



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 3 December 2025

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 March 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 3 December 2025

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

*Petitions***Waste and recycling management**

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 3158 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that:

- Waste to energy incineration comes with significant impacts of our health, climate, environment and future generations. Even best practice models emit significant volumes of toxic air pollution, greenhouse gases, persistent organic pollutants, microplastics and hazardous ash waste over their lifetime. Recent evidence from Europe shows a legacy of dioxin contamination in the soil, eggs and other produce surrounding these facilities at levels harmful to human health.
- Any such project will expose our communities, homes, schools, agricultural industries and the natural environment to this pollution. This will result in heightened risk of cancer, miscarriage, infant deaths, developmental delays, reproductive issues, heart disease and respiratory problems.
- Other impacts include significant financial and contractual risks for local governments, while also undermining more sustainable and effective waste management solutions.
- Waste to energy incineration produces significant greenhouse gas emissions. Their development would be inconsistent with our governments' commitment to net zero.
- Waste to energy incineration is a linear waste management technology incompatible with the Victorian Circular Economy Policy. Claims that it is part of the circular economy, or that it is better than landfill, are greenwashing.
- There are safer, more effective ways to manage residual waste in Victoria.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Government demonstrate leadership in waste management as an essential community service, with an immediate moratorium on all proposed waste to energy incinerator projects and legislation to prohibit waste to energy incineration anywhere in Victoria.

Sarah MANSFIELD: As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

*Papers***Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action***Sustainability Fund Activities Report*

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (09:34):
I move, by leave:

That the 2024–25 *Sustainability Fund Activities Report* be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General –

Managing the Transition to Renewable Energy, December 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Service Delivery Performance 2025, December 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Ombudsman – *'We just want to finish our home'*: Management of Domestic Building Insurance claims by VMIA, December 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Respect Victoria – Maintain the momentum: Three yearly report to parliament on the progress of prevention 2022–2024, under section 15 of the Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018.

Statutory Rules under the Supreme Court Act 1986 – Nos. 126, 127 and 128.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 123, 126, 127 and 128.

Legislative instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of an Order to fix the greenhouse gas reduction rates for electricity and gas for 2026, under the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I think I am detecting a slight change in practice with the Clerk not reading each of the Auditor-General's reports. I understand that is an efficient device, but I actually think, given the importance of the Auditor-General, that it is important that they be read in, in the proper formal way, on each occasion.

The PRESIDENT: We will take that on notice, and we will have a serious conversation.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Members statements

Metro Tunnel

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:45): It is an exciting time for westies now that the Metro Tunnel is open. The summer start timetable is officially in full swing, delivering 240 extra services every week along the Sunbury, Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, and on Sunday more than 70,000 Victorians turned out to catch the very first train going through the tunnel and to explore their five brand new absolutely stunning stations. This will prepare the network for the big switch on 1 February, when we will begin delivering turn-up-and-go services on the busy Sunbury line, transforming how those who live in our growing western suburbs travel across Melbourne and beyond. Importantly, this change will also unlock the network, meaning we can run more services more often, including on the Werribee line. To celebrate this huge milestone, all Victorians will enjoy free public transport every weekend until 1 February across our entire network of buses, trains and trams. From next year kids will be able to travel for free every single day – amazing – and seniors will be able to travel for free on weekends, making it even easier for them to stay connected and enjoy everything our state has to offer. Labor governments have always had a strong record in delivering public transport for the west, and only an Allan Labor government will continue to invest in the infrastructure our community in the west needs and deserves.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (09:47): For my member's statement today I was going to say how grateful I am to be in this role three years in – but after finishing after 2 am last night, I am not so sure. Despite the long hours, I am grateful to be a voice for northern Victoria and highlight the issues that matter to our region. The last week is a fitting snapshot of the diversity of this role. I held community chats in Wodonga and Spring Gully, attended parliamentary committee meetings and met with local councillors. I toured the Albury–Wodonga hospital, held media interviews, connected with schools and dropped by a support group for women affected by cancer. I met talented musicians of the Air Force Band, had breakfast with businesswomen at Be.Bendigo and met with valued CFA volunteers at Axe Creek and Lockwood fire stations. I visited Bendigo Fresh Farms in Maiden Gully and met the inspiring family behind it, and I had a sneak peek of MADCOW's new support centre for the homeless in Bendigo. I also attended three Christmas parties and joined the Nationals team in doorknocking and sign waving. With one year to go until the next state election, there are many issues,

but locals are very concerned about the rising cost of living, escalating crime, high debt and taxes, crumbling roads and the need for better health care. I am committed to serving our region, and I am thankful for this opportunity.

Multicultural youth advisory committee

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): Young people have the power to change the world. They are also at the heart of some of the most urgent challenges we face. Recently I had the great privilege of hosting six talented, incredible and super intelligent young people from diverse cultural backgrounds as part of my multicultural youth advisory committee. I am so excited and humbled to share power and space with these young people, hear their unique insights and experiences and offer them opportunities to inform decision-making on issues that matter to them.

Pasefika Career Expo

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): I was also proud to attend the Pasefika Career Expo last week in Broadmeadows, where I met many Pacific Island students in public schools in the north who were curious about politics as a tool for change and impact. This was an environment where young people actually felt seen and embraced, a beautiful example of culture and community as protective factors. I want to especially thank community and faith leader Tony Naea, an absolute champion for young people from diverse backgrounds and someone who understands that if you want to empower Pacific Island young people you link them with their culture. Young people are powerful, and they need to be given every opportunity to lead. I want to thank all of them for the opportunity to listen and share space with them.

Metro Tunnel

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): Well, the spirit of Victoria was on full display on Sunday, with tens of thousands of Victorians from across the state coming to see the new Metro Tunnel. And what an exciting day it was, in and out. I was delighted to join the more than 70,000 Victorians trying out the new services on the summer start through the Metro Tunnel – on the new line that will connect the south-east to the west. Acknowledging Minister Stitt’s statement just before as well, how good is it that our two communities will be so much more accessible to each other now. The excitement was palpable across the network. It was great to bump into a few people as well, by chance, on one of those new services. From 1 February next year the big switch turns on. Not only will the Pakenham–Cranbourne line go straight through to Sunbury on every service, but the Frankston line will go back to going through the city loop. While the Liberal Party over there continue to talk down this project – that they called a hoax, that they called a Berlin Wall, that they called all sorts of things – this government, on this side of the house, is getting on with delivering for Victorians.

FORE Australia

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): I also had the great privilege last night of hosting an event in this place with the bright young people from FORE Australia, a group that brings together young people and engages them in politics. They provide lots of support and assistance and services to state MPs as well. It was great to have the team in, meeting MPs, meeting staff and seeing a bit more about this place. Congratulations to Lucy Skelton and all the team for a great event, and I wish them all every success going forward.

Ballarat SpringFest

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:51): Anyone knows the real place to be on the weekend was at SpringFest in Ballarat. There were thousands of people walking around Lake Wendouree. I have got to thank the Rotary Club of Ballarat for the wonderful work that they have done. I have got to say there were probably all four seasons in the one day – maybe three times over – in Ballarat on Sunday, but I was proud to be there talking to literally thousands of people around the lake. It was a really good day too. Hundreds of stallholders were there.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Joe McCracken: Maybe you would have been there too, Mr McIntosh, in another life. Who knows. Anyway, that is fine.

Wendouree Senior Citizens Club

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:52): I also want to acknowledge the Wendouree Senior Citizens Club, who had a birthday in the week just gone. I was pleased to be there and celebrate with them. They had a really good celebration with lots of dancing, lots of colour and lots of great food. I want to congratulate the Wendouree Senior Citizens Club for the work that they do.

Walk in Her Shoes

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:52): I also attended the *Walk in Her Shoes* exhibition run by the Council to Homeless Persons during the week. There was a very informative forum that occurred, and I particularly want to pay tribute to two strong, dedicated women, Vanessa and Diane, who were so brave in sharing their stories about their experiences with homelessness. It is a conversation that needs to be had more, and I really want to pay tribute to those two women, who shone a light on the experiences of a lot of people in similar situations. Well done to those two brave ladies.

Animal welfare

Georgie Purcell (Northern Victoria) (09:53): Another year has rolled by, and I would like to once again use my final members statement for the year to encourage kindness over the holiday season. Turkeys love companionship. They happily chat to one another and have unique and distinctive voices, just like we do. Pigs adore belly rubs, wag their tails when they are excited and will trot over for affection from people that they trust. Cows are gentle giants who form best friendships and nuzzle as a form of affection. Chickens have unique personalities and love to find a sunny spot to sunbake in. Lambs especially love to run, leap and play together, often skipping and hopping like puppies. But especially around this time of year, turkeys are killed at around 10 weeks old, most commonly by electrical stunning and by decapitation. Pigs as young as six months old are lowered into gassing cells, and cows are shot in the head with a captive bolt gun or firearm. Chickens are trucked to slaughterhouses in crowded crates, and lambs have been raised in freezing winters so that they can be eaten at a time that suits people's demand. But we all have the power to change these animals' futures. So this holiday season, if you plan to have a pig, turkey, lamb, chicken or cow at Christmas, please be sure to give them a good seat at the table.

Metro Tunnel

Sheena Watt (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): The Metro Tunnel is now open a year ahead of schedule, and Victorians have embraced it in a way that speaks to what this project means for our state. I was on the first service from Sunbury to run through the tunnel, and you could hear and feel the excitement of everyone on board.

Members interjecting.

The President: Order! Reset the clock.

Sheena Watt: The Metro Tunnel is now open a year ahead of schedule, and Victorians have embraced it in a way that speaks to what this project means for our state. I was on the first service from Sunbury to run through the tunnel, and you could hear and feel the excitement as everyone got on board. Every carriage on our train was filled with cheering, lines of gunzels called out every station as we arrived, and there was a real sense that people knew that they were witnessing a generational change in our public transport network. Five new stations now sit at the core of that change – Arden, Parkville, State Library, Town Hall and Anzac – and they will reshape how people move through our city. They are new, accessible and world-class. They make the network easy to use for students, workers, families and visitors. They connect communities in ways we have been talking about for

years, but now we were finally seeing and experiencing the joy as we came into the stations and heard various different chants. I have got to say it was pretty special. Victorians have waited a long time for this moment – to be on the train, to go through the new tunnels, to step into those platforms and to see what has been built for the next generation. It is something that people will remember. This is a milestone for our state, and it will not be forgotten anytime soon, especially by me.

NAPLAN results

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:56): I rise to pay tribute to the schools today who are publishing the NAPLAN results from 2025. We saw the NAPLAN results in Victoria – outstanding results, they were. I want to pay tribute to all of the hardworking teachers, the families and the students, who have worked so hard to achieve those results. I was recently talking with the principal at Beaumaris Primary David Tapp about the changes that they have made to their explicit teaching model in line with the support that is being provided by the Victorian government and the policy directions out of the Department of Education and the minister towards explicit teaching. What that is demonstrating is significant improvements both at that school and across the board in NAPLAN results, literacy, numeracy, reading and writing. Everyone who has been involved here should be hugely congratulated.

Metro Tunnel

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:57): I also want to lend my voice to saying how great the Metro Tunnel is. Like many of my colleagues, I was out there on Sunday catching the train and walking around. The concourses underneath Melbourne Central connecting to the State Library station were absolutely buzzing. Thousands of people came out on the weekend, on Sunday, to experience these new stations and this new train; it was phenomenal. The biggest improvement to Victoria's public transport system in 40 years – it is absolutely fantastic.

