above the law. This cannot be said for every country out there, and it goes to show why having a strong union movement is so important. To tar the entire union movement with the same brush following the revelations about the CFMEU would be to misrepresent the state of affairs entirely and would be an insult to the millions of workers who make up the union movement.

The Watson report touches on the idea, speaking specifically of the CFMEU members, stating:

There are over 30,000 members of the Victorian CFMEU and 99% of them are honest men and women working hard in a difficult and sometimes dangerous workplace. This report is not about them ...

This is why the Allan Labor government's strong response to this issue has been so important. We came out and said, very clearly, 'Nobody is above the law' and that there must be zero tolerance for any illegal behaviour. This was the correct response and it was a response which is cleaning up the construction sector. The Victorian government supported the federal government's decision to place the union in administration. It sent a clear message to the community, to businesses and to any other actors in this space that the government has a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption.

## MOTIONS

Watson's report emphasises that the administration has been successful in restoring integrity to the union, stating:

The Administration has been in place for eighteen months and it is clear that the process of reform is having a positive effect.

In responding to Greg Wilson's independent review, we have established the Construction Complaints Referral Service, so that individuals have a safe and secure way to report unlawful and unacceptable behaviour. This is important because workers, contractors and anybody involved in the construction project must be able to report illegal behaviour without threats of violence, coercion or retribution. We have expanded the Labour Hire Authority's powers by giving more powers to the fit and proper person test to account for people's past convictions, insolvencies, close associations with unfit or improper individuals and membership of criminal organisations. Some parts of the construction sector need to use or choose to use labour hire services, and it is important that they are able to know that these services are doing honest business and that the workers they provide are there to do honest work. They have also updated policies for state government construction contracts to demand more accountability from contractors in ensuring that no criminal activity takes place on their worksites.

These steps, recommended to the government by an independent review, represent an approach to dealing with this problem which is based on treating the issue with the seriousness it deserves. It follows the record of this government of tackling organised crime in Victoria, from the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024 to investigate unexplained wealth changes, reforms to unlawful association schemes and the new serious crime prevention orders. The Allan Labor government has taken a firm focus on weeding out criminal activity, and that extends to our efforts to combat issues in the construction industry. Strengthening the integrity of our construction union will benefit all Victorians, ensuring that the sector will meet the standards expected of it by the community in the years to come.

It is also worth us taking a look at what our government has been doing to strengthen IBAC and fight corruption. One thing that is important is giving IBAC stronger powers and record funding. That is exactly what the Allan Labor government has done. Stronger powers and record funding mean IBAC is more able to serve its mandate of uncovering, investigating and fighting corruption. Not only will this give IBAC budget independence and ensure it has the confidence to continue to be fearless in its efforts against corruption but the 2025–26 state budget delivered \$65.6 million for IBAC so that we can keep IBAC strong and keep it working effectively in the best interests of the Victorian public. IBAC has an important role to play in keeping public life clean and ensuring that politics continues to be about public service. IBAC ensures that the public can have confidence in the work that we do in Parliament.

Actual cases of corruption damage the public's confidence in government, but sometimes even just perceived corruption can have a similar effect. This is one of the reasons why having a strong institution such as IBAC which is trusted by the public to root out corruption is so important. The public expects that where there is wrongdoing there will be accountability and consequences. On this side of the chamber we believe whether corruption and illegal behaviour takes place in a union or a business or in a government, it should never be excused. We take a zero-tolerance approach to illegal behaviour as the first principle of our response to these issues. The measures we have taken are working. They are ensuring that we will have a construction sector which is fit for the future and can maintain public confidence.

The Allan Labor government has been decisive in responding to the public allegations levelled at the CFMEU and has taken the necessary steps to ensure the continued administration of the union to best deliver outcomes for members while rooting out corruption. Criminal conduct has no place in business and no place in our union movement, and the Allan Labor government has stuck to its principles with decisiveness and transparency, ensuring the best outcome for all Victorians.

## MOTIONS

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:02): I rise to support motion 1253 in Mr Davis's name. This house is being asked to note the findings of the *Rotting from the Top* report by Mr Geoffrey Watson SC tendered to Queensland's Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU and Misconduct in the Construction Industry. Mr Watson is not a political figure. He is a respected senior counsel with deep experience in exposing corruption. His conclusions deserve to be taken seriously.

The report makes deeply troubling observations about practices within the construction industry. Even more concerning is that commentary relating to Victoria was redacted from the publicly released version of the report, despite indications that up to 15 per cent of payments on Victorian Big Build sites may have been corrupt payments. If even a fraction of that figure is accurate, we are not talking about small sums; we are talking about billions of dollars of Victorian taxpayers money potentially siphoned away from schools, hospitals, roads and essential services.

The Victorian government's Big Build is the largest infrastructure program in our state's history. It commands enormous public investment and carries enormous public trust. With that scale comes a heightened responsibility for transparency and accountability. When credible allegations of systemic corruption arise, the appropriate response is not silence, not redaction and not dismissal – it is scrutiny. A royal commission is not a political stunt. It is the most powerful, independent investigative mechanism available to this state. It has the powers to compel witnesses, require documents and get to the truth. If there is nothing to hide, then there should be nothing to fear from a full and transparent inquiry.

This motion does not pre-empt findings; it simply calls for sunlight, because sunlight is the best disinfectant. For the sake of integrity in public administration, for the protection of taxpayers money and for the reputation of Victoria's construction industry, I urge the house to support this motion and call for a royal commission into corruption on Victorian government Big Build sites.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:05): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion, which calls on the Allan Labor government to institute a royal commission into corruption on the Victorian government's Big Build. The *Rotting from the Top* report, all 136 pages, made for very interesting reading. It was made public for the first time through an inquiry into union corruption up in Queensland, which was established by the LNP government. I remember hearing debates in this chamber before about the value of royal commissions and hearing those on the other side saying they do not achieve anything. Well, the royal commission in Queensland has uncovered a whole lot of things, including actual allegations of corruption that go deep into the CFMEU. We have had Mr Watson in his report indicate that a conservative estimate of \$15 billion has been siphoned to the criminal underworld, to bikies and to gangsters off Victorian construction sites. This is taxpayer money. That equates to 130,000 nurses, 130,000 police officers – 130,000 coppers. That is what we are dealing with.

As the member for Laverton agrees, everyone is talking about the \$15 billion – the \$15 billion that has been rorted from taxpayers, the \$15 billion that could have funded so much around our communities. At a time when we are dealing with enormous financial issues in this state, this Premier has allowed \$15 billion at least to be siphoned off to bikies and the criminal underworld. And we had the theatre of Jacinta Allan, the Premier, parading around her IBAC letter and saying, 'Look, I responded', without telling anyone that no less than six months after she sent off that letter to IBAC she received a response. She received a response from our Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission saying that they could not investigate because they did not have the powers and also 'Can you give us those powers?' What did Jacinta Allan do? Absolutely nothing. This is a pattern of behaviour from your Premier that only a few of you are still willing to defend.

Remember the time that the Premier with the Treasurer went out and announced a new taskforce, Operation Hawk, only for it to be found out later that day, I believe, that Operation Hawk was established by the police and had been running for months. This is a pattern of behaviour from this Premier. You would think with 20 taxpayer-funded media advisers this Premier would actually have

## MOTIONS

the political smarts to get things right. IBAC responded to the Premier, ‘Please give us more powers.’ What did the Premier do? She sat on her hands. Of course the Premier does not want IBAC to have more powers. We saw the disgraceful way in which members of this house and the government attacked former commissioners of IBAC, like Mr Robert Redlich. We have seen the way they have attacked people like Geoffrey Watson – absolutely shameful. It is absolutely shameful to be attacking integrity officers. We see Ms Kilkenny and Mr Carbines make outrageous comments, and Ms Shing today as well. I mean, the only thing lower than attacking pre-eminent Victorians in the way that this government has done is the Premier’s approval rating. That is the only thing that is lower than attacking pre-eminent Victorians and respected integrity experts and legal experts in our state.

This government has got desperate because it has run out of time and it has run out of money. As members in their caucus said, they are defending the indefensible. You have only got a few left that are willing to defend the Premier, according to media reports – Ms Symes, Ms Shing, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms D’Ambrosio and that is about it. There are none left willing to defend the actions of this Premier, who has allowed this CFMEU activity to absolutely flourish. Only the Liberals and Nationals will give IBAC follow-the-money powers – the powers that they have asked for – to get to the bottom of this. Only the Liberals and Nationals will establish a royal commission to get to the bottom of this situation, as they are doing in Queensland. We have seen year after year – since the Premier, for a decade, has been responsible for this area – the Premier enabling the CFMEU.