Kilsyth festival

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): I have to say, I concur with Mrs Broad's earlier remarks about the lateness of our finish. Probably we are all very, very tired today. I am pretty sure we are going to have to switch our printers on to power-saving mode, and we might be a little bit low on toner, but we will see how we travel throughout the rest of the course of the day. Anyway, I am pleased to say that I had a wonderful experience over the weekend, and it was fantastic to visit the Kilsyth festival. This event is always a highlight. It was great to connect with many locals and hand out our ever popular and sought-after Terps merch. We also got to talk to many people about the fantastic projects that the Allan Labor government is delivering. Of particular interest was the Metro Tunnel.

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, my Terps merch is printed in accordance with the rules and all that sort of stuff. Others tend not to do that. Anyway, of particular interest was the Metro Tunnel, affectionately known by our gunzel community as the Munnel, which officially opened this Sunday. It is truly a transformative project that will reshape our transport network for decades to come. I want to thank everyone who stopped by at the Kilsyth festival for a chat. I look forward to seeing you again next time.

Ability Works

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I also had the pleasure of visiting Ability Works last week, which is a terrific not-for-profit social enterprise that provides tailored employment opportunities for people living with a disability. Their work spans manufacturing, packing, mailroom services and warehousing, and they are breaking down barriers every day. Ability Works is committed to purpose through employment, and their efforts make a real difference to individuals and to our broader community. I want to thank the team for showing me around and for taking me through and explaining the vital work that they do. These experiences remind me, and all

of us, that the strength and diversity of our community and supporting initiatives that create opportunity and connections is important.

Eureka Stockade

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:00): Well, it is 171 years since the Eureka rebellion led to the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat. It is particularly important to me and my family; Patrick Howard, my great-great-great-grandfather, was arrested at the rebellion. It was a defining moment in Australian history. It led to the right to vote for Australians, and also a big part to come out of it was the union movement in Australia. I want to give a shout-out to Ballarat Trades Hall and to all the trades halls around Victoria and the work that the union movement has done to support workers in the pay and conditions that they have in their workplaces. Although it was 171 years ago, it has had a massive impact on Ballarat, our state and our country, and it is great to be able to acknowledge it here today.

Community safety

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:01): Sunday 30 November was an important day. Firstly, we saw the government just loving itself at the opening of the Metro Tunnel in what undoubtedly must be one of the country's most expensive ever photo-ops. That said, I welcome this important infrastructure, which will deliver real benefits and that, unlike the Suburban Rail Loop, actually has a business case. Secondly, Sunday also saw the declaration of the Melbourne CBD, Docklands and Southbank as a police-designated area. In short, this means police will be able to stop anyone on foot or in a vehicle, perform a body search, require face coverings and outer garments to be removed and require people to move on. And who will police most likely stop and search? Well, based on the police's own data, that will likely be First Nations people, who are 15 times as likely to be searched; those of African appearance, who are nine times as likely; and Middle Eastern or Pasifika folk, who are five times as likely. And overwhelmingly they are going to be young. So once again we have this appearance of a Jekyll-and-Hyde government, reconvening the Parliament on 9 December to apologise to First Nations people for the harm that has been wreaked upon them, while they concurrently create and implement laws that will inevitably wreak further harm.

Bills

Summary Offences Amendment (Begging) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

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

In my opinion, the **Summary Offences Amendment (Begging) Bill 2025**, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The Bill amends the *Summary Offences Act 1966* to repeal the offence of begging and gathering alms.

Human rights issues

Right to Life and to Liberty and Security

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. Section 21 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to liberty and security of person and must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. 'Arbitrary' means unjust or unreasonable in a way that is not proportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

This Bill repeals the offence of begging or gathering alms, that is punishable by up to 12 months imprisonment. In doing so, it repeals a law that undermines the right to liberty for people experiencing poverty who are begging as a life sustaining activity.

The criminalisation of begging is disproportionate and not reasonably necessary to preserve public safety, as people who beg are not inherently a threat to public safety, and existing offences address violent and threatening conduct.

The criminalisation of begging entrenches inequality as people who are experiencing homelessness, long-term unemployment, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependence and violence beg at higher rates. It does not address inequality or poverty and instead attempts to remove it from public view.

This Bill will shift the approach to begging from a criminal justice response to a public health response, which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of people who are begging. For these reasons, I consider that this Bill is compatible with the Charter and promotes the right to life and the right to liberty and security.

Conclusion

I consider that this Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Rachel Payne MP
Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region
Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Second reading

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Legalise Cannabis Victoria is committed to upholding human rights. Laws that criminalise begging are an untenable breach of those human rights, discriminating against people experiencing poverty.

Jessica Geddes was just 27 years old when she was murdered by her abusive partner – a bright young woman who taught herself to play guitar and piano and had dreams of studying medicine.

Amid housing instability, illicit substance use, and mental health issues, Jessica met Robert.

Several days later they moved in together, and Robert began coercively controlling Jessica and physically, emotionally, financially and verbally abusing her. He also diverted her Centrelink payments into his own bank account.

Jessica would sometimes beg multiple times a day for food, cigarettes and money, telling neighbours that Robert would beat her up if she did not return with what he wanted.

Police received 36 public order reports related to Jessica from 3 May 2019 to the time of her death in November 2020, mostly in relation to her begging. In the uncommon instances police got there before she left, they would advise her not to return. This was despite reports of suspected family violence and concerns for Jessica's welfare.

State Coroner John Cain's report on Jessica's death recommended the Victorian government work with Victoria Police to develop a welfare-orientated response to people who beg, rather than a criminal one.

The report stated: 'a community-based response to Jessica's begging (rather than the threat of criminalisation) may have promoted positive engagement and fostered greater interpersonal connection, which can be a significant protective factor against violence and the negative impacts of violence. Instead of being afraid of getting in trouble from police, Jessica could have received referrals to get assistance with housing, substance use, mental/physical health and family violence.'

Following the tragic murder of Jessica Geddes, the number of people charged with begging in Victoria has dropped significantly. From April 2020 to March 2021, 104 people were charged with begging, but the following year it was only 15.

While this is a welcome shift, it does not change the fact that it is still a crime to ask for help in Victoria.

Fines and imprisonment continue to be imposed for the offence of begging. While some people charged with begging get diverted to assistance programs, others end up with fines or further criminalisation where there is a failure to appear at court.

I would like to share the story of Jenny – this is not her real name – shared with me by Justice Connect.

Jenny sought assistance from Justice Connect’s Homeless Law for \$5000 in unpaid fines she had incurred while living her life in public.

These included two court-ordered fines for begging totalling \$500. Her Newstart income wouldn’t come close to covering them.

Just contacting Homeless Law and coming to an appointment with lawyers was an achievement for Jenny. Her depression and severe anxiety had made accessing services confronting and alcohol dependence made long-term engagement difficult. Jenny had experienced violence from her on-off boyfriend but struggled to end the relationship and often reported assaults by him. Sometimes she self-harmed, or fell and injured herself while intoxicated. Her support worker worked closely with Homeless Law lawyers to support Jenny to address her health and housing issues and safely distance herself from her boyfriend. In the meantime, her fines continued to exacerbate her anxiety.

Obtaining records of Jenny’s unpaid fines proved challenging due to her history of housing insecurity and lack of documentation. Justice Connect’s Homeless Law provided legal support over many months to clarify the state of her infringements. An application to court was eventually made, and a rehearing was held five months later. Jenny received an adjourned undertaking.

We are criminalising people like Jenny for being poor, treating them as a nuisance rather than people in need of support. By doing so we compound financial hardship and cycles of poverty.

Section 49A of the Summary Offences Act 1966 provides that it is an offence to beg or gather alms. Incredibly, this has a penalty of up to 12 months’ imprisonment.

Since 2005, an average of 141 people are charged with begging every year.

This offence originates from vagrancy laws Victoria inherited from the UK’s Vagrancy Act 1824, which criminalises sleeping rough and begging.

These 200-year-old-plus UK laws are expected to be repealed in the coming months.

New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania have all decriminalised begging. In fact New South Wales did it almost 50 years ago.

Victoria is increasingly being left behind and if we fail to act, we will only go backwards.

Melbourne council’s new community safety program is aimed at addressing complex on-street issues such as public consumption of alcohol, begging and antisocial behaviour, will be doing so through move-on directions and infringements.

Looking at Melbourne council’s website, it now includes a reporting form for ‘anti-social behaviours such as begging’. You can drop a pin on a map to show where someone is begging, you don’t have to explain any risk and the community safety team of private security guards will be deployed to their location.

While the police response to begging seems to have softened, as long as it remains an offence, people who beg will be targeted by these programs.

As we approach the Christmas period, we are often taught to think about those less fortunate. The reality is this group will only continue to grow as Victorians face increased cost of living.

Shelters are full and people are turned away from homelessness agencies every day.

People beg because they need to. It's often a last resort and puts people at high risk of being verbally or physically abused.

When this government decriminalised public drunkenness, it recognised that doing so would allow people to access safe and appropriate care, the same is true for begging.

People who are experiencing homelessness, long-term unemployment, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependence and violence are for various reasons, much more likely to beg.

Yet, Victoria is happy to further marginalise our most vulnerable and criminalise a life-sustaining activity. These laws try to hide poverty from view, rather than address it.

Whether or not it is a criminal offence, people will still need money to survive, and yet you are saying to people who beg that it is as much a criminal act as stealing – it's outrageous.

Our current laws entrench inequality, encourage stigma and prevent people accessing care. It is also simply ineffective at reducing the number of people who beg or addressing underlying causes of begging.

This bill repeals the offence to beg or gather alms.

In doing so, it will shift the approach to begging from a criminal justice response to a public health response, which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of people who beg.

The decriminalisation of begging was suggested in the final report of the inquiry into homelessness in Victoria.

At the time, the committee heard concerns from Victoria Police that repealing the offence could make it more difficult to regulate professional begging, citing an example from some years earlier.

There is no evidence that this extends beyond a tiny minority of cases.

These kinds of activities and anti-social behaviour can adequately be dealt with by alternative charges.

Retaining the offence of begging harms so much more than it helps. These archaic laws waste police resources and are increasingly out of step with other jurisdictions.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Attorney-General on this matter. When I raised this in Parliament, I received a response from the Attorney advising that she had asked the Department of Justice and Community Safety to consider abolishing the offence.

This is a simple legislative change and should be made as soon as possible.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:12): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025 (the Bill).

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

Overview

This Bill will amend the Crimes Act to allow authorities to prosecute patterns of manipulative and controlling behaviour as coercive control. This includes physical, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill amends the *Crimes Act 1958* to create a new criminal offence of coercive control within intimate partner relationships. The offence applies where a person engages in a course of conduct involving abusive behaviour, with the intention of coercing or controlling an intimate partner. The maximum penalty is 7 years imprisonment.

Abusive behaviour includes violence, threats, intimidation, humiliation, economic abuse, monitoring or tracking, isolation, property damage, harm to animals, deprivation of liberty, or other behaviours causing harm.

The offence applies whether the conduct is carried out directly or indirectly, including via technology or the use of animals, and includes conduct occurring partly outside Victoria provided a sufficient territorial nexus exists.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages a number of rights under the Charter, including:

1. Right to recognition and equality before the law (s 8)
2. Right to life (s 9)
3. Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (s 10)
4. Freedom of movement (s 12)
5. Freedom of expression (s 15)
6. Right to privacy and reputation (s 13)
7. Right to liberty and security of person (s 21)
8. Right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (s 22)
9. Rights in criminal proceedings (s 25)
10. Protection of families and children (s 17)

A detailed discussion appears below.

1. Protection of Families and Children (s 17), Right to Life (s 9), and Protection from Cruel or Degrading Treatment (s 10)

The purpose of the Bill is to prevent and penalise coercive and controlling conduct, which is recognised as a serious form of family violence with significant psychological and physical impacts.

By criminalising such conduct, the Bill promotes these rights, offering greater protection to victims – predominantly women – and supporting the safety, wellbeing and dignity of families and children.