There was a time when the CFMEU just dealt with the people projects – housing, hospitals – and the AWU dealt with civil. That all changed under Jacinta Allan. Why did that change? That changed because of factional alignment. We saw time after time Jacinta Allan enabling the CFMEU, allowing them into workplaces, allowing them onto the Big Build and kicking off the AWU. We even saw examples, shockingly, with the failed Commonwealth Games – do not forget she was minister for that too. She stuffed up two things, and that side made her Premier. But on the failed Commonwealth Games athletes village, she actually wrote the CFMEU into contracts, saying, ‘You must use the CFMEU.’ Continuously, time after time, Jacinta Allan has been the minister responsible. She even referred matters to the Australian Building and Construction Commission after it had already been defunded by the federal government. She referred matters constantly to the federal government, to the ABCC, even when she knew they did not have the powers to investigate. She continually responded to allegations by saying industrial relations are a matter for the federal government, and it was only when she was exposed by *60 Minutes* and the *Age* that she discovered she could take action – I wonder why. She did not like the answers that she was getting. Time after time we know that she was warned about CFMEU activity on government construction sites but failed to act.

We have seen some pretty awful instances, particularly of women being attacked on construction sites; people smoking ice in front of women; holding women hostage; paying for strippers; paying for sex workers with taxpayer money; bikies and gangsters fighting for control of the Hurstbridge site, which was an absolute racket and rorted probably in the millions of dollars; and people using taxpayer-funded cars for criminal hits. This is the kind of thing that goes on at our construction sites. As I was talking about today, it is already going on at Suburban Rail Loop sites. For those contractors who complain about not giving in to bribes – the government says we should escalate it, but if you complain about it, you get kicked off site because you are not playing ball with this racket that the government is providing a protection racket for. The only way we can get to the bottom of this is to establish a fair dinkum royal commission, as outlined in Mr Davis’s motion. It is the only way we can get to the bottom of the systemic corruption that has seeped into our construction sites, that has siphoned \$15 billion and that this government has covered up.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:14): I want to thank all of those who have made a contribution today, particularly those on the non-government side of the chamber, where in each case, every case, they have spoken in favour of the motion and against the corruption that is behind the Big Build sites, as has been exposed by Mr Watson SC and others. It is clear that the corruption is there. It is clear that something has got to be done about it. I say we should listen to Robert Redlich and the

others who have called for royal commissions. A royal commission is necessary here. It is necessary to be built on top of additional IBAC powers. Mr Redlich made the case very clearly this week in the public media about the need for both expanded IBAC powers and expanded IBAC funding and for a royal commission to deal with the depth and complexity of what has occurred here. The fact is, whether it is \$15 billion, whether it is \$30 billion, whatever the exact number is, it is a huge amount of public money that has been squandered corruptly and could have funded schools, hospitals or a reduction in our debt. So whatever worthy project in your electorate that you wanted to fund or see funded, that has very likely been compromised by the enormous amount of money squandered corruptly on these Big Build sites by the arrangements put in place by Jacinta Allan as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. She cannot step away from this. She cannot avoid responsibility.

The truth is that I think the community has had enough. The community wants a full royal commission. That is why we have brought this motion to the chamber today. I want to thank Mr Watson SC for the work that he has done. The idea that government members today in this chamber would attack Mr Watson or attack Robert Redlich – a person of exemplary integrity, a great Supreme Court judge, a Court of Appeal judge, but also somebody who did enormously good work when he was at IBAC. He continues to serve the public by blowing the whistle on many of this government's failings, and he does that in the public interest. I say let us listen to what he said, let us make sure that a royal commission is put into place that will deal with the issues of corruption on these Big Build sites. It is so much money. We cannot waste time. We cannot stand back at this point. We actually need to get an outcome for the community, and this corruption has got to stop.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (24):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (15):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

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

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:23): I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.***Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:23): I rise to make a statement on the Legal and Social Issues Committee report into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers, which was tabled in December. That report, and particularly the minority report from government members, detailed, I think, quite factually, the serious concerns that exist with the condition of those towers. The inquiry revealed evidence of failing sewer systems; of mould in walls, caused by those sewers collapsing; of structural deficiencies, particularly emerging in the concrete used in the unique

## STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS

78

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2024

construction methodology for those towers; and of the lifts that cannot accommodate stretchers in, I think, 95 per cent of the towers, which means that people who require an ambulance cannot get stretchered out if they live in those towers. There is evidence, which the majority of the committee denied going in the report, from the Victorian Public Tenants Association, which articulates in particular the climatic issues associated with the units, flats, being too hot in summer and too cold in winter. It is not unexpected, because many of these towers were built 60-plus years ago, with an expected lifespan, when they were built, of 50 years. So they were built 60 years ago, with a 50-year expected lifespan. I think that it is incumbent upon all of us to recognise that some of the most disadvantaged members of our community deserve to live in homes that are modern, that are energy efficient, that are accessible and that meet contemporary building standards and not to consign them to live in facilities that were built 60 years ago with a 50-year lifespan.

Recently, and following the tabling of that report, the government announced the next tranche of tower redevelopments, and on Monday, with Minister Shing and alongside Mr Berger, we visited the residents in the tower at Inkerman Street in St Kilda. We had a really great and lengthy conversation with residents there about their perspectives on the current conditions of the towers. We heard quite stark evidence about some of the deficiencies that exist in those places and the strain that they are under. It was quite clear that the residents genuinely had affection for the communities in which they live. To say that they did have some shock at the next wave of announcements is absolutely true, but as one of the residents told us, it took about a day or a day and a half for that shock to wash through before the excitement about the next phase – the opportunity of the new apartments that are being built in the social housing developments in Prahran, in South Yarra and in Port Melbourne, which are built to modern standards, which are energy efficient and which are accessible – the sense of excitement about the opportunities that are emerging and the eagerness of those residents to go and have a look at the new homes, which they are going to be moving into once the relocation process in these towers starts from July, came. I think it was important for us to be there to listen and to talk about what the future holds. I think it is quite clear that, as always, people are nervous about change, and we absolutely understand that, but the support services are there and the relocation assistance is there. But most importantly, the brand new housing that these residents – with their neighbours, maintaining their community – can move into is being built right now and will be finished later this year.

There are many great examples of wonderful, new social housing estates being built right across the Southern Metropolitan Region and right across metropolitan Melbourne. The Big Housing Build and the towers redevelopment program are incredibly important parts of making sure that those who need our support the most with housing have the opportunity to live in new, modern homes, and I absolutely think that that is what they deserve.

### Department of Transport and Planning

*Report 2024–25*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:28): I rise to speak on the Department of Transport and Planning's annual report that was tabled last year. The Department of Transport and Planning of course is responsible for all of the maintenance on our roads in Victoria, and we know that our roads are in a deplorable state. In fact it is not just our roads. As I raised in my constituency question today, it is also the directional signs that are barely readable because the white lettering on them has shrunk and peeled off, and they are just left with the shadow of what was written there before. The intersection that I mentioned was that of the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Hume Freeway, and visitors to the region would not know where they are going. It is just disgraceful, the condition of that sign. But we know that in local areas when they have a disaster like a flood or a bushfire or whatever that for local governments to get funding out of the state government to refurbish bridges that are damaged or roads that are damaged, they have to have a set of photographs of what the road looked like before and a set of photographs of the after.

## STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

79

Local governments have been doing audits of all of their roads. But the City of Whittlesea, whilst doing an audit of their own roads, also did an audit of the arterial roads in their municipality, and we have 221 pages of defects on arterial roads in the City of Whittlesea. In fact not only are there 221 pages but there are a lot more photos, because most pages have four photos on them. There are 14 photos of large piles of dumped rubbish. Some of the worst of these are on Donnybrook Road and Craigieburn Road. Of guardrail damage in their municipality there are 54 photos. It is on all major roads. Some of the worst of it is on Donnybrook Road and Craigieburn Road again. Also audited were missing or damaged signs – there are 135 photos on major arterial roads of missing or damaged signs. Some are completely missing. Speed signs are lying on the ground, some of them face down – motorists could not possibly see them. And this does not even include the infamous Donnybrook Road sign, because that is in the City of Hume. 135 missing or damaged signs.

On defects in their road surfaces, there are 323 defects recorded: potholes, degraded surface, missing lines and edges that are breaking up on the roads. This is on almost every arterial road in the City of Whittlesea. The dead animals on the side of the road – this is really sad. There are actually 14 photos of rotting carcasses of kangaroos. Some are skeletal, some look like other animals have fed off the carcass, but they are all obviously not fresh roadkill; they are carcasses that have been left on the roadside to rot. Overgrown grass – we know this government does not like to mow the grass. There are 99 photos of nature strips, side roads, median strips, roundabouts, gutters and the bases of guardrails where the government has failed to mow the grass or maintain the growth of weeds. Fallen branches – there are 16 photos where tree branches have fallen across guardrails and the sides of roads, and some of them are obscuring signs. Drainage – there are 54 photos of broken or blocked drains and water pooling in gutters and on road surfaces. And of course graffiti – 97 photos of graffiti on state government infrastructure. Graffiti on poles, signs, underpasses, bridges, power substations, New Jersey barriers, fire hydrants – basically anywhere you can scrawl a tag.

This is a damning report on the state of arterial roads – the state government-managed roads – in the City of Whittlesea. I call on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to actually get herself a copy of this report – it is available from the City of Whittlesea – and to start working through fixing all of these defects on the major arterial roads in the City of Whittlesea.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

#### *Budget papers 2025–26*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:33): I rise to speak on the budget papers for this current financial year, particularly budget paper 4 and budget paper 3, as they relate to output initiatives for the Department of Health. On that subject, I was very excited with the news in the past few days that a builder has been appointed for the construction of Casey Hospital’s new emergency department. Casey is, of course, a very important hospital in the south-east, and it is growing, and we are serving a very large and growing population that I am proud to represent in the Casey–Cardinia region. That is why practically doubling the capacity of the new emergency room compared to the old one is such an important initiative. I, myself, with Mr Tarlamis and other colleagues, have been out many times to Casey to see firsthand the pressures on the existing emergency department, and we know that this new facility is going to make a tremendous difference to getting timely access to emergency health care in the growing south-east suburbs, because as the south-east grows, we invest in it and we are growing services and infrastructure with it.

It is not the only investment that we are making in health in the south-east, though. There is of course the Peninsula University Hospital, the single largest investment in a hospital facility outside of central Melbourne in the state’s history. It is a terrific new hospital – great to see it up and running there. The local member, Paul Edbrooke, has done a tremendous job in advocating for this project and seeing it through to completion, with Frankston Hospital now becoming this premier health facility on the tip of the Mornington Peninsula with Peninsula University Hospital.

## STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS

80

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

It is also not just about tertiary critical care hospitals; it is also about the other supports and services, including Cranbourne Community Hospital. Whilst the Liberals seek to talk them down – whether they are denying that they exist or are just flagging to us that they plan to shut them down as part of their secret cuts agenda, I do not know – what I do know is the Cranbourne Community Hospital is already providing really important services to the local community with those sorts of more minor entry-level day surgeries and the like, providing that care closer to home and in the process taking that pressure off bigger hospitals like Casey, Dandenong and Peninsula University as well. Indeed it is not the only one in the south-east. Pakenham Community Hospital is well underway and continuing construction, and the very hardworking member there, Emma Vulin, has done a great job in pushing that through with the various site challenges it has faced. In fact it is just another example of the huge amount of investment that has been made across the south-east.

I note that the current – and current for the time being – leader of the Liberal Party went down there recently and tried to with a straight face tell locals that we are not investing in the south-east. I do not know what she was doing when she was being driven all the way down from Kew to have a look in Pakenham. She probably was not looking at the roads that we have already upgraded or the roads that we are currently upgrading. She probably was not looking at the four level crossings that we have removed in the suburb of Pakenham alone. She obviously did not take the train, because she would not have seen the level crossings. She would not have seen the brand new, rebuilt Pakenham station. She would not have seen the other brand new station in East Pakenham either. She probably did not see the countless new schools we have built in the suburb, including some that have opened in just the last few years. She probably did not see the urgent care clinic in Pakenham either that is invested in by the state government – with 50 per cent contributions to these very important facilities, whether they be in Pakenham or whether they be in Narre Warren.

While she is complaining about a lack of investment and at the same time complaining that the works and roadworks going on are causing distress, it is a bit of a strange path to be walking, but whatever line she decides to fall onto the end of, you cannot deny that the Labor government, this Labor government, is investing heavily in Pakenham, in Berwick, in Cranbourne, in Narre Warren and right across the south-east for the health services, the transport infrastructure, the new bus routes in fact and all of these services that our growing communities need and deserve.

The urgent care clinics are another very important part of that, as is indeed the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, providing an alternative pathway to critical emergency care when you need it.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Whatever happened to the virtual ED, Mr McGowan? Because some of your colleagues also refuse to acknowledge that it exists. They ask – maybe they are going to cut it as well.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Maybe they are going to cut it as well, Mr Tarlamis. They ask openly, ‘Have you ever heard of a virtual ED?’ to the person who set it up in Victoria, because they do not know, and they do not want to know, because they do not care. All they are going to do if they do get in is cut them back because they do not care about these services. They do not even care, and they do not even want to know about them. That should be a chilling thought to anyone who values the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, who values Cranbourne Community Hospital and who values the investments that this government is making in our growing suburbs.

**Sustainability Victoria**

*Report 2024–25*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to make a contribution on the Sustainability Victoria annual report 2024–25. The Sustainability Victoria annual report for 2024–25 provides a detailed record of the state’s progress in transitioning towards a circular economy and

meeting established climate targets. This period marks the commencement of Sustainability Victoria's *Strategic Plan 2024–2027*, a framework that is designed to shift the state from a linear economic model to one where waste is minimised and materials are kept in productive use for as long as possible.

The Victorian government remains committed to the target of a 65 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero emissions by 2045. To support these goals, the government allocated \$197.3 million through the Sustainability Fund during this reporting period to facilitate waste reduction and climate mitigation initiatives. Data from the past year indicates that these investments have resulted in the recovery or recycling of an additional 269,763 tonnes of material. These infrastructure improvements are a core component of the government's circular economy policy, which seeks to divert 80 per cent of waste from landfill by 2030. In terms of direct carbon impact, Sustainability Victoria's programs contributed to a reduction of 202,331 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions. The transition to a cleaner economy also saw the creation of 312 new jobs within the sector during the 2024–25 financial year.

The government's strategy emphasises big system change by addressing the full life cycle of products. This is evidenced by the support provided to 134 circular economy projects ranging from local repair cafes to industrial scale glass and plastic recycling facilities. A key priority has been the Closing the Loop initiative, which focuses on the design and manufacturing stages to ensure products are durable and recyclable from the outset. For example, partnerships with textile and furniture industries have demonstrated the commercial viability of using 100 per cent recycled materials in high-value manufacturing. In addition to industrial shifts, the report outlines the government's focus on community-level environmental safety. The Detox your Home program successfully held 38 events, allowing over 5000 households to safely dispose of 137 tonnes of toxic household chemicals that would otherwise pose a risk to local ecosystems and waterways. Simultaneously, the ResourceSmart Schools program involved over 500 schools in active sustainability education, resulting in a collective saving of \$3.5 million in utility costs through improved resource efficiency.

Looking forward for the remainder of the 2024–27 strategic period, the government's focus remains on three specific outcomes: building the evidence base for circularity, accelerating the adoption of circular business models and fostering sustainable behaviours across the Victorian population. The report underscores that while significant milestones in waste diversion and emissions reductions have been met, continued investment in infrastructure and rigorous data collection will be required to meet the state's 2030 and 2045 statutory obligations. This transition is framed not only as an environmental necessity but as an economic structural change intended to improve the state's long-term resource security and productivity. I commend the report to the house.

***Petitions*****Waste and recycling management**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (17:42): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Sunbury is a hip, diverse and rapidly growing town. Its vibrant centre is host to a burgeoning cosmopolitan foodie culture, supported by access to exceptional local vineyards and farms, and locals have easy access to abundant native vegetation and wildlife. It is no wonder the people of Sunbury are proud and protective of their part of the world. As this petition attests, Sunbury also has no shortage of passionate residents determined to stop Sunbury being treated like the natural home for Melbourne's toxic waste dumps. On hearing about the plans to plonk a big, dirty waste incinerator in their backyards, the locals wasted no time in getting a petition up and managed to collect 3500 signatures in a matter of weeks. They are fighting the good fight for the future of residents.