2. Privacy and Reputation (s 13)

The offence may engage the right to privacy by subjecting an individual’s personal, relational, or digital conduct to criminal scrutiny.

However:

- The offence is precisely defined, requiring a *course of conduct* and *intent* to coerce or control.
- It is directed at serious harmful behaviours, including monitoring, tracking, intimidation, economic abuse and deprivation of liberty.
- The limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, given the nature and gravity of harm the Bill seeks to prevent.

The Bill does not permit arbitrary interference with privacy but rather regulates conduct in a proportionate and targeted manner.

3. Freedom of Movement (s 12) and Expression (s 15)

While ordinary interpersonal interactions are not affected, some conduct that could be characterised as “expression” or behaviour relating to another person’s movements may fall within the definition of abusive behaviour.

Any such restriction is narrow, targeted and justified:

- The offence requires *intent to coerce or control*, not merely unpleasant or argumentative behaviour.
- Harms addressed – especially surveillance, deprivation of liberty, and intimidation – are serious and well-established components of family violence.

The Bill therefore imposes no unjustifiable restrictions on these rights.

4. Liberty (s 21), Humane Treatment (s 22), and Criminal Procedure Rights (s 25)

The Bill creates a new imprisonable offence and therefore engages rights relating to liberty and criminal proceedings.

These impacts are permissible and justified because:

- The offence is clearly defined, including objective and subjective elements (course of conduct, abusive behaviour, intent).
- Standard criminal procedure safeguards apply.
- Maximum penalties are proportionate to the seriousness of the conduct.

The Bill does not modify or displace any existing procedural rights under section 25.

5. Recognition and Equality Before the Law (s 8)

The offence applies to all persons equally regardless of gender, sexuality or cultural background. It also protects individuals who may be disproportionately at risk of coercive control, thus promoting equality.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the *Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025* is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, as any limitations on rights are reasonable, necessary and proportionate to the Bill's purpose of preventing serious harm and promoting the safety and dignity of people in intimate partner relationships.

Second reading

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered, by leave, that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

In Victoria, family and domestic violence continues to be a critical issue. Despite the Labor Government's 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence (and claims its recommendations were fully implemented), family violence rates continue to trend up:

The Crime Statistics Agency's latest crime data for the year ending June 2025, showed Family Violence Serious Assault incidents increased by 23.35% from June 2024. Breach of a Family Violence Order also increased from June 2024 by 16.68% in June 2025. Victim reports of stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour towards a females increased from 4,878 cases in 2024 to 5,422 cases in 2025.

Last year was the first time that family violence incident call outs to police surpassed 100,000.

The need to do more is ever present. Women of all ages understand the societal problem of domestic violence.

Unfortunately, these statistics do not focus specifically on coercive control. Coercive control is at the heart of much domestic abuse, leaving the person dependent on their abuser, lacking in confidence and isolated from their support network. Victims may suffer for years at the hands of a controlling partner before the pattern of behaviour is identified.

Perpetrators of coercive control use a number of techniques to establish power, including threats, degradation, isolation from family and friends, monitoring/surveillance, gaslighting, enforcing trivial demands & alternating punishment with rewards. Victims can sadly slip into the manipulative worlds created by the abuser of isolation, emotional and psychological violence and financial abuse.

The link between coercive control and female intimate partner homicide is undeniable. Danielle Tyson (2020) cited evidence of coercive control being present in almost all intimate femicide cases in Australia.

Victoria is lagging other states who have moved to criminalise coercive control. Domestic violence is prevalent and growing, yet Labor have failed to take key proactive steps and learnings from other jurisdictions to implement preventative measures and reduce incidents.

Coercive control in other jurisdictions

NSW became the first State/Territory in Australia to criminalise coercive control, when in November 2022, the NSW Parliament passed the *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Act 2022*. This comes after the 2020 establishment of the *Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control* to inquire into and report on coercive control in domestic relationships.

As of 1 July 2024, coercive control is now a criminal offence carrying a maximum of **seven years** imprisonment. To date they have had 1 prosecution.

In Queensland in March 2021, *Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce* was established to examine coercive control. The *Criminal Law (Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023* was passed by the Queensland Parliament in March 2025.

Since 26 May 2025, Coercive control is now a criminal offence allowing authorities to prosecute patterns of manipulative and controlling behaviour.

Former UK Prime Minister Teresa May established coercive and controlling behaviour as a criminal offence in the Serious Crime Act 2015 which saw England and Wales become the first nations to do so. Until then domestic laws mainly addressed physical violence. Emotional, and economic abuse – where victims were controlled without physical harm – were not adequately covered. The Prime Minister on hearing too many stories of coercive control acted. There have been many prosecutions in the UK since that time.

UK Family Violence organisations and the Metropolitan Police acknowledge the role of their legislation in a societal shift in understanding coercive control. As a result, this legislation has an important preventative role, working hand in hand with the criminal offence which have seen Women's Aid UK reported there were 43,774 offences of coercive control recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall) in the year ending March 2023.

Victoria's scheme

This bill, *Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025* is being introduced in order to protect victims of coercive control and criminalise coercive control behaviour.

Our scheme will be modelled primarily on NSW legislation which carries a maximum of 7 years imprisonment.

For the purpose of the bill, intimate partner means another person who

- is or has been the person's spouse or domestic partner, whether or not the other person lives or has lived with the person or
- has had, an intimate personal relationship with the person, whether or not the intimate personal relationship is or was sexual

The abuser must engage in a 'course of conduct' of behaviour that includes but is not limited to violence or threats of violence, intimidation or humiliation, coercion or control, economic abuse, emotional or psychological abuse or monitoring or tracking a person's activities.

Evidence can include phone records, text messages, photographs of injury, diary entries of events, bank records & witnesses.

A broader education package will form part of the implementation. We will introduce education and training for authorities and the broader public about coercive control, and managing the perpetrator, and how to protect the victim.

The Liberals and Nationals are committed to real action that prioritises prevention and safety, particularly for those suffering family and domestic violence. We will make coercive control a crime as well as introduce a preventative Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Right to Ask, Right to Know – Clare's Law), which was voted down by the government twelve months ago.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

*Production of documents***Machete amnesty**

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the contract for market research to support the development of public messaging around the machete ban that comes into effect on 1 September 2025 that was published on the Buying for Victoria website titled 'Market research services for machete prohibition campaign', contract number PAB024/25-26; and
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council by 26 January 2026 the report provided to the Department of Justice and Community Safety related to this contract.

I know that there is a lot of public interest in where the money has actually gone on the machete bins. We have accounted for about \$2 million of that clearly now. Recently we looked at the tenders website Buying for Victoria, and there were two new contracts listed there. One was for about \$825,000, which was related to creative services, and the other contract was for about \$125,000, which was related to market research. What I am asking for today is the report that was done for the market research. I think that there are lots of people in this state who would be very interested in what type of market research was done. I have been involved in market research in the past myself, and I think that for the price of \$120,000-odd we are probably looking at focus groups and things like that. I think that the people of Victoria would be very interested to read this report. That is what I am asking for. It is a very simple motion, and I urge all members of the house to support getting this document.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:15): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Limbrick's name. It is a machete short-form documents motion, and it is convention that the government does not oppose documents motions. I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing it and acknowledge his continued interest in the magical machete bin mystery tour that he likes to keep going. I know his followers take a very keen interest in it – it is kind of funny to watch. But Mr Limbrick does raise some legitimate questions that he has a genuine interest in understanding, particularly in regard to the funding.

I think what is important to note in this matter is that of course, again, the government only has 5 minutes to be able to respond to these things in a speaking slot. We do not get the amount of time that we would like to usually take to respond to these matters, to give them a fulsome reply, but it is the want of this chamber at the moment to not allow the government to give fulsome replies. Nevertheless what I do want to do is start my contribution with some of the misinformation that has been spread by opposition members in this place, which of course might add the spice to the flavour that Mr Limbrick seeks in regard to this matter. It has added some intrigue, but it is always disappointing and concerning when misinformation is spread, because people look to governments and authorities to get answers and information. But when those in opposition deliberately spread misinformation and disinformation, that is always incredibly disappointing. Brad Battin, on 27 August 2025, said:

The government are trying to answer these massive crisis issues, particularly around knife crime, with the machete ban that they have put on Victorian streets, and their answer to that was to put machete bins outside police stations at a cost of \$325,000 for each and every bin that is put across the state.

We know that is false. That is absolutely false, inaccurate and untrue. I know Mr Limbrick has been on this theme for a couple of weeks now, and there has been information and documents that have been produced for him that actually disprove that. So I just want to put that on the record.

Another example: Nicole Werner, the member for Warrandyte in the other place, said on 13 August:

If you do the maths on \$13 million for 40 bins, that is \$325,000 spent per bin. These bins look like charity bins at an op shop. These bins are reminiscent of these bins that you would put outside of an op shop to dispose

of clothes. That is the Allan Labor government's priority – to cut \$15 million from the budget for policing, to cut the money, but instead spend \$13 million of taxpayers money on 40 bins at what – I do not know – \$325,000 a pop. You could buy a Ferrari with that, member for Malvern. That is absurd.

Again, that has been disproven – completely incorrect. I think Mrs Werner's statement, if you do the math – clearly Mrs Werner cannot math, because that is not what each and every bin costs.

Then finally, Ms Crozier from this place said on 27 August:

While I am on machetes, we have got the machete bins that are out there. They are covered with barbecue covers – you know, \$13 million for a few machete bins at \$370,000-odd each. These figures are extraordinary, and that is just so symbolic of this government. They have got no clue how to manage taxpayers money. They are just appalling in their disregard for how taxpayers money should be spent. It should be spent wisely.

Again, the misinformation and the inaccuracies – they have not even been able to stick to the actual figures – and then there is the moving feast of what it was for, what it was about. As the magical mystery machete bin tour has gone on, as we can see, Mr Limbrick has been provided with information and documents that give some clarity to exactly what the government has been doing in regard to that.

What I can say as well is that community safety is the Allan Labor government's top priority, and all Victorians have the right to be safe and feel safe in their communities. What we do not need is mischievous opposition members deliberately spreading falsehoods and disinformation that just frighten people. What people want to see is leadership and real action on these sorts of things, so we are also backing Victoria Police with our record investment of over \$4.5 billion to ensure our police are equipped with the resources and tougher powers they need to keep our community safe.

We know that these machete bins are working. We know that there have been a range of knives and things returned through these bins, but not only through the bins, also through police, who have been undertaking searches at various places as well. We want to make sure that community safety remains our top priority. We know these reforms are working and we are getting knives off streets. As I said, we are introducing another range of measures as well that will help police with the powers that they need to be able to reduce knife crime.

It is always disappointing when we have to deal with disinformation in this place, but eventually the truth does come out. What we are seeing today is that as the magical mystery machete bin tour goes on and on and on, we are seeing more and more information that is actually the truth of the matter. I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:20): I rise to speak in support of this documents motion. It is important to get to the bottom of the government's machete bin disaster of a policy, which has failed to actually deal with the issue. I was giving examples yesterday of where a machete bin location is literally metres away from a place where machete melees seem to happen every two days, which is Broadmeadows Central. Literally across the road there is a machete bin. Not much seems to be happening in terms of people dropping things off there, but there are certainly plenty of machete incidents around there. We know the government's \$13 million program of machete bins has been shrouded in secrecy, and of course there is the market research. It would be classic for this government to find out what the focus groups are saying about their machete bins rather than actually implement things that work, like Jack's law, which would give police the powers to take machetes off our streets in the first place.

We have seen – and I have quite enjoyed – Mr Limbrick's Instagram campaign on this issue and getting to the bottom of this issue. We know that much of the money that has been allocated has been spent on things like Facebook ads. If you are a violent young teenage offender, who I think are now banned from social media, are you really going to be persuaded by a Facebook feed ad saying that machetes are now banned?