As part of the government's proposed metropolitan activity centre plan, Sunbury and its surrounding areas are set to become a thriving activity centre with thousands of new residents, major retailers and speciality stores. And guess where it is growing? It is growing towards the HiQ plant. Why is this

government now planning to just trash the town? Did the government think that they could just wave this through before the populace had time to clock what was happening and raise objections? They did not reckon on the speed with which the No Sunbury Waste Incinerator group could grow from a handful of concerned residents to a fully fledged community movement. The group now has 2500 members on Facebook alone.

Let us be clear: the group is not going to take this incinerator proposal lying down. If the proponents of this project thought there would be no resistance, they were wrong. It is amazing how the threat of an incinerator in your backyard can fire up the community. And let us be clear: that is what this is. It is an incinerator. It is simply burning garbage. As members know, the EPA have issued a waste cap licence to HiQ to burn three-quarters of a million tonnes of waste annually in this facility. Instead of investing in ways to get these resources and hazardous materials out of our waste stream, the government wants to pile them up and burn them. We know the incinerators cannot be turned off, or should not be turned off, when the government hits its waste reduction targets. That would be logical, but the technology does not allow that without risk. We are going to keep feeding this hungry beast constantly until it is decommissioned. Let me assure you the people of Sunbury ain't throwing away anything close to three-quarters of a million tonnes of rubbish every year. The total landfill produced by the Hume LGA is 14,000 tonnes, so we are going to be trucking in an additional 736,000 tonnes from all over the state to keep feeding our very hungry incinerator. And this is only one of seven proposed by the state government. We will, if these go through, have more incinerators in Victoria than in all of Australia combined.

Let us face it, the promise of waste to energy is a scam. The energy produced will not be powering homes in Sunbury or feeding the grid. The energy produced by the incinerator will power the incinerator – little or nothing more – and while doing that it will produce the same amount, if not more, of greenhouse gas emissions as coal-produced energy. I am amazed at the government's general lack of care around waste management and its jaundiced and enduring faith in the market to take care of our waste problems without much oversight. For example, I was quite startled to learn that there are no minimum environmental standards set for tenderers. The laissez-faire approach is deeply troubling and further evidence of the government's lacklustre approach to environmental regulation – doubly so, given that the government has refused to release the documentation that has been requested on the tender and selection processes. Members might remember that Chris Bowen, the now federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, opposed the construction of incinerators in his patch in western Sydney, describing this as 'not clean energy ... It is literally a dumpster fire.'

What about HiQ? Well, most recently, in 2024, the EPA laid a series of charges against HiQ for failure to implement a range of safety measures, and that did not stop them being awarded the licence. I just conclude by saying that with a project that is as disgusting as this it pays to be diligent, and before we commit to incinerating three-quarters of a million tonnes of garbage, let us allow an appropriate due diligence process via an inquiry to occur. Pending that, no incinerator for Sunbury.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (17:48): I just want to place a few comments on the record in relation to this particular petition. Firstly, I just want to acknowledge all those who have been engaging in our democratic processes by signing the petition, and I understand from conversations I have had with the local member for Sunbury Josh Bull that the community does hold concerns about the proposed waste-to-energy facility in Sunbury. I know Josh very well, and I know that as someone who has grown up in Sunbury and lived there for 40 years and is raising his family there, he cares deeply about his community. I know that he has taken the time to listen carefully to the views of the community and consider them, and he has also made his personal position clear about this project. I do want to acknowledge his ongoing advocacy on behalf of his community and for bringing those matters to the Parliament.

It is also important to note that anyone in Victoria who wants to develop and operate a waste-to-energy facility must first obtain all of the required regulatory approvals before they can commence

construction and operation, and waste-to-energy projects are governed by multiple pieces of legislation in Victoria, including the Environment Protection Act 2017, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Environment Effects Act 1978 and the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. Any proponent who is seeking planning approval must demonstrate that a waste-to-energy facility is consistent with relevant policies and controls relating to the environment, economic and social impacts in line with the Victorian planning provisions and the Planning and Environment Act. If a planning permit application is submitted to the Minister for Planning, who is the responsible authority for waste-to-energy projects, under those circumstances the minister will be required to consider and determine the application in line with the requirements of those acts.

I am advised by the Minister for Planning that as of 2 February 2026 a planning application has not been submitted to the Department of Transport and Planning for the proposed waste-to-energy facility in Sunbury. I think that is an important point to note here. This assessment process would include referral to relevant government authorities, consultation with the Hume City Council, public notice and opportunity for public submissions. Key elements of the assessment would also consider relevant state and local policies contained in the Hume planning scheme, together with environmental, economic, social and relevant technical considerations. If an application for this project is submitted – currently there is no application – and it is considered satisfactory for public consultation, community members will have a further opportunity to engage in the planning process and make their views on the proposal known to the Department of Transport and Planning. That is in addition to the requirements under the Planning and Environment Act. The proposal would also require approval of a development licence under the EPA, the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. Development licence applications primarily include scientific assessment of potential risks to human health and the environment from matters such as pollution, waste, air quality and odour.

I also note that the petition mentions the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry, which will soon no doubt be accepting submissions from the public. It is important to note that the government did support that inquiry going ahead. I think that will be an important process and a further opportunity for the community to have their say.

The safety and environment of all Victorians is a priority for our government, and the Victorian government has established a very robust framework to regulate waste to energy. Waste-to-energy facilities must operate in accordance with strict environment and human health regulations in Victoria. These rules require waste-to-energy facilities to use international best practice pollution controls. It is also critical that proposed facilities build a social licence to operate, and the government expects operators to work closely with affected communities to understand and address any concerns they raise. Again, it is important to note that none of those parts of the process have been entered into yet, because at this point in time there is no application for a licence before the minister. The EPA, planning authorities and Recycling Victoria each have a role to play in ensuring that waste-to-energy facilities meet these standards.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:53): I am pleased to rise and make some comments about this petition, and I indicate that we support taking note of the petition. I am very respectful of the work that has been done by so many in the community in Sunbury. I am going to make a broad statement of policy that we are not necessarily opposed to waste to energy. We see that that has a role, but that does not mean that every waste-to-energy project is well positioned or well managed. In this case the Sunbury community has every reason to call this process out. Despite what the minister just said, I have little confidence that the Allan Labor government will have a fair process, will have a proper process and will have a process that actually listens to the community.

The community in Sunbury have been taken for granted by this government. I do not want to be very unkind about Mr Bull, but I do not believe he has stood up for his community properly. I do not believe he has fought for his community. I know Simmone Cottom. She is a very strong advocate, a true local in the area and very strongly engaged in supporting her community. She has made her points known to me as the Shadow Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction and to many others in the coalition

about the need to make sure that there is a proper process that respects the community in the Sunbury area, and there has not been to date.

The minister and her comments leave me with no enthusiasm, no confidence that the community will have the right response. We are very concerned about this particular proposal. We are very concerned that it does not have the right protections for a community in the local area, and that is partially because of the work done by Simmone and Trung and Moira in the upper house to make sure that the opposition – the Liberals, the Nationals – actually understand what is important on these matters. I thank Mr Ettershank for bringing this to the chamber. I thank Ms Cottom in particular for her strong advocacy on behalf of the local community.

I make the point that whilst you can have a general support for a particular policy, that does not mean you can ride roughshod over local communities when it comes to the buffer zones, the protections that are needed, the distances that are required and the huge impact by many of the vehicles in that area. The Sunbury community has suffered massively with the toxic spoil that came out of the West Gate Tunnel. They rolled truck after truck after truck – millions of them. Labor did that, and there was no proper process in providing the approvals for that particular process. I say an incinerator needs a proper buffer, it needs a proper environment effects statement, and it needs to make sure that it does not impact negatively on a local community.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (17:57): I am glad to see this petition come before the house. I sincerely thank the member for Western Metropolitan Region, Mr Ettershank, for bringing it forward, along with the thousands of Victorians who signed it. I want to acknowledge the dedication of the community members of the No Sunbury Waste Incinerator group who have come here today to say no to the proposed incinerator in their backyard.

Sunbury residents are tired of being treated as a dumping ground for Melbourne’s waste. They do not want the government to build a toxic, dirty, polluting waste incinerator in their community. They deserve to be listened to. We absolutely need to reduce the amount of waste going into landfill. We 100 per cent agree with that, but setting fire to our waste is not part of the solution. For too long this government has neglected waste management and recycling, and now, instead of doing the right thing, the government is literally starting a dumpster fire and leaving communities like Sunbury to deal with the toxic consequences.

The Victorian government’s decision to roll out waste-to-energy incinerators across the state will only throw further fuel on the fire of the climate crisis we are living through. Victoria recently experienced record-breaking temperatures. There are out-of-control bushfires still burning in this state. The impacts of climate change are here now, and we know that there is worse to come. It is staggering that Recycling Victoria granted a cap licence to HiQ in August last year to process up to 750,000 tonnes of residual material every year in Sunbury. Waste incineration produces vast amounts of greenhouse gases – as Mr Ettershank has pointed out – and it is completely inconsistent with the government’s so-called commitment to net zero. These facilities lock in decades of emissions at precisely the moment when we need to be cutting them and cutting them fast.

The proposed Sunbury incinerator is a threat to the health of local residents. Even so-called best practice incinerators emit toxic air pollutants, persistent organic pollutants, microplastics and hazardous ash. Evidence from Europe shows long-term dioxin contamination in the soil, eggs and produce surrounding waste incinerator facilities at harmful levels to human health. If built, the waste incinerator in Sunbury will expose nearby communities to increased risk of cancer, respiratory illness, heart disease and harm to unborn babies. Yet residents are being asked to accept these unacceptable risks. Worse still, these projects hand public health over to private corporations whose primary responsibility is to shareholders, not to communities.

Waste incinerators are enormously expensive to build, which means they require a guaranteed supply of waste for decades. Councils are locked into long-term contracts that actively discourage waste

reduction and recycling, because these hungry beasts require to be fed with waste 24 hours a day, seven days a week to run properly, which creates a really perverse incentive to burn recyclables, plastics and organics that should never be incinerated in the first place. Jurisdictions across Europe and the US are now moving away from waste incineration for precisely these reasons. Denmark, once heavily reliant on the incinerators, is shutting them down and reinvesting in waste reduction and recycling instead. They have learnt the hard way that burning waste locks in failure. We should learn from that lesson, not repeat their mistakes. The priority for this government should be waste reduction and recycling, not building toxic waste incinerators. Burning our rubbish is expensive and incredibly inefficient. Recycling, on the other hand, creates jobs – six times more jobs than incineration – and we are always hearing about how important jobs are to this government. Well, let us talk about jobs. Doing things with our waste other than burning it would actually be better for our economy, and it would deliver far greater energy and economic value.

Communities are rightly calling out the hypocrisy of this government supporting these projects in principle but local ALP members opposing them when they are proposed in their backyards. We only have to look at the Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio, who campaigned against a Cleanaway waste-to-energy facility in Wollert, or the member for Lara Ella George, who has successfully advocated against a Prospect Hill International proposal in Lara. I have joined her in some of that advocacy, and it was welcome, but there is some hypocrisy here. And now we are hearing that the local member in Sunbury Josh Bull is standing with the community in opposing this one.

What is the government doing? There are safer, cleaner and more effective ways to manage residual waste in Victoria. The Sunbury community has sent a clear message that enough is enough, and with the stroke of a pen the government could stop this project before it even starts. They could put people first, and the Greens stand with the community in calling on the government to do so.

**Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:02):** I rise today to speak on the petition put forward by my colleague Mr Ettershank regarding the waste incineration on Sunbury Road, and I thank him for doing it because it is a very important subject for my constituents in the western suburbs. It must be made quite clear that the Victorian Liberal coalition does not oppose good, appropriate waste-to-energy technologies in Victoria. In fact our *Zero to Landfill* aims to do exactly that. We are committed to less waste going to landfill, better recycling and new clean energy for Victoria, preserving resources for future generations.

But supporting waste-to-energy initiatives in principle does not mean accepting a project that is deeply inappropriate for its proposed location, lacks proper process and poses significant risk to residents in my electorate. And that is exactly what the case is with the proposed waste-to-energy incinerator on Sunbury Road, Bulla. The proposal would see up to 750,000 tonnes of waste burned every year, far more than that area produces, effectively turning Sunbury and Bulla into a dumping ground for waste from across Victoria. Any major infrastructure project without proper process would bear great cost on the community, costs that would have direct and indirect impacts on the Sunbury community. You are looking at a 60-metre smokestack operating 24 hours for 30 years that would tower over nearby homes and farmland, permanently changing the character of the Sunbury community in my electorate.

Residents have raised concerns to me. My colleague Simmone Cottom has raised concerns to me and has advocated quite deeply for the area about the health and environmental impacts with the transformation of waste and by-products such as ash out of the facilities. The presence of a large industrial facility near residential areas can decrease local desirability and hinder property value growth. This situation would significantly disadvantage my community in Sunbury and all 3264 of those who signed the petitions.

Additionally, there are some serious traffic concerns regarding this project, as my colleague Mr Davis has mentioned. The project is expected to generate over 300 truck movements per day across the area – we know Sunbury, and I have been up in this chamber quite a bit regarding improving roads in the area – which would put further strain on already congested roads, increase the noise level and the

safety risk in the whole area. Beyond the tangible impacts we are facing at the moment, there is widespread frustration about the process itself. Many residents feel that the decision has been made for the community but not with them. That is the issue we are talking about here today regarding this process. We are not opposed to turning waste into energy – in fact every technology is looked at with a wider scope on its feasibility. A Victorian Liberal–National government would commit to ending household waste being sent to Victorian landfill, but we cannot support projects that endanger the health of a community, damage the local amenities, undermine property values of hardworking Victorians and, most importantly, fail the basic test of putting community interest first. I want to end my contribution by saying that my community in Sunbury deserve better than becoming Melbourne’s dumping ground. We deserve a transparent process, modern solutions and a project that respects the people who live there and call it home.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): I rise today to speak in support of the petition brought forward by the concerned residents of Sunbury. I would like to acknowledge the community members who are here for this debate today and thank them for their ongoing advocacy, and my colleague David Ettershank, who has been actively campaigning alongside the community. I think we can all agree that Victoria has a waste problem. With our landfills nearing capacity and recycling rates stagnating, the state is turning to waste to energy as a solution, and outer suburban areas like Sunbury are bearing the brunt.

If built, the proposed incinerator in Sunbury will be a beast. The proponent, HiQ, is proposing a facility that would run 24 hours a day, seven days a week and burn up to 750,000 tonnes of waste each year. That volume goes well beyond local needs. So where is all this waste coming from? Well, the Minister for Environment has assured me that the government does not support any further increases to the current waste energy cap or importing waste from other jurisdictions. I remain incredibly sceptical. If this government does not want to continue opening new landfills, more waste is going to have to be imported from across the state and perhaps across the country, regardless of whether they support it. No wonder residents are feeling like they are in a dumping ground. I have heard from families who made Sunbury their home, and it offers open spaces, relative affordability and a sense of community. This facility would sit 1 kilometre from an established housing estate and nearby schools, creeks and parklands. Traffic impacts would also be significant. It is estimated that this facility would bring 700 additional trucks each day onto already congested local roads. This means more emissions, more noise and more strain on infrastructure. Sunbury residents should not have to choose between an affordable home or their health.

In my own electorate we have also seen plans for a waste-to-energy facility in Dandenong South, nearing the fragile local Dandenong Creek and connecting waterways. Again, these outer suburbs are the dumping ground in this government’s waste agenda. We must ask ourselves the broader question: is waste to energy the answer? These facilities require a steady stream of feedstock to remain economically viable. That within itself risks locking the state into decades of waste generation to service a beast that must be fed. The government has committed to transitioning to a circular economy, yet incineration sits at the lower end of waste hierarchy. It recovers some energy, yes, but it does not prioritise reduction or reuse, it does not demand greater corporate responsibility and it does not transform consumer patterns. We only need to look to the UK or internationally for some examples. Burning waste does not vanish it, it merely transforms it into emissions and residual ash. Most facilities produce by-products, including bottom ash and fly, and these contain heavy metals and other toxic substances.