David Limbrick interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: They do not use Facebook, that is right. We continuously see this government is all about the spin and all about the image. We have seen several bills that are basically media releases come through this chamber rather than actually dealing with the issue at hand. I on a number of occasions have moved both amendments and bills to ban machetes. I was told by people on that side, like Ms Terpstra, Mr Galea and Mr McIntosh, I think, that we were just playing up to 3AW and the *Herald Sun* and that machetes were not an issue. They of course voted against having a machete ban on numerous occasions; now they are in favour of it. This goes to show the hypocrisy of this government, who only move when the polls do and who only move when it is a crisis, not because they are actually listening to the community. But they will move when they listen to focus groups, which is why this particular market research would be quite interesting to get information from by way of a documents motion. So I want to thank Mr Limbrick for moving it.

There were several disparaging remarks by Ms Terpstra, I thought. Not only has Mr Limbrick been putting interesting information on Instagram regarding this issue, but so has my colleague the member for Warrandyte, who has been putting out some great information – in fact she has more followers and far more reach than the Premier, who of course plunges hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money into her social media. It is important to get this out there. There are a lot of people who think it is an extraordinary waste of money to spend \$13 million on 45 machete bins, so it is important to get that information out there into the community. The member for Warrandyte of course has done numerous videos on it that have got wide reach – in fact more reach than the Premier can pay hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money for to try to buy, which is what of course our Premier does. I thank Mr Limbrick for this motion.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:24): I rise to speak on David Limbrick's machete short-form documents motion. As my colleague Ms Terpstra said, as is convention, the government will not oppose the docs motion. It was very interesting to hear Mr Mulholland go on and on and on about his colleague's comments around machete bins but not raise the amount of incorrect information that has been put out publicly through their comms machine. He could not bring himself to acknowledge where his colleagues had made numerous errors on the public record. Anyway, he must have run out of time; 5 minutes is a short amount of time to make a contribution, as we know, on short-form documents motions. Just to be very clear, the machete disposal bins each cost approximately \$2400, not the \$325,000 that that the Liberals have flagged. That investment supports the rollout of the entire machete amnesty project.

I think it is fair to say that when you have an undertaking such as this you want the community to be aware of it and you want the community to be able to use it. Those opposite and Mr Mulholland, as per usual, sit on the sidelines and snipe. They take cheap shots. But the government has got on with this and ensured that the public are aware of the program and that the public have had the opportunity to dispose of machetes, which has been taken up already. The most recent reports are that over 9000 machetes and blades have been put into the bins so far, before the final numbers are put together.

It is very interesting that Mr Mulholland was talking about decision-making and how it has been led. It is very interesting that the government's action around dealing with crime led to the Liberals instantaneously and unexplainably knifing their own leader. They have not been able to explain why that happened. The Liberals' misinformation and disinformation have continued. The cartoon in the *Herald Sun* was quite something. Here we are talking on this motion, and poor Mr Battin, their third leader in 11 months, was politically disposed of.

We are used to the Liberals taking an important issue like this and absolutely politicising it. At least three of their members have publicly been on the record whipping up for weeks incredibly inflated costs about these machete bins. When we had gun amnesties back in John Howard's time, time was allowed for the public and the community to be aware of it and to dispose of their guns in the proper way. That is what the government has allowed to happen. It has done so in a way that has been thought through, that has been adequately provided for and that has enabled this program to be run out.

I just reflect on Mr Mulholland's comments and why he would not want to see a program put in place with appropriate time and with appropriate communication to community, which has been taking it up, as I said, with nearly 10,000 knives and machetes disposed of into these bins, and why the opposition want to play politics with this rather than getting these knives off the streets, because that is the important outcome. We do not want knife crimes in our community, and by delivering this program we have taken a huge amount of knives off our streets. We have had an amnesty period where people have had a fair amount of time, communication and opportunity to do so. I will leave my comments there.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

North Richmond medically supervised injecting room

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:30): I move:

That this house:

- (1) expresses its strong support for the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) and the life-saving services that they provide in preventing overdose deaths and in offering wraparound support and pathways to recovery;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) over 11,000 overdoses have been safely managed in the North Richmond MSIR with not a single fatality;
 - (b) there have been over 600,000 visits to the service since it opened in 2018 with wraparound health and social supports offered to many vulnerable Victorians;
 - (c) prior to the opening of the MSIR, North Richmond had one of the highest overdose fatality rates in Victoria;
 - (d) the MSIR offers evidence-based and human-focused harm reduction health care that acknowledges that drug use is a health issue; and
- (3) affirms that drug harm reduction services should be targeted where there is the greatest need, and decisions on location should be based on evidence not politics.

I am here today to back in the North Richmond medically supervised injecting service, because this service saves lives. It reduces overdose deaths, and it provides people an opportunity to connect with wraparound services that offer health and social supports as well as pathways to recovery. My Greens colleagues and I have long been supporters of this service, and I stand here today to reiterate that support and to thank the staff at North Richmond for their vital and compassionate care for people who use drugs in our community.

Everyone in our state should have the right to accessible health care, and it must be offered where and when people need it. The North Richmond medically supervised injecting room has done the excellent work that it was set up to do. It has reduced drug harm and it has reduced deaths in the area, and behind each of the over 11,000 overdoses that have been safely managed at the service is a person. It is someone who has loved ones around them, someone whose life matters and who should have access to the life-saving care that this service offers. Too often people who use drugs in our community face harmful stereotypes and stigma, and this creates real-world barriers for them in accessing health care as well as pathways to treatment and to recovery. The medically supervised injecting room staff are experts in offering health and social supports with the respect and the care that everyone deserves. Drug use and addiction in our community are complex issues, but ultimately they are health issues. Making sure that people have access to a range of expert community healthcare service provision is critical, and this is what the North Richmond Community Health service provides.

We have to acknowledge context here. The medically supervised injecting room was set up in North Richmond because that is where significantly elevated drug use was already occurring. It is where we were routinely seeing people lose their lives. The local government area of Yarra in fact holds the

awful title of having the highest number of overdose deaths involving heroin across Melbourne over the last 10 years and also the highest number of heroin overdose deaths that have occurred outside a residential setting. Lives have been lost in our public spaces, in our parks, in our alleyways, in toilet blocks. Decisions of where to locate these crucial services must be based on evidence, and the evidence is clear: this area is where the harm has been occurring. There is work to be done to make sure that more people can access this service, so that overdoses can be safely managed inside a service like the medically supervised injecting room (MSIR). Without it operating, the harm to many vulnerable Victorians – the preventable loss of life – and to our state would be tragic.

In saying that, I do think there is also a need for more outreach workers to be funded at the North Richmond Community Health centre. I believe there are currently two people who are doing an amazing job at connecting with people in the wider community and offering drug and alcohol support for people outside of the centre. This work should be expanded, and the government should provide the funding required to support more people into these roles.

When the bill to make the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room permanent came through this chamber, I and my colleagues in the Greens did move some amendments to expand access to the centre to more people, because we should all know drug-related harm in our community does not discriminate. It is our position that someone who is under 18, who is subject to a court order, who is pregnant or who requires peer or partner support should not be referred away if they are standing in front of the desk asking for medical assistance and supervision. If people from these vulnerable groups want to seek this medical assistance, they should be permitted to. I say that not in any way to reflect upon the standards of the centre itself; this is a reflection on the current legislation – legislation that my Greens colleagues and I sought to amend. While those amendments failed, we remain committed to expanding access to this life-saving care.

Beyond the excellent work that the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room does, my Greens colleagues and I want to see more of this service provision offered across the state to people who need it. It can be offered in a discreet manner. It can be offered in an area based on evidence, not politics. We do not need people whipping up fear. We do not need people in our community, particularly leaders in this place, fostering stigma and discrimination against vulnerable people. We need the provision of life-saving health services where they are needed. Where there are overdoses occurring, there should be an overdose prevention service on offer. That could be in Dandenong, it could be in Geelong, it could be in St Kilda or it could be in our regional centres in this state. They should be where they are needed to save people's lives. We can reflect on the data.

Most glaringly, and I have long been on the record about this, there needs to be a supervised injecting centre in Melbourne's CBD. It was a primary recommendation from Ken Lay's report that the city needs an MSIR. Almost 80 prominent organisations wrote to our Premier in support of a Melbourne CBD MSIR. These are experts in experiences of drug dependence, in health and medicine, in homelessness and in justice and youth services. Their concerns are clear. The letter says:

Every day, people are risking death by injecting drugs on Melbourne's streets; in car parks, laneways and public toilets. Approximately one person a month dies after using heroin in the City of Melbourne.

These deaths are unnecessary. These are sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. All loved and mourned by families and friends.

It goes on to say:

We need to look beyond the emotion, judgement and fear, and assess the hard evidence.

It was a dark day when the Labor government announced that they were not proceeding with the Melbourne CBD medically supervised injecting room that they had promised. They already had the building. They knew that it was necessary, that it would save more lives, and instead they crumbled to the businesses and opponents who said, 'Not in my backyard.' Well, people are already using injectable drugs in our city, and they are dying from preventable drug overdose. Leaving people out

in the open without medical supervision to use these substances will lead to more deaths and will put people and our communities in harm's way.

It was deeply disappointing that Yarra and Melbourne city councils have voted to end their support of supervised injecting services. I know that not all councillors supported the motions that passed these councils, but that there was a majority of support is really concerning. These councils seem to be buying into, frankly, cheap, populist and stigmatising rhetoric that ignores the fact that offering overdose prevention services should be above politics. The decisions as to where medically supervised injecting rooms are offered should only be made based on the evidence. Where there is evidence of injectable drug harm, we need to be offering drug harm reduction services. Where people are dying in our streets from drug overdoses, we need to be offering medically supervised injecting centres and their wraparound supports. It is just that simple. Choosing politics over the lives of people who use drugs in our community is despicable. The councillors who claim to care about people who use drugs but then vote to oppose these services in their areas should be ashamed of themselves.

Medically supervised injecting centres like that of North Richmond are not the panacea to drug harm. They are absolutely life-saving and life-changing, but they are one part of a holistic approach to reducing drug-related harm in our community. There is more we can be doing to support people experiencing addiction who are also experiencing poor mental health and people who are experiencing PTSD. We need to make sure that there is adequate housing for those experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Pharmacotherapy is crucial to helping people end or reduce their drug use and dependence, and Victoria needs to expand access to these services, including by offering many more hydromorphone places than are currently available.

Medically supervised injecting rooms are also an important tool given the rise that we are routinely seeing of potent synthetic opioids like nitazenes in our state. These drugs, which are found in a range of illicit substances, often as a contaminant, are often many, many times stronger than substances that we all hear about, like heroin. The naloxone program of vending machines and take-home kits is excellent, and it should be expanded. But so too is offering people access to the life-saving care that our medically supervised injecting centres provide. People in our state are using injectable drugs. People are dying from overdoses in our communities. My colleagues and I want to make sure that people who are vulnerable in our state have access to safety and security and the service that services like North Richmond provide. The North Richmond MSIR is very literally saving lives and offering so much more to our community. I call on all members of this chamber to support this motion and to support the important work of the supervised injecting room in North Richmond.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:41): I rise to speak to Mr Puglielli's notice of motion 1188 on the injecting room. The opposition's concerns are well known around North Richmond and where this injecting room has been situated – next to a primary school. We have said from the outset that it should not be next to a primary school, and I will come to that. I notice that in his contribution Mr Puglielli is calling on the government to have more injecting rooms around the state – Dandenong, Geelong. I am sure that is the Greens' policy, and they will be pushing that and no doubt speaking to the government about the need for that. They have made their position very clear.

On this side of the house we want more rehabilitation, and we want people off these dangerous drugs. We have seen the harm it has done in so many areas, not just to them personally but also to the broader community, around crime, spiralling and a life of really appalling situations, with the numbers that are now using these awful, awful drugs. Whether it is heroin, whether it is ice, whether it is a combination of very serious drugs, it does no good to anyone, and we need to have a greater focus on rehabilitation and a greater focus on more mental health beds to cater for this. What I have great concerns around, with the injecting room, is we can never see the data about how many people have actually been rehabilitated. Where is the rehabilitation? Where are the numbers that have said, 'There are x amount of people going into this facility and x number being rehabilitated and off drugs'? We never see the data. We do not get that. We get spin and we get the numbers saying we have saved lives. Well, there

are people dying around the injecting room. There are children walking past dead bodies. There is the most appalling antisocial behaviour and crimes that have gone on.

I have been to the community meetings from day one, well before most of you were in the Parliament, because this issue has been a big issue for the residents and the community. The Victoria Street traders have spoken about the issues that they have been facing since the injecting room opened. It is in the wrong place. Even the left-leaning Stephen Jolly is saying we got it wrong – the government got it wrong. I will come back to some of his comments because he is speaking on behalf of his community, and they are speaking out and quite rightly saying that this should not be tolerated in any way. Mr Puglielli's motion does talk about the prevention of overdose deaths and offering wraparound support and pathways to recovery, and that is what I am most interested in. Our shadow minister Emma Kealy has been leading the charge. She led the charge on opioid replacement therapy, and the government followed suit and finally made that commitment. But we have said for years that we do not support this, and residents have felt ignored by the government because of the community safety crisis that is in their areas. This is of the government's own making.

Just a few weeks ago hundreds of locals marched against the injecting room because they have had enough, they are fed up with it, and they cited the rising crime rates and the business closures. Anyone can see Victoria Street and what has happened to that vibrant strip that now is too dangerous for many people to even contemplate going to in order to attend restaurants there, and restaurateurs say that they have to close their doors. That is not what we want to see. We want to see vibrancy. We do not want to see a honey pot of drug use like this injecting room has created – and it is well known and well understood that is exactly what has happened. I quote from Yarra's mayor Stephen Jolly, who calls it:

... the greatest public policy disaster in recent Victorian history.

They are very strident in their views now, because they have heard from residents. There are the hundreds of thousands of needles and syringes that the council has to clean up – \$400,000 annually spent cleaning up syringes, with no clear financial commitment from the government at all to assist in this. They have done some landscaping – they talk about landscaping and improving amenity – but that does not take away from the dangers in the streets for the residents. I have seen videos of the drug use in the streets and the sexual acts that are done for deals. I mean, the residents are all there with their CCTV, and they send it to us, and it is pretty graphic. This is where children play, this is where children live and this is where children go to school, and they have to step over dead bodies, watch drug users using drugs and see the shocking degradation of the area in terms of the human filth that is there. This is unacceptable on any level. This is a policy failure, because it has not taken into consideration the amenity of the residents of North Richmond. I hope that their voice gets louder and louder and louder, because the government has ignored their concerns for too long.

I want to quote from somebody else who has said what is going on. They have called it a 'one-stop shop for crime' – this is what local police have dubbed the area. The article goes on:

... a nearby Buddhist temple ... told councillors the community had been forced to "put the metal bars on the windows" due to "violence [and] break-ins constantly".

It is:

... "littered with needles vomit, faeces, [and] drug dealing".

The life-saving service is one thing, but it is this total degradation that is going on where it is ruining the amenity, and the concerns of residents have just been ignored for years.

A couple of weeks ago I asked the Minister for Mental Health about this area, about what the government was going to do to address the concerns of school parents, the Richmond community and Yarra City Council and to move the injecting room. The minister did say:

We will continue to work closely with everyone in that precinct, and we will continue to have a very sharp focus on harm reduction and helping people turn their lives around.

I was glad that the minister said that at the time, but there is no evidence of that occurring, and that is my point. This has been here for years, and we do not see that data. We do not see those results. There is no follow-up and there is no tracking – or if there is, the government does not release it so that Victorians have full transparency about what is going on.

I acknowledge that there is a very big drug issue in this state, and I acknowledge, as Mr Puglielli said, there are a lot of people that are on drugs and they need support. They do need support; no-one wants to see anyone on drugs. I am sure all of us have had friends and family members who have slipped into this terrible decay and have seen their lives ruined and their family lives ruined after it. It is appalling, and no-one wants to see that. We need to give support and turn these people around.

I say and the coalition says that this is in the wrong area. This injecting room is in the wrong area. I want to just say again that it has also been acknowledged by the operator of the injecting room. They have admitted that the service initially failed to adequately address community safety concerns about antisocial behaviour of drug users. That has only got worse with the increased crime.

Again, in closing, Stephen Jolly, the Yarra mayor, says it is the greatest public policy disaster in recent Victorian history, calling it ‘Disneyland for drug users’. The president of the local traders association on Victoria Street, who I have referred to before, Ha Nguyen, locks the doors of his cooking school during classes to prevent drug-affected individuals from entering. He says while the injecting room may keep some drug use out of laneways, it also makes the area a drawcard for users who engage in antisocial behaviour that has a devastating impact on the once vibrant shopping and dining hub. CEO Simone Heald has admitted, as I said, that the service initially failed to address antisocial behaviour and community safety concerns.

This is a very big issue. The government has ignored it. They have tried to cover up what the impacts of government decisions are. I again say this injecting room has been a public policy failure. It is in the wrong area. We have consistently said that for years. We will continue to say that. We took to the last election that the injecting room should be moved. We still hold that view. It should never be in a residential area next to a primary school – never, ever. The government has failed the residents of North Richmond.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:51): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Puglielli’s motion with respect to the medically supervised injecting facility in North Richmond. In relation to this particular policy but of course more broadly, it is very clear that the Allan Labor government has a demonstrated track record of taking a harm minimisation approach to alcohol and drug policy and reform. As a government we look past the divisive rhetoric to implement evidence-based policies that actually improve the health and social outcomes of Victorians, whether it is at the medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) or whether it is at the pill-testing service or other initiatives, which I will get to in my contribution. This demonstrates that we are delivering on a harm minimisation approach to alcohol and drug policy and reform and that we are backing the expert evidence and standing up against those who seek to stigmatise those who use drugs and who seek to divide communities. That is exactly the approach that this government is taking.

We are absolutely proud to support a health-led approach to reducing alcohol- and drug-related harm. We have made significant investments to expand treatment services and to establish and support harm minimisation services for those who need it. Since we were elected we have invested more than \$3 billion in drug and alcohol treatment. More than \$380 million was allocated in the 2025–26 state budget – so the last state budget – to allow the government to continue to expand many of the life-saving and life-changing services and initiatives because we know that there is ongoing harm from alcohol and drug use and alcohol and drug abuse, and each year we service 40,000 people across alcohol and drug treatment and harm reduction supports. The establishment of the medically supervised injecting facility at North Richmond is a very clear example of the government’s commitment to implementing drug policy that works, reduces harm and supports those who need support with services, and we are proud of the work that the MSIR does.

We have had several debates in this chamber in the last couple of years about the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond. It is patently obvious, from history, that Melbourne's drug market has operated in this area for decades. Members of the local community, including the former member for Richmond Richard Wynne, have advocated strongly for decades the need to improve the harm minimisation and support services located in the area where a drug trade has existed for a long time, because residents on the streets around the drug use were experiencing significant harm and ambulances were turning up to overdoses on a frequent and regular basis. What this medically supervised injecting facility in North Richmond has done is provide a space where injecting drugs can occur in a safe manner, supported by a range of services.

With more than half a million visits and more than 11,000 overdoses managed without a single death, that facility has established itself as one of the world's most effective medically supervised injecting facilities. When we manage the injecting drug use in the local area and provide those support services, it has benefits, yes, for those who are using injected drugs, and it has benefits for those in the local community who are not walking over overdoses on the footpath. But it also takes pressure off the broader health and hospital system so that we do not have ambulance call-outs on a frequent basis into these streets dealing with people that can be properly looked after in the medically supervised injecting facility, either to safely manage their drug use and prevent overdose, so to have a prevention function, or to navigate them into a range of broader support services that exist alongside the injecting facility, which means that a range of other health benefits and health and support services can be provided. We know that since the facility has opened in North Richmond there has been a significant reduction in ambulance attendance in the area involving naloxone administration to reverse heroin overdoses. The facts speak for themselves: fewer ambulance attendances in the local area involving naloxone administration to reverse heroin overdoses since the facility has been opened – that is what has been happening at North Richmond.

But as I said, it is not just about emergency response, it is also the role that the facility plays as a gateway into broader support services, whether that be general health services, mental health services, dental services, housing support services or a range of things which are provided onsite. In total, more than 4000 referrals have been made to date to external health and social services, and more than 177,000 instances of support services have been provided onsite since the facility opened. It is very, very clear that the medically supervised injecting facility is delivering the kind of services that the users need, delivering the kind of services that benefit the broader community and reducing harm both to those individuals and to the broader community.

That is exactly what the independent review that was established to examine these issues has found. The Ryan review was handed to the government in March 2023, and that review was emphatic in its findings that the North Richmond medically supervised injecting facility was saving lives. I think if we as members of Parliament are trying to think about what some of the key metrics are that we want to see our investments having and our laws having, for many of us, saving lives is pretty high on the list of the things we want to see demonstrated from the investments that are being made in services and the impact of the laws that we are passing. Certainly what we have done in the past to make this facility permanent, through laws that we have passed in this Parliament, as demonstrated by the independent review, has been saving lives. Also, as I said, the independent review found by that time that the overdose management was working effectively, and that has continued.

The report is not blind to the challenges and acknowledges the complexity for local residents and for local businesses in dealing with drug addiction in the community. It is complex because it requires people with complex needs to interact with a complex web of social, legal and other supports. The service system that we provide to many in the community is often not easy to navigate. What I think one of the benefits of providing the sorts of services that the medically supervised injecting facility does is providing some of those wraparound, integrated support services in one place so that they can be much more efficiently and effectively used by those with particularly complex needs and particularly those who are injecting drug users who need that support.

In the last minute I just want to touch more broadly on some of the other initiatives that the government is taking to support harm minimisation across the state. We have obviously invested quite considerably to expand access to public pharmacotherapy services by supporting more community health organisations to deliver those supports. There are the 20 naloxone dispensing units that have been provided in key locations of high overdose harm; expanded community outreach to services, particularly to teams in St Kilda and Footscray, targeting areas where additional wraparound supports are provided; and supporting the Salvation Army just across the road here on Bourke Street to establish a new health clinic, providing right now health, mental health and alcohol and other drug supports. Plus, in Gertrude Street in Fitzroy, we have now got the permanent fixed-site pill-testing service, which is doing an exceptionally important job in making sure those particular drug users are fully informed about what they are ingesting. Fundamentally, the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond is saving lives and should be supported.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:01): ‘You talk we die’: those words are painted on the mural on the side of the Hive on Victoria Street in North Richmond. They were there before the overdose prevention centre opened. These words were a plea from the community that had already lost 23 people in the 400-square-metre area around the North Richmond health centre in the year before the medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) began operating in 2018. Back then calls to 000 were constant. Ambulance sirens never seemed to stop. Residents said some days they felt like they were living in a war zone. This is a community where some of the poorest Victorians live alongside some of the wealthiest, and for more than 30 years policing and punishment have done nothing to reduce the local drug market or ease the suffering of people dependent on heroin.

Today ambulance call-outs have halved within 1 kilometre of the centre, yet just a kilometre from here drug-related ambulance call-outs are increasing. The MSIR now supports around 230 clients a day. It is one of the busiest and best medically supervised injecting facilities in the world. It is world-class because it provides direct pathways to support. For hundreds of people it has been the beginning of recovery. For thousands it has meant access to opioid replacement therapy, life-saving hepatitis treatment, mental health care and housing support. For many it is the first time someone genuinely asked how they were and cared about whether they live or die.