We know that the risks associated with that are respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease and increased risks of cancer from exposure. Now Sunbury residents are being asked to put faith in HiQ, a company that has been fined by the EPA for 13 offences. It is entirely reasonable for the community to question whether HiQ should be trusted to operate a facility that generates these kinds of hazardous by-products. Sunbury residents are asking for fairness, transparency and the right to live in a community that is

## ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

87

healthy and sustainable. We owe it to them to step back, to listen and to wait until the waste-to-energy inquiry is complete so that we can then ask whether this is truly the best way forward.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:10): Let me provide, first of all, my support for petitions; they are an enormously important endeavour in our Parliament. I just want to say that we also need balance, because there are good energy-from-waste systems that can occur in locations in regional Victoria with industrial centres that actually diminish CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and take cars' equivalent emissions off the road. But I fully support this petition.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (18:11): Can I firstly thank all of the members for their contributions today and all the members of the community who have come in to witness the debate. I think I can safely say on behalf of the community that we are all sick of the greenwash. Minister Stitt's assurances about regulatory safeguards and consultation are a joke, and Sunbury residents, every time they drive down Bulla Road, witness 1.5 million cubic metres of soil dragged out of the West Gate Tunnel project as a daily reminder of how superficial consultation can be and how those safeguards fail our community time after time. I welcome the support of the opposition. It is terrific if you have come on board, because obviously you did vote against the inquiry, but it is great that you have come on board to join us now, so thank you for that.

Across the world, these are technologies in retreat, and we need to recognise that they are simply not appropriate. Minister Stitt talked about a social licence. Well, I can say with great confidence there is no social licence forthcoming for these projects. This is a terrible technology. It is toxic, it is inefficient and it is absolutely antithetical to the government's own policy on waste and how we reduce landfill. I think it is also a testament for us to think about the politics here. All of these seven projects are being dropped into safe Labor seats, and we can see the number of people in the government who have come to witness this debate: the government benches are empty bar Minister Tierney. So what is that about? It is about disrespect. It is dishonesty. If the government are so keen and confident about this technology, let them put it in some marginal eastern suburb seats, and then let us see how we go, because it is not going to happen. In the interim, can I just say, 'Sunbury says no.'

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:13): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

## Construction industry

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:13): (2318) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Nick Staikos. The Allan government has strengthened trade registration and consumer protections in the building industry. The action I seek is an update on expanding registration to additional trades and how these measures will restore confidence for Victorian home owners.

## Planning

**Joe McCACKEN** (Western Victoria) (18:14): (2319) Tonight I raise a matter for the Minister for Planning regarding ongoing planning delays within the Central Goldfields Shire Council, specifically concerning a constituent of mine Mr Aaron Beaton and a modest residential development in Carisbrook. Mr Beaton is attempting to bring several housing blocks on line on the corner of Cambridge and Brown streets in Carisbrook. Now, that is seven blocks in the middle of a housing affordability crisis in a regional town which is crying out for growth, investment and opportunity. Yet instead of being supported through a clear and efficient planning pathway, he is met with delay; complexity; what appears to be bureaucratic stonewalling, with repeated referrals and authorities often making referrals to each other; road access complications; cultural heritage hurdles; preference given

to preferred contractors; and 100 per cent predetermined cost recovery, including officer time, before matters are even properly assessed or progressed. At some point the question must be asked: are we facilitating sensible regional development or are we strangling it? I fully appreciate that councils have to operate under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. No-one is asking for corners to be cut. What we are asking for is clarity, fairness and timeliness.

Because when councils delay, it is not just some abstract administrative issue – it costs real money, it creates real stress, and it undermines the confidence that people have in the system. Planning should not be a brick wall; it should be a process, and it should be a fair process. In communities like Carisbrook and indeed the broader Maryborough community, we should be encouraging sensible development, not frustrating it through avoidable bureaucratic complexity. Seven housing blocks might not sound much, but in regional towns this is real – this is families, this is growth, and regional Victoria cannot afford to be put in planning paralysis. If we are serious about housing supply, if we are serious about regional growth and if we are serious about fairness, then we must ensure that councils are partners in development, not obstacles to it. The action I seek from the minister is simple. I urge the minister to intervene to help sort out this matter, which would include meeting with my constituent and the Central Goldfields shire, and I am very happy to help facilitate this. I look forward to a positive outcome.

### Climate change

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:16): (2320) Polluters should pay for the damage that they cause. Our communities are living through more frequent and more severe climate disasters – floods, fires and storms – and these are driving up insurance premiums and leaving people in limbo for months waiting for clean-up and recovery support. This is the human cost of Labor's support for polluting fossil fuels. Ridiculously, while ordinary Victorians pay the price, many of the companies making huge profits off wrecking our climate are paying little to no tax, and when the burning of fossil fuels supercharges disasters like fires and floods, it is households, emergency services, local councils and taxpayers that are stuck with the bill to clean up their mess. How is that fair?

So here is the Greens proposition: make the polluters pay. The government should stop paying them. Stop underwriting their operating costs through taxpayer subsidies, tax them effectively and redirect that money into the things that people actually need – disaster resilience, climate-ready infrastructure, and cost-of-living relief. This is not a new idea. The Greens called for the end to the diesel fuel rebate – for example, for mining – decades ago, and the action has only become more urgent as the climate crisis intensifies. Far from subsidising their polluting, climate-wrecking activities, the government should be instituting a levy on fossil fuel producers. The funds raised can help us to support community adaptation and recovery, as well as creating a financial incentive to transition away from fossil fuels.

The action I seek from the Minister for Environment is that they set up a climate adaptation fund, which can resource local resilience projects such as new nature corridors, drought-proofing techniques and community education and awareness initiatives. Victorians should not be having to pay to clean up the mess made by our biggest polluters. It is the polluters who should pay.

### Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:19): (2321) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Major Events, and it relates to the shocking announcement today that the Phillip Island MotoGP is going interstate. It has been on Phillip Island – and indeed I have attended it in my younger years – for almost 30 years. It has been a supreme calendar event. It has created excitement, economy and vibrancy right across that whole Bass Coast area. Again we see another cancellation under this government of an international event through bungling and mismanagement. The action I seek is consistent with stakeholders and it is consistent with the Bass Coast mayor and deputy mayor and council, and that is for those key stakeholders, tourism industry and the council et cetera to meet with the Premier and the Minister for Major Events to set up an economic opportunity as to what to now? Now that you have ripped out thousands upon thousands of dollars of economic imperative. There

## ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

89

have been calls from the Nationals and the Liberals. I raised this issue in January on the back of the whispers. I know my colleague the Shadow Minister for Tourism and Major Events David Southwick and my colleague Renee Heath have also drummed the beat against this death knell. It is about jobs, and this has been a result of this ineptitude.

Recent assessments by Ernst & Young found that the MotoGP delivered \$54 million in economic benefits in 2023 – that was the most recent study – including almost \$30 million in local spend and supported almost 300 full-time equivalent jobs. This will hurt this region, and this government is turning its back. Not only is the member turning her back but this government is just walking away. Around 90,000 people attend every year. Living locally I see the bikes go by. It is not only that area, but it is the other towns that radiate out from that area where people stay, play and enjoy our beautiful region of Gippsland and Bass Coast. You promised the Commonwealth Games, and you cancelled that too. This is a track record of diabolical proportions, and this is symptomatic of this government's decline in care for this area. Will you convene this urgent meeting with those people I said and put the right people at the table to at least have the discussion about where to from now for the Bass Coast community?

### Barmah-Shepparton Road

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:22): (2322) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to ensure the Barmah-Shepparton Road from Shepparton to Barmah is repaired to an acceptable and durable standard. Well, another year, another road in my electorate in desperate need of repairs. The Barmah-Shepparton Road is yet another very busy regional route, connecting Shepparton with the smaller communities of Barmah and Nathalia. Trucks, cars, motorcycles, school buses and farming equipment use this road every single day. It is a critical connector for families, for farmers, for freight operators and for emergency services. There has been at least one fatality on this road in the past two years, with the condition of the road surface identified as a contributing factor. That is simply unacceptable. When road conditions are deteriorating to a point where they are putting lives at risk, it demands urgent and meaningful action.

Whilst motorists were initially pleased to see some resurfacing works undertaken, constituents have since raised serious concerns regarding the quality of those works. I have been contacted by residents who reported that resurfaced sections began crumbling and breaking apart within weeks of completion. Loose aggregate, uneven surfaces and rapid deterioration are not just frustrating but dangerous. Motorcyclists in particular are vulnerable to loose gravel and unstable surfaces, and heavy vehicles travelling at speed can quickly exacerbate the damage. This is not just about inconvenience; it is about safety, about value for money and about respect for regional communities. When works are carried out they must be done properly the first time. Taxpayers in regional Victoria deserve infrastructure that lasts, not temporary fixes that fail before the next season.

I am also concerned that repeated patching and short-term resurfacing ultimately costs more in the long run. A proper rehabilitation of the road base and surface may require a larger up-front investment, but it will deliver safer conditions and better value for money over time. Therefore, the action I seek from the minister is to ensure the Barmah-Shepparton Road from Shepparton to Barmah is repaired to an acceptable and durable standard.

### South Yarra Primary School road safety

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:24): (2323) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last year 290 people lost their lives on Victorian roads. That is still 290 lives too many. The Allan Labor government announced in late 2024 the *Road Safety Action Plan 2*, delivering increased road safety infrastructure and increased enforcement of regulations over the next four years to reduce road deaths and trauma and investing over \$1.1 billion with the goal of halving road deaths and significantly reducing road trauma by 2030. A key target of this action plan is to protect vulnerable and unprotected road users, including children, through signalling

## ADJOURNMENT

90

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

infrastructure on high-interface urban intersections, education initiatives, enforcement of compliance and more.

Concerned parents and staff of South Yarra Primary School in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region have reached out to our office regarding noncompliance by motorists with school-zone speed limits and signalling on the intersection of Punt Road and Pasley Street, which puts schoolchildren from South Yarra Primary School at risk of harm when crossing a high-traffic road. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide my office with further information on the enforcement of road laws at this location.

### Construction industry

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:25): (2324) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and it concerns the budget impact of the \$15 billion in corrupt Big Build payments identified by Geoffrey Watson SC. The Treasurer has stated this figure is not finalised, but Mr Watson has made it clear it is at the lowest end of the spectrum. As he says:

... the government had a duty to know ... a duty to monitor ... costs-blowouts. There is no doubt the government knew about the rising problem – but it is equally clear that the government did nothing.

In a way, Labor is lucky the figure is so ridiculously vast – so vast we can hardly comprehend what this corruption has actually cost us. Fifteen billion dollars – it is just three words, how bad can that be? Tonight I want to make this figure mean something real, and in this I am indebted to Warrnambool mayor Cr Ben Blain. Ben asked what south-west Victoria would look like if that money had been spent locally. The answer is ‘totally transformed’. On roads, he said:

Looking at road infrastructure ... we know our roads are a challenge ... they're unsafe. Across the state, just under \$1 billion is spent on these road blitzes –

\$1 billion –

\$2 billion into south-west Victoria's roads would totally change our transport networks.

On health, he said:

... look at our hospital facilities and our \$358 million project. You put another few hundred million towards that and we could really have a really amazing hospital.

He continued:

We could be looking at bigger trains to improve our services ... these aren't just pipe dreams, these are things we actually need and we haven't gotten anywhere close to \$15 billion.

...

This is money that would transform not just Warrnambool, but all of the region.

And I can add to his list. Fifteen billion dollars would fund 25,000 homes, 40 hospitals, 500 schools, 20,000 fire trucks. Imagine! It is ridiculous, but that is the scale of this corruption. We could fund a regional council's annual budget for 250 years. We could bid for and then fail to deliver the Commonwealth Games 26 times over. The action I seek, Treasurer, is that you immediately and energetically do whatever it takes to get back every single cent of every single dollar. On top of that, we certainly could have delivered the Phillip Island MotoGP that has gone to South Australia. We will see what \$15 billion can really do.

### Warrandyte road safety

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:28): (2325) I rise this evening to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding road safety in Warrandyte. The action I seek is for the minister to outline what steps the government is taking to make the roads of Warrandyte safer and how these measures will deliver lasting safety improvements for the community.

## ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

91

I acknowledge the work of the Albanese Labor government and the Allan Labor government in prioritising road safety through investment, planning and community consultation. I also acknowledge the advocacy of Gabriel Ng MP, the member for Menzies, and Matthew Gregg MP, the member for Deakin, who have worked with me and the community to elevate local road safety concerns at the Commonwealth level.

I welcome the reduction of the speed limit on Ringwood-Warrandyte Road between Kendall Road and Harding Road, which took effect on 5 December 2025. This change followed strong community feedback in response to a high-speed traffic environment and concerns about safety and was supported by Victoria Police, Manningham City Council and local bus operators. I also note the ongoing planning for safety improvements at the Warrandyte Five Ways intersection. Together these initiatives reflect a coordinated approach to improving safety for motorcyclists, cyclists, pedestrians and local residents.

### Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:30): (2326) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Regional Development. The action that I seek is for the minister to release all analysis of the economic value of the Phillip Island MotoGP to my region and to the state of Victoria. I am actually disgusted to see that Victorians have been dealt another blow today with the loss of the MotoGP. I, along with so many of my constituents, am both devastated and angry at this announcement. The Allan Labor government has had years to lock in this agreement, and it has failed to do so. Just like that, we have lost another one of our most iconic events.

The MotoGP has been held 29 times on Phillip Island. It is one of regional Victoria's most iconic events. It is said to generate over \$55.6 million in economic impact across the state of Victoria, and just shy of \$30 million of that is direct local spending in the Bass Coast. It supports 284 local full-time jobs. What is more disgusting, in my opinion, is that just yesterday the Premier was trying to look as if she supported this event. I am not going to beat around the bush with this. The Labor government have shown themselves to be economic vandals, complete dream-crushers, because this decision is probably going to be the death note for a lot of local businesses in Bass, and I just think it is disgusting.

I also want to say that I hope that the two Labor MPs for the Eastern Victoria Region did not just lie down and go with this; I hope they fought. But the reality is that in this state we are paying a million dollars an hour on the interest alone on our debt. It has been uncovered there has been at least \$15 billion funnelled to criminals. Every child born in the state of Victoria inherits the equivalent of \$20,000 of state debt, which is their burden to carry as soon as they are born. The minute they are into this world, that is the debt that they have got to carry. This government has to get its act together. You have completely let down the people of Bass and you have completely let down the people of Victoria, and you need to explain yourself.

### Northern Metropolitan Region mental health services

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:32): (2327) My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Mental Health. It was fantastic to hear that the minister has officially opened the mental health and wellbeing local in Darebin, which is now operating across two sites in Northcote at High Street and Separation Street. This launch provides a front door for the inner north to the mental health and wellbeing system, which is entirely free of charge. What makes this model so transformative is that it removes the traditional barriers to care. Our constituents do not need a GP referral or even a Medicare card to walk through the door and get help. This is a direct flagship reform born from the 2021 Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. By delivering this service through Neami National in partnership with Northern Health, we are ensuring that clinical expertise is paired with compassionate, community-led support.

We know that the demand is there. Across Victoria more than 33,000 people have already accessed this type of local service. With our government's most recent budget including an investment of a

further \$34.4 million to strengthen the network, we are proving that only Labor are serious about making health care accessible. Having a safe and welcoming environment for those dealing with mental health challenges, including co-occurring substance use and addiction, is vital for people's mental wellbeing. I am incredibly proud to see this service now offering in-person care in my electorate.

The action I seek is for the Minister for Mental Health to provide information on how the government is working to ensure that our local communities in the Northern Metropolitan Region are being made aware of this new model of care.

**Government performance**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): (2328) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer. It is a truism in business, and I think in government as well, that reputational risk can very rapidly become operational risk. A business that loses its reputation can find that that cascades into genuine financial problems for it as it loses the faith of its supply chain, the faith of its financiers and the faith of its customers. Reputational risk can become, very, very rapidly and very, very seriously, operational risk, and I fear today that Victoria has actually reached a tipping point in which that has occurred for the state. There is only so much scaffolding you can put around the lies of the Victorian economy and the management of our finances, only so much hubris you can put in through nothing more than bluster, to defend the state of our finances, the serious financial strife we are in through debt, until the thing starts to implode upon itself. There is already an acronym going around: ABM. This is what the building and development community says – anywhere but Melbourne – because it is a reputational risk that has become real as an operational risk.

Today, apart from all the corruption we have heard about, apart from the fact that we have somehow lost \$15 billion from under our noses and the Treasurer cannot even tell you that – was not even aware of that – on top of that today, we have lost the grand prix. Not everyone loves the grand prix. The grand prix is not about everyone, but it is symbolic, isn't it. It is really symbolic of where we are at, because reputational risk means the people who run that MotoGP did not believe in us; they believed in South Australia, and that is where it is going, and the people of Bass and the people of regional Victoria will pay the price. Where are we going – nowhere good. I fear today is a tipping point, and I fear today Victorians' eyes will be open to the true state of affairs. The action I seek from the Treasurer is to explain how she is going to get that \$15 billion back to fund hospitals and schools and roads and education and community houses around our community. Where is it coming from, and how are you getting it back?