We should be proud of what we have achieved here in Victoria and we should be expanding this model, because here in our state overdose kills nearly twice as many people as road accidents. In 2024, 584 Victorians died of an overdose. That same year 281 Victorians died on Victorian roads. We rightly spend billions of dollars on road safety – of course we do – but when it comes to preventing overdose and reducing drug harm, our investment in that is a pittance. It is unacceptable that governments continue to commit far more to policing than to treatment, prevention and harm reduction combined. Less than 2 per cent of Australia’s illicit drug budget goes to harm reduction measures such as needle exchange programs and supervised injecting facilities. Instead of talking about shutting down life-saving services like the MSIR, we should be asking what more we can do. We should be investing in community-based harm reduction services, especially in places like North Richmond, one of the poorest communities in the country, surrounded by suburbs of extraordinary wealth. Just as with road safety, we need to place services where the risks are highest and where the need is greatest.

Facilities like the MSIR are only one piece of what this community deserves. The North Richmond estate needs investment. Victoria Street needs investment. The people who live there deserve safety, dignity and support. Yet we continue to hear people in this chamber and local politicians calling for the MSIR to be moved up the road to St Vincent’s or closed altogether, as though this would magically fix homelessness, chronic illness and decades of neglect. We know that it will not. To be kind, those arguments are naive; more often, they are politically motivated. What are we doing to support the small businesses struggling with costs and vacancies? Half the shops on Victoria Street are empty. Homelessness is rising and chronic illness is rising, yet we still argue that closing a life-saving service is somehow the solution. It is far more expensive to police drug harm than to treat it. Pathways into treatment cost less and save lives. We have discussed in this chamber many times the enormous cost,

financial and human, of criminalising drug use. Criminalising cannabis alone costs Victorians millions of dollars and stops people from seeking the help that they need.

Rather than closing MSIR, we should be asking: how can we strengthen it? Can we expand access to evidence-based treatments such as hydromorphone, a pharmaceutical alternative to heroin that has proven highly effective when methadone and other opioid therapies have failed? Can we ensure medicinal cannabis is affordable for people in this community? We have growing evidence that medicinal cannabis can reduce the harms of other drug use. While we delay, people continue to die. Within a kilometre of where we stand today dozens of people will lose their lives to preventable opioid overdoses this year. The City of Melbourne now has the highest overdose rate in the state.

I just want to make mention of the opposition's position around the relationship of the school with the MSIR. From my understanding of what the community have told me and what the school has told me, the school has a great relationship with the North Richmond Community Health centre and has been a long-time supporter of the MSIR. If anything, the continued attacks by those who oppose the MSIR have far greater negative impact on that school and the children that attend that school than the life-saving centre itself. What we do know is criminalising and stigmatising people who use drugs harms far more than it helps. As the mural says: 'You talk we die'.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:07): I am happy to respond to this motion. Certainly we have addressed this issue in previous iterations as well. On 4 May 2023 the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023, which facilitated the medical supervised injecting centre, was debated right here in this chamber. It was the day before Father Bob Maguire's funeral, so I remember that as well. I also remember that he spoke very strongly in support of medically supervised injecting rooms (MSIR). He had been an advocate for people experiencing drug addiction and related issues for a very long time. When I say he was an advocate, he was not judgemental and he was not passing blame or individualising people's challenges that they faced, which is very consistent with a health-based approach to drug addiction. He was a generous, sharp, exceptional maverick Catholic priest who epitomised values of love and generosity towards the most disadvantaged in our community. I am sure he was at the point of being booted out of the Catholic Church on occasion because of his determination to be that way. He was not interested in issues of hierarchy of the church but, rather, doggedly persistent in his support for all people in his neighbourhood. He cared about his own community, and he wanted to make his own community a better place. That sounds a little bit familiar to what we are addressing here today. He believed community is made up of compassion and care, common sense and communication.

He established the Father Bob Maguire Foundation to provide material, emotional and social support to whomever, whenever and wherever necessary. His motto was 'We leave no-one behind.' I feel it is very apt to continue to channel those values as I respond today by seeking to help and support those who find themselves in difficult circumstances rather than to judge or police them. There is significant evidence supporting a response to drug addiction as a health issue requiring treatment and support rather than a moral failing or a criminal activity, and it should not be used to drive fear and panic in communities. As I said, Father Bob wanted to make his own community a better place. These communities should not be exploited for political purposes – and I do not say that the moving of this motion has anything to do with that; I think it is really important that it is raised. But when these issues are politicised negatively and judgmentally this instils fear based on false information within communities and it implies judgement and blame, which is not fair or inclusive, and none of the evidence justifies that kind of approach.

The medically supervised injecting room operates where Melbourne's drug market has existed for decades. It is something the previous member for Richmond the Honourable Richard Wynne strongly advocated to support the local community. Now with more than half a million visits and over 11,000 overdoses reversed without a single life lost, the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room has firmly established itself as one of the most effective facilities of its kind anywhere

in the world. These are not abstract statistics; they represent thousands of people who are alive today because this service existed when they needed it most.

This service has also played a crucial role in easing pressure on our local health system. Since it opened ambulance call-outs for overdose incidents in the area have fallen significantly. As a consequence, in real terms this means ambulances are able to attend other emergencies, and there has been a marked reduction in the need for naloxone administration by paramedics. That is good news for emergency services, for hospitals and for the broader community. In a sense the medically supervised injecting room sits within a suite of services that we now have in Victoria. The urgent care clinics are another example of providing affordable options to people that might have otherwise ended up in the very, very expensive and time-consuming emergency departments – same same.

Critically, the MSIR service has become about far more than responding to overdoses. It has gone on to reflect the advocacy of foundations such as the Father Bob Maguire Foundation, as it is based on the principle of working actively with the community to implement new and sustainable solutions for people who need support. It is now a vital gateway into broader health and social care for people who often fall through the cracks of traditional systems. I was just reflecting on what it means to fall through the cracks. Even if we just have a look at some of the underlying causes of addiction, it is not possible to justifiably blame people for becoming addicted, because there are so many different reasons why people become addicted. They could have a genetic predisposition. Early childhood trauma is also acknowledged as a cause. Social pressure and a whole range of other dynamics facilitate an individual becoming addicted. Certainly, as I have mentioned before, as a sexual assault counsellor at the Centre Against Sexual Assault in Warrnambool, every now and again one of the coping mechanisms of a client, usually a woman, would be addiction. That was their way of coping with what was going on in their mind, as I said, with not just early childhood trauma but trauma in general.

Providing onsite access to mental health care, dental care, housing support and case management means people are being supported to stabilise, recover and rebuild their lives. Women reported to me that being influenced by alcohol or drugs or even a gambling addiction emptied their mind; it pushed aside all of the other thoughts that were going on. These wraparound services help people deal with those issues and provide support, not judgement but validation and respect, and I think with all of the evidence there is absolutely such a strong case for this approach. To date more than 4000 referrals have been made to external health and social agencies. This has been a great success in a community that had established drug abuse that was creating unmanaged risks for the community. Now there are options, and I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to respond to this motion.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:17): I too rise to speak on the Greens motion from Mr Puglielli, and I thank him for bringing the issues to the house. These are issues that I have certainly raised in the house before but from a different perspective. My question is: how much do we really care about our Victorian children? How much do we really care about their education, about protecting them, about what they learn, about what they are exposed to, about what is important to the families that are zoned for this primary school? I have been to and I have attended meetings to do with harm minimisation, and I understand the issues, I understand the arguments for it and I understand the amount of use that this centre has. Long before we did the housing inquiry and visited the area for the inquiry, I made a special visit to Richmond to look at the primary school and the drug-injecting centre right next to the primary school. I know that it is stated as being so many metres away, but the reality is there is a really tall fence that has had to be built that just divides the buildings between the primary school and the centre that is used for the drug injection program. For me as a parent, to think that families that are zoned in this area must use this primary school – this is their allocated primary school for their zoning, and they are surrounded by a situation which is just unthinkable for little children. It is not protecting our vulnerable little ones. It is actually not safe. We talk about and we see the issues for people who are going to and from work, saying that they do not feel safe, that they are exposed to situations where they do not feel safe. But what about these little children? At the meetings that have taken place in the school, the amount of people and the amount of children that

have found syringes in and around their fence lines and their school is simply outrageous. This is not how Victorian schools are supposed to be. They should not be located in an area where young, vulnerable children are put into a situation where they are unsafe, with drug dealers and with crime.

I listened to what Ms Payne had to say, and I take issue with some things, because in fact both times that I have been down to the Richmond injecting rooms and the school, the ambulance call-outs have been constant and the sirens going off have been endless. It did not stop the number of ambulances that were being called out. Whilst I think it is great that we can have a service where people can get an ambulance and be taken off to hospital and the ambulances are being called out regularly, this is simply the wrong place for harm minimisation. I understand that we are coming into an election year, and I understand that this is a Greens seat. Suddenly the government is looking at the issue and thinking, 'We need to do something.' But the reality is you have needed to do something for a very long time.

I also went out to this site because I had heard rumours that in my region in the south-east there were going to be a number of potential drug injecting rooms opening up, and I wanted to see and hear from the residents about the outcomes of having an injecting room in a residential area right next to a primary school. As it turns out, this government then went and did needle syringe programs right near yet another primary school, in Springvale. Again, just through the needle syringe program we have outrageous outcomes. It is simply not okay. It is not safe for the businesspeople and it is not safe for the children. How much do we really value protecting children in this state? If this program is working so well, then release all the data and make it transparent all the time in real time so we can see it. If it is so successful, then help us to see it.

I have an issue with the fact that we do not invest enough in the opportunity for rehabilitation, because I come across people who say, 'There is nowhere for me to go.' We simply are not investing in that opportunity. Not everybody wishes to use harm minimisation. Not every family wishes that to be their option. There are people crying out to have a second chance at completely getting off their addictions, and they want rehabilitation. What about funding some rehabilitation? Again, rehabilitation cannot take place around areas where there are drug dealers. You simply cannot do it that way.

I understand the sense of urgency and where the Greens are coming from, saying, 'We need to protect people. This is a very busy centre.' Yes, it is a very busy centre, and no, I do not want drug-injecting rooms. I am even struggling with the needle syringe programs in the regions of the south-east because of the implications of the way they have completely changed the landscape in every area where these vending machines have been introduced. It has changed the crime rate – it has increased it. It has changed the dynamics of the help that people are getting and the level of safety that people feel. I understand the issues and those who are completely compassionate and passionate about having harm minimisation as an option. I have heard everything that they have had to say. As I said, I have attended their meetings – they have held stuff here in Parliament before – and I have made the effort to learn and to listen. But the reality is we need to invest in rehab. The reality is you simply cannot have a program like this literally right next to a primary school with just a fence between the two buildings. It is not okay. Would anyone that has a little child that they have ever cared about and looked after honestly want to expose their children to this? It is not fair that local residents have only got this option available to them as their local primary school.

As has been said, even the mayor, Stephen Jolly, of Yarra City Council, has said very clearly that the Victorian government got it wrong when it placed Melbourne's only medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond next to a primary school in a dense public housing and residential precinct. That has come straight from the council. He is quoted as saying:

The current site is not right. You can't put a service like this next to a primary school and expect no problems.

Stephen Jolly went on to say:

We support the injecting room – just not where it is now. It needs to move to a spot that's safer for residents and still saves lives.

He also went on to say:

The locals are worn out. They've lived with this for years but are tired of being ignored while crime soars – break ins are 50% higher in Richmond than the Victorian average, car theft just about double. It's time the Victorian Government stepped up and fixed it.

That is from Stephen Jolly. I can say that if you go and move these injecting rooms anywhere in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, if you care for the residents – nine out of 11 seats are Labor seats – and if you give a damn about any of the Victorian public, you will not be putting services like this in residential areas next to primary schools, next to aged care facilities, next to community centres or next to people who live and work and have to walk past these centres. It is not okay – it is simply not okay. I cannot support a service that is provided in an area that causes more harm to innocent lives. I completely understand the arguments for it, but the locations need to be selected sensitively and intelligently.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:27): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Puglielli's name in regard to the Richmond medically supervised injecting room. I also want to thank Mr Puglielli for bringing this motion. I know he has a keen interest in this matter, as do I, and I want to thank him for bringing this important motion to debate.

I think what we all know is that the medically supervised injecting room has played a critically important role in saving many, many lives. As somebody who grew up in New South Wales, and having been in and around Kings Cross, these sorts of places are not new in New South Wales. They have been around for quite some time. What is absolutely clear and irrefutable is that these sorts of facilities save lives – they absolutely save lives. Whether it is injecting rooms or giving people safe places where, if they are affected by drugs, they can get the medical treatment that they need, they are critically important. It is always a little bit disappointing when we debate these sorts of motions with those opposite that we still have to deal with the approach that we have got to stigmatise people who are suffering from addiction. The approach is to say that they should be ridiculed. There is hysteria around it. The bottom line is that this should not be happening. The bottom line is that people are struggling with addiction; it is a health issue.

People need access to medical treatment. For example, with the North Richmond site – and I understand what Mrs Hermans was just saying, that she broadly supports the issue but does not agree with where it is placed – there was a long process that was around how this was actually set up. Just looking through the notes and having listened to what has been said before, this is managed by Cohealth as well, and one of the reasons for the selection of this site was actually because this is where a lot of drug overdoses were happening. I do not know what people expect will happen if you just say, 'Well, we can't have it there.' Do you just think that then people are magically not still going to present with the same problems? That logic does not make any sense at all. You have to provide the service where people are presenting. This ongoing picking, nitpicking, complaining and whingeing away about something being placed where it is does not resolve the fact and does not address the fact that people are presenting with a problem that they need medical attention for. Yes, there can be a lot of effort put into managing issues around people accessing it when there are behavioural consequences around what is happening in and around it, but demonising people for going into an injecting room is inappropriate. I recall when we debated this sort of motion before in this place Ms Crozier waved around a photo of people accessing a service, for example. Those sorts of things are just really inappropriate. I really live for the day when we can stop being so juvenile about this and just acknowledge that people have a problem. They need to access medical attention. Let us get them the help that they need and help them recover from that. They are not choosing behaviour like this. There is something going on for that person. Whether it is complex mental health issues or whatever is going on for that person, let us just get them the help that they need so they can get onto a path to recovery and the rest of it and then end up becoming a functioning, contributing member of society, which is what we all want.

MOTIONS

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As I said, the local Cohealth, who run the medically supervised injecting room at Richmond, work closely with local residents. They continue to have dialogue with local residents. Any issues that are raised by residents are addressed. I understand it can be distressing to see people who may have overdosed or different behaviours – I understand all of those sorts of things. But ultimately there needs to be a service. The location was selected because of the presenting need, and it is doing an amazing job. For example, this motion that Mr Puglielli has brought states:

... 11,000 overdoses have been safely managed in the North Richmond MSIR with not a single fatality ...

That is amazing. That is saving lives. That just shows you the breadth of the problem that people with addiction are suffering. They are going there, and they are getting the treatment that they need. The motion also states:

... 600,000 visits to the service since it opened in 2018 with wraparound health and social supports offered to many vulnerable Victorians ...

That is what we want. We want a service that is actually supporting people who are struggling with addiction. That is what Labor governments do. We need to provide health services for people who are in need.

Our government, the Allan Labor government, is proud to support a health-led approach to reducing alcohol and drug-related harm, and we have made significant investments to expand drug treatment supports and harm minimisation services for those who need them. We have doubled the number of beds for drug and alcohol support since coming to government, because we know that we want to provide those services for Victorians in need. So we have doubled the beds available whilst in government. We have invested more than \$380 million allocated in the 2025–26 budget for alcohol and drug services, and that will allow us to continue and expand life-saving and life-changing services and initiatives. But we know that alcohol and other drug harms are increasing, and each year more than 40,000 people access alcohol and drug treatment and harm reduction supports.

I am fortunate that in my region, the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, we have a fantastic drug and alcohol service as well. Because I am half asleep, having been here at 3 o'clock in the morning, and cannot think properly, the name just escapes me, but we have a wonderful service. Turning Point – there it is; it came to me eventually. I have visited them a number of times, and they tell me that one of the biggest groups of people presenting for alcohol and drug-related issues is actually people struggling with alcohol addiction as well. When we talk about substances that can be injected, there are also people struggling with alcohol addiction. They do an amazing job helping people get off the grog and stay sober, and I am really fortunate and pleased to have that service in my region. It is one of the only inpatient services that is based at Box Hill Hospital, Eastern Health.

We can pretend that these problems do not exist. It is kind of like sticking your head in the sand – it does not really work; it is just denying the obvious. But just when you look at the numbers, as I mentioned before, each year more than 40,000 people present for alcohol and drug treatment and harm reduction support. It is a problem. We cannot say that it does not exist and we cannot continue to say, 'Not in my backyard.' We need to have services somewhere. We need to put them where people present, and that is what we have done. Again, by having these services for these particular needs, it also takes pressure off our local hospitals and reduces ambulance call-outs to the area. For example, since we have opened the North Richmond site we have seen a significant reduction in ambulance attendances involving naloxone administration in the area to reverse heroin overdoses as well. So we know that these things are working.

It is not just about that critical intervention at that time when someone might be experiencing an overdose but also about connecting people to a broader health and social service network. I talked about those wraparound supports before. They could need mental health, dental care or housing support – all of those things are delivered onsite. It really hooks and connects people up to the wraparound support services that they might need. For example, more than 4000 referrals have been

made to date to external health and social services, and more than 177,000 instances of health and social support have been provided onsite. That is an amazing record. Something that we should all be really proud of saying here in this place is that people are aware of the service, it is actually being well patronised and used and it is a very important one.

I thank Mr Puglielli for bringing this motion. I thank him for his interest in the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room. I think the government's position on this is that we support the motion. I just want to thank the workers at the medically supervised injecting room site at North Richmond for all that they do in helping Victorians who are struggling and battling with addiction each and every day and for the very important and challenging work that they do in helping them recover from addiction but also then connecting them up with the relevant supports and services that they need. I commend the motion.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:37): I rise to speak against this motion, but before I start speaking, obviously I would like to acknowledge that speakers on both sides of the house are all well intentioned. I will not be casting aspersions on the character of those opposite, regardless of the fact that they do it to us.

First of all, we have been given some false binary choices in this debate. We have basically had some options presented to us. The first is to do with addiction. We all agree that these people are suffering from addictions. We all agree that they need health care. People on my side usually choose rehabilitation. The people over there use something called 'safely managed overdoses'. Yes, I would definitely prefer funding rehabilitation. Then there is the accusation that if you do not support this safe overdose subsidisation you are somehow a bigot and somehow looking down on these poor people with addictions. I think a lot of us here are parents, and it is ridiculous to assert that any of us do not lie awake at night worrying about things like that happening to our children. It is totally unnecessary to be casting aspersions on people's character on this issue.

Then just say that we all agreed that we are going to have this facility, it just should not be located where it is. The next binary proposition that has been put to us is that you have to put it where they are; you have to put it where it suits these addicted individuals. We say no, you put it where it suits the safety of the community. You put it where it benefits the most people. If they go to a particular place, I would rather pay for shuttle buses to an industrial zone. Then you get that behaviour and you get addicted people somewhere else where they are not in front of children, where they are not going to drop their syringes around children, where their drug-induced violence is not going to be around children and where the other things that come along with it often, which are very sad, like prostitution and petty theft, are not going to be around children. They are not going to be around businesses. Everybody knows that when you are addicted to drugs you do things that you regret. We do not want those things in front of children. We do not want those things devaluing businesses and homes and making places unsafe.

I have actually been in the situation of looking after a child who did get pricked with a syringe, and it was awful. There is no excuse for locating this anywhere near businesses, homes or children. You all saw the footage of that woman off her face on drugs – yes, an addict, very sad, but she was violent towards a child. You can balance both responsibilities. You have just got to use some creative thinking. Get some kind of a shuttle bus. Put it in the industrial zone. Pretending like there is only one option, that it has to be right there in front of everybody's faces with all this risk to other people, is just so cruel. You would not want to live there. You would be upset if your business got devalued. You would be upset if your home got devalued. You would be upset if you were worried about your children walking home from school and one of your little ones perhaps picking up a syringe.

This whole debate is absurd. Of course you can move it. You are already spending a ridiculous amount of money; what is a shuttle bus? What is something else? Whatever it is, you creatively workshop a solution around it. The last thing you do – the thing that you never do – is put children at increased risk, put innocent people at increased risk. That is not a solution. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (11:41): I am pleased to be able to rise today and make a contribution on Mr Puglielli's motion. I thank him for bringing this important motion to the chamber. It is a regular topic in the chamber, the medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) in Richmond, and it is really good to see that this opportunity is framed around why this is such an important service in our state – why this is such an important service that requires us to take a level-headed evidence-based, health-led response, not one that is perhaps a little bit more emotional in nature.

What I want to say about the medically supervised injecting room – and I am obviously on the record as saying quite a bit about this service – is that it is an important part of our alcohol and other drug system. That is an important point in itself: it is part of a broader AOD system in our state. It is not an either/or situation. When somebody is struggling with addiction, we have a number of ways in which we try to support people throughout the community, depending on where they are at as an individual. Sometimes that might mean that they require some health information; they require some support about understanding the nature of their particular struggle or challenge with alcohol or other drugs. It might be that they need counselling. It might be that they require a rehabilitation bed or a detox bed. But for others there are different health responses that are required, and the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room is a good example of where our government has been proud to actually listen to the expert health advice and provide a service for those most in need in the community struggling with opioid addiction – and other drugs as well, but the main consumers of this particular service are those that struggle with opioid addiction, and of course there are those that are also using ice. They are the two main drugs. From the data, they are the two main drug uses that the service provides support for.

All of the health advice, when the government looked at establishing this service, told us that you have to put these services where the drug market is. Anybody who has looked even in a cursory way at the history of this service will know that the community of North Richmond actually campaigned for years to have this service established, because North Richmond has always been a place where drugs are dealt and drugs are taken. There is nothing worse than being in a local community, feeling absolutely helpless and having nowhere to be able to provide support for people in the middle of an area where drugs are rife. What was happening in North Richmond before the establishment of the medically supervised injecting room was people were OD'ing in people's front yards, in laneways, right across that community. The ambulance call-outs were through the roof, and the community was under significant pressure in dealing with these things.

Back in the 1990s I had my own experience of this. I lived in Footscray, and there was a heroin epidemic going on at that time. I remember coming home one day, finding somebody on my front verandah who clearly was in trouble and having to call the ambulance and get that person assistance. That was something that was happening incredibly regularly in Footscray. I remember from that time being pretty sad that because of some very loud people in the community we were unable to deliver a medically supervised injecting room in that community at that time. Anyway, the world has moved on, and we are in a circumstance now where our government took that expert health advice and established the North Richmond safe injecting room. It has a track record of saving lives. It has safely dealt with and managed over 11,000 overdoses in the time that it has been operating.

I think I have talked before in the chamber about some of the wraparound services that are available at that service, which is the really powerful untold story, I think, of why the MSIR is so important, because it actually provides additional health and community supports for people who, let us face it, are some of the most marginalised in the community. What is sad is that some people's political approach to this is to further stigmatise those people who are doing it incredibly tough. I would again challenge anybody who has the view that this should just be shut down and moved somewhere out of their line of sight to actually go down there and speak to the health professionals that work with some of the clients that use the MSIR and understand what the power of that health service really is.

I also want to just touch on a couple of comments that have been made during the debate. I think it is really unacceptable for anybody in an elected position, representing communities across our state, to actually be peddling misinformation in the community when it comes to drug harm. It is incredibly irresponsible. I want to call out that there have been examples recently of members of this place going into communities and spreading misinformation about well-established health programs and health initiatives. Let us take the needle exchange program as an example. This is a proven public health measure that has been in Australia since the 1980s and has saved, I would argue, thousands and thousands of lives. It is about acknowledging that people who use drugs intravenously need to have access to clean and safe equipment in order for them to not become even sicker than they already are through their addiction. To demonise the provision of safe equipment through the needle exchange program I find staggering, and people ought to take a good look at themselves, frankly.

Our government was proud to establish the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room. We understand that there is an ongoing need to work with the community beyond just the establishment of this important health service, and we have certainly taken a number of steps to do that locally. We have got the Ryan review, which I know a number of my colleagues have already touched on today, which made a range of really important recommendations around strengthening the medically supervised injecting room service in the North Richmond community but also went to really important issues of amenity in the area and security in the area. Our government has been proud to work with the community, with all of the relevant agencies and also with the local businesses and council, and we will continue to do that. We have also been proud to invest in that through over \$13 million for the North Richmond precinct to improve its amenity and safety and to continue to make sure that the voices of that community are at the forefront of the work to continue to strengthen the provision of health services to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

I again want to thank Mr Puglielli for bringing this motion to the house. The government will be supporting this motion, and not only that, we will continue to support a health-led response when it comes to people in our community who are struggling with addiction throughout our whole system, not just the MSIR but the whole system of AOD services in our state. Finally, I want to thank all of the incredible workers that work in the AOD sector, who show incredible care and compassion for thousands of Victorians every single day.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (11:51): I rise today to speak on this motion moved by Mr Puglielli regarding the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room. It is a huge topic, and in the amount of time I have got left I will try to squeeze in as much as I can. People in this room have spoken about this at length at various times. Those opposite in the government have mentioned harm minimisation based on two things: health and social outcomes. Yes, we need health. Social outcomes? Whose outcome are we listening to? Are we listening to those who are living in the area, or is it the outcome for those people actually suffering or subject to the injecting room?

With every implementation the government does, it takes time for things to happen and consequences to take place. This has been in place for almost 10 years now. I worked in the area for the last 30 years at Fitzroy, at Richmond and at Collingwood. At the time I told the councils and I told the people there that there would be consequences coming. Moving forward, eight years down the track, we had a rally down at Richmond in Victoria Street regarding making our streets safe. Not only were there residents and business owners, but also councillors came out saying, 'We got it wrong. We've got to move this injecting room. It's at the wrong location.' At the time, at the rally, when it counted, where were all the MPs? Where were all those Greens activists? Where were all the Labor representatives who support this injecting room, support the people and listen to the people? There were none whatsoever. The only MP who was there was the Liberal member – me. Unfortunately, there were no others who would come and listen to the people and listen to the businesses.

I will quickly mention, in relation to drugs, that the minister mentioned in the 1990s there was a drug crisis in Footscray. She forgot to mention what happened afterwards. In operation after operation, we moved drugs away from the mall in Footscray. In three years, police moved it and cleaned it, and there

are no drug overdoses on a regular basis in Footscray anymore. So that is what happens when you put police operations in to move drugs in the area. It does work, unlike what the Greens are trying to say. Police do have some impact in the area. Unfortunately, with Richmond we have got high-rises and we have got a school, and that is where the issues arise in relation to harm minimisation and where you put the injection room. Besides all the shops – half the shops in Victoria Street have gone as a result of the injecting room and after COVID. Businesses have closed down.

I have got a minute left. I will try to squeeze this in. People are screaming to the government and screaming to the Greens, ‘Listen to us. You got it wrong. You’ve got to move the injection room.’ If you do not listen to those people in Richmond, if you continue the way it is with the Labor government and with the Greens, you will continue to have an injection room where the kids and where the flats are, and it will continue down the track in relation to your children’s future. Listen to the people from Richmond. Listen to the people who live there in those flats and those kids that go to school. We have got people being assaulted outside school. We have got people assaulted in the streets. Quickly, in my last 10 seconds, to the people in here: I have been down that street. Clean up the mess, clean up the injection room and clean up the overdoses you guys created. Remove the injecting room.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:56): I thank members for the contributions they have made to this motion debate today. I particularly want to thank crossbench and government speakers, including the minister, who have come to this conversation with evidence and who have come to this conversation with a sense of compassion and data underpinning the arguments that support the service.

I will spend the remainder of my time addressing contributions made by opposition members. What I will start with is this: I have been listening quite intently to the contributions that have been made by members opposite, and I do not think I have heard a single statistic. I do not think I have heard any data from any of the opposition members who spoke on this motion. Frankly, I have heard mostly fear. I have not heard data and I have not heard evidence to underpin the arguments that have been made, and I think surely that was what was warranted with the motion that has been brought before us. We heard ‘We never see the data.’

Members interjecting.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is being interjected now: ‘We never see the data.’ I do not know what the opposition members are reading, but I am reading the Flynn review, I am reading the Hamilton review I am reading the Ryan review and I am reading the Lay review, in all of which experts laid out clearly the benefits of these services, what they offer to the community and understanding of what has occurred at the particular service we are examining in the motion today over the years when this has been examined. I do not know if there is selective reading going on from opposition members or if they have simply refused to engage with it. Instead they come here today and say, ‘We never see the data.’ It is there on the public record – read it.

We heard members opposite talking about wanting to see people offered a pathway off the drugs that we have been talking about, offered more pathways to rehabilitation. Literally the pathway for that is this service. I have not heard solutions from those opposite offering an alternative pathway that is actually viable and backed by evidence. This service is backed by evidence. We heard members opposite referring to people around the centre dying while using drugs and being drug-impacted around the centre. As I spoke to in my contribution, and having not just visited the site, as it sounds like some people opposite have done, but gone into the service and spoken to the people delivering this life-saving care to people in our community, largely why this occurs is because someone cannot get into the service, because the service, if they have access to it, is a life-saving health support. It has wraparound social and health supports. It is why, in response to the Ryan review, we brought amendments to this place to amend the current legislation to ensure that more people could get access to the service. Those amendments failed. They were voted down by members opposite. So to have members come in here and talk about the devastating examples where we are seeing people lose their

lives around the centre or seeing drug use outside the centre: you are literally to blame for it because you opposed those amendments that would have seen people have access to this life-saving care.

Members opposite quoted from councils, in many cases elected officials who have been elected by communities in areas like North Richmond which expected progressive representation but who have instead sold out to fear campaigns, often for their own perceived electoral prospects. There was talk about it being in the wrong area. We hear this a lot; it has been well canvassed across many public spheres and in the media, both by these councillors I am referring to and by members of the opposition. But what we rarely hear is where the right area is. Where is the right area according to the opposition?

Members interjecting.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Quite rarely. And when we do have a suggestion, it is ‘Not in my backyard.’ It is conveniently beyond the boundaries of the areas that we represent – out of sight, out of mind, condemning people to die in our streets and alleyways. It is a despicable position held by members of the opposition that they bring to this debate. Back in this life-saving service.

What I will end my remarks with today, in thanking members who are supporting this motion that is before us on behalf of my Greens colleagues and myself, is the quote that I raised earlier in my contribution:

Every day, people are risking death by injecting drugs on Melbourne’s streets; in car parks, laneways and public toilets. Approximately one person a month dies after using heroin in the City of Melbourne.

These deaths are unnecessary. These are sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. All loved and mourned by families and friends.

...

We need to look beyond the emotion, judgement and fear, and assess the hard evidence.

Having said that, I commend the motion to the house.

Council divided on 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 (16): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Motion agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: I acknowledge a previous member of this chamber in the public gallery, Mr David O’Brien.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Electricity infrastructure

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:07): (1165) My question today is for the minister representing the minister for energy in the other place. At this time of year the amazing, hardworking people of our farming communities should be working from sun-up to sundown, harvesting their crops for the year. Instead farmers to our north and west are travelling hours to stand in support of each other against harassment and forced entry to their land by VicGrid officers. Will the minister stop the forced entry by VicGrid officers until such time as the landholders and communities have been thoroughly consulted and listened to?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:07): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her question, and I will happily refer that to the minister in the other place for an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Public sector review

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:08): (1166) My question is to the Treasurer. On the announcement of the Silver review you were quoted as saying that it was ‘needed to address the budget recurrent problem that we have’. Will you be accepting all recommendations of the Silver review?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question and her interest in the Silver review. As I have outlined in this chamber on numerous occasions, the Silver review, along with the government response, will both be made public.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:08): Treasurer, will you be accepting the recommendations, given that you said it was important that the Silver review be adopted?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): Mrs McArthur, apologies: I should have been more explicit in my answer. The response will be made public, which will answer your question.

Ministers statements: Regional Worker Accommodation Fund

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): I would like to update the house on some major milestones from the Allan Labor government’s Regional Worker Accommodation Fund and how it is providing homes for workers right across regional Victoria. In Hopetoun the community are ready to welcome vital healthcare workers, with the completion of four worker houses for Rural Northwest Health, which can now host up to 12 medical professionals and their families, including four nurses who are moving in just this week. The project is already paying dividends, with available positions filled during a recent recruitment drive and the health service able to reopen its urgent care centre because of the arrival of additional staff. The houses were largely constructed offsite in Swan Hill by modular construction business Swanbuild, spreading the economic benefit outside the original intent. In Kyabram we have marked the completion of two one-bedroom units at Kyabram District Health, and they have already been allocated to staff and visiting health professionals. In Irymple we have had the completion of eight units, with 28 bedrooms ready for workers and their families. The houses were built by local company MCBG Karadoc. Construction is underway in Omeo, Robinvale, Shepparton, Beaufort, Wangaratta and Wonthaggi. These are just some of the more than 50 projects being delivered across regional Victoria through the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. The projects are unlocking around \$370 million of investment in worker accommodation across industries that need it most, like health, agriculture and tourism. It will provide more than 1750 bedrooms for thousands of key workers and their families. The fund is just one of many examples of the \$47 billion investment in regional Victoria since 2014. The Labor government obviously continues to invest in regional Victoria, as we always have.

The PRESIDENT: I am really pleased to acknowledge in the gallery honourable members and staff from the County Assembly of Bomet, which is in Kenya. You are very welcome. Thanks for visiting our Parliament and sharing your knowledge with us.

Protective services officers

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:11): (1167) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, last night in the debate on the police and other matters bill you assured the house twice that the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service had been consulted on the protective services officer provisions. It is my understanding that the Aboriginal Justice Caucus was shown one PowerPoint slide at a working group meeting. The process was that they were told the bare minimum; they were not

consulted in my view. In that meeting I understand they asked for more information or detail to understand the bullet points on the slide and none was provided. The requests to see a consultation draft of the bill were rejected. The strong response, I understand, in the room on that day was that this process was by no means and in no way to be considered consultation. Minister, when you told the house that the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service had been consulted, is this the consultation you were referring to?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:12): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question. Mr Puglielli, you are firmly asking a question that should be directed to the Minister for Police in the other place. That consultation was led by his team and his department.

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, I am asking the minister about statements that he made to this chamber yesterday evening. It is firmly within his remit to respond.

The PRESIDENT: Ministers get assigned to take other ministers' committee stages through our chamber. I think the minister is indicating that it does not fall within his remit. I am sure he or whoever else would be happy to pass it on to the Minister for Police