**Country Fire Authority**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:37): (2329) My adjournment is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to end this self-made crisis inside the Country Fire Authority by reversing real terms funding cuts. For weeks Victorians have been treated with complete contempt by the Premier and her ministers on this issue. The Premier gaslit the independent Victorian Auditor-General's Office, claiming the latest annual report was late because of delays at their end. This forced the Victorian Auditor-General's Office to pen a media release to the *Australian*, correcting the record. When Mrs McArthur took the Treasurer to task last sitting week on the funding cuts, Minister Symes continued to perpetuate the big lie that funding has gone up every single year, completely contradicting the Parliamentary Budget Office. The PBO confirmed that grant funding fell every single year between 2020 and 2021, 2023 and 2024, with a total drop of \$12.1 million. For a Treasurer who once asked a room full of businesspeople what their favourite tax was, I am not sure I will be relying on Ms Symes's arithmetic for this. While grant income 2024–2025 is higher than the previous year on paper, it is still \$55 million less than 2020, after taking four years of inflation into account.

The fleet is old, outdated and underfunded, with hundreds of CFA trucks aged between 25 and 30 years. I have seen people sitting on the back, outside, on their way to bushfires. Volunteer numbers

have fallen off a cliff, with operational volunteers ageing and dropping by over 7000 between 2015 and 2016, and 2024 and 2025. Most CFA volunteers are over 40 and a huge proportion are over 60, with few young people joining. Brigades are heading into high-risk fire seasons, and we have seen that with ageing tankers, insufficient PPE and stations that are literally falling apart. While spending on PPE and equipment fell by \$8.3 million, spending on internal IT consultants and contractors jumped by \$16 million. The Premier is now trying to hire a new CFA spin doctor on a salary of up to \$430,000 a year of taxpayers money – a spin doctor, not firefighters, not equipment, not training. And how does the government thank our CFA? A \$3 billion emergency services tax on volunteers, farmers, small businesses and home owners of course. While regional Labor MPs, like Martha Haylett, have gone into hiding over the tax, we have some brave metropolitan MPs who are out there championing it and its supposed virtues. My counterpart Mr Galea recently accused us of peddling misinformation on the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. Well, I dare Mr Galea to repeat that to our constituents in the south-east who are footing the bill for your government's financial mismanagement. We have also had Mr Batchelor – *(Time expired)*

**Hill Top Golf & County Club**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:40): (2330) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. The action that I seek is for the minister to review and improve the *Victorian Corella Strategy* and to develop more effective methods of corella control to prevent widespread spread damage to sporting surfaces.

I have been contacted by the Hill Top Golf & County Club in Tatura, who are desperate for solutions to their persistent problems with corellas. The birds gather in large groups around the golf course to dig up the grass in search of food below the surface, and their digging tears up the playing surface. A flock of corellas can destroy one of the golf greens in a single morning, making the hole essentially unplayable. As the problem has spread, fewer rounds of golf are being played, and this has caused a sharp drop in club revenue. The club is already in a tight financial position, but with less people playing and using the course due to the corella damage the future viability of the club is at risk. They have tried every possible method of management and control. They have instituted daily corella patrols staffed by elderly volunteers who drive around in shifts at 6 am and 6 pm to scare off the birds, but this is only a temporary solution and the birds soon return. They have also tried using a gas gun to scare the birds but were met with vocal pushback from nearby residents.

The club has obtained an authority-to-control-wildlife permit and employed shooters, but they cost \$600 to hire and are only allowed to kill 20 birds at one time. When the club reached out to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), they suggested the removal of onion grass, but the club does not have any onion grass. The club estimates it has spent \$12,000 in repairs this season and \$9000 in wages for staff responding to daytime attacks. These estimates do not include lost revenue, the volunteer effort or the use of carts. The figures demonstrate how this problem is threatening the future viability of the club.

The minister must urgently find a solution that is both effective and financially viable for small golf clubs, and cricket clubs as well, across the rural and regional area. The *Victoria Corella Strategy June 2022–32* identifies that corella populations have increased significantly since 2010 following the millennium drought, and density has increased, especially in north-central Victoria. Page 22 of the strategy document says that the strategy will be reviewed to ensure that it is an effective tool for the community to manage corella issues. The experience of the golf club suggests that the existing suite of suggested strategies is not effective and that more consideration must be given to other potential control methods. The club is desperate for help to contain and remove these birds, and they feel they have now exhausted all options and are getting no support from DEECA.

**Macedon Ranges police resources**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:43): (2331) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police and is in relation to rising crime in the Macedon Ranges. I recently visited businesses in Kyneton and

## ADJOURNMENT

94

Legislative Council – PROOF

Wednesday 18 February 2026

spoke with local residents who have raised concerns about increased crime and reduced hours at the local police station. One business told me about seven break-ins on one day in Kyneton. I was told it is increasingly challenging for retail staff, who are facing a high number of violent and verbally abusive people coming in. I spoke with a mum who told me about her young daughter who was working at the local IGA store before Christmas when a man came into the store saying he had a machete up his shirt. The manager wrestled him to the ground and restrained him. He had a knife, but it took 45 minutes for police to get there to assist when the local station is just 5 minutes away. That same family had a motorbike stolen from their locked shed. I was asked why there are not enough police on the streets but if you drive 3 kilometres over the speed limit, they are there.

I met with another local resident who has been robbed eight times who also spoke about the high rate of crime in Gisborne which saw the Telstra store closed its doors. A comic depicting the issue in the *Midland Express* shows a Telstra call centre operator saying, ‘Thanks for calling Telstra. To visit us in store, please go to Sunbury or Melton. It’s safer there.’ The latest crime data shows that in the past year total criminal incidents in the Macedon Ranges increased by 21 per cent. It does not matter if you live in Kyneton, Gisborne, Woodend, Riddells Creek or Macedon, crime has gone up. In 2023 reception counter hours were reduced at 43 stations with the expectation that Victoria Police would continue to recruit to fill current vacancies. Well, it is now 2026 and since then, when Jacinta Allan became Premier, the number of police has actually gone backwards. Crime is at an all-time high, with over 640,000 offences recorded in the 12 months to September 2025. Nearly half of those cases remain unsolved. With more crime and less police and stations still operating on reduced hours, crimes go unreported or unsolved, and ultimately community safety is being eroded. The common thread from speaking with local residents and businesses in Kyneton is the action that I seek: for the government to ensure that Victoria Police have the resources they need to do their job, more police on the streets and a station that remains open.

## Vandalism

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:46): (2332) My matter for the adjournment tonight concerns the protection of statues, sculptures and monuments around the city and more broadly in the state. We have seen some terrible acts of vandalism in the recent period: the cutting down of Captain Cook’s statue and other acts of vandalism that damage ancient and very important statues that reflect our history. This should not be allowed. It should be opposed in every way. I want to draw the Minister for Creative Industries’ attention to the notice of motion on 3 February 2026 from Lord Mayor Nicholas Reece and Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell at the City of Melbourne that the Future Melbourne Committee:

Notes repeated acts of vandalism ...

I just want to put on record that I think it is very important that our major council is now recognising that these acts of vandalism are part of a pattern. The importance of this recognition is significant. It:

Requests management to take a proactive approach, increase on-site security and CCTV ...

and look at certain other mechanisms, potentially fencing in certain cases. Importantly, at 1.5 they focus on the pursuit and recovery of repair or reinstatement costs from responsible parties. I say they should hunt down these people who have destroyed our statues and our history. They should hunt down these people and they should make them pay – they should pay. If you have destroyed an ancient statue, you should be held accountable for that and you should pay. I think that the City of Melbourne, through its particular set of minutes, has actually begun to recognise that, and I pay tribute to them. I am not sure that I like 1.6.2 quite as much, but I leave that to one side. At 1.6 it:

Resolves that the statues and memorials policy be finalised and presented to Council by April 2026 ...

## ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Legislative Council – PROOF

95

I welcome the decision of the council to push ahead so firmly with that. At 1.7 it:

Requests an update from management by April 2026 of the actions needed and the timelines for delivery and repair relating to the following statues: (1) Vida Goldstein; (2) Burke and Wills; and (3) the King George V memorial.

Again, important statues, all of them. They should be restored, they should be protected and they should be on public display. The Burke and Wills one is an important one. The state government wanted it out, and now they have actually got the opportunity to bring it out of storage and make sure that it is visible. This is an important point, and I ask the Minister for Creative Industries to look at this policy and to institute a recovery and repair – *(Time expired)*

### Responses

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:49): This evening we had 15 adjournment matters. All of those will be referred to the relevant ministers.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:49 pm.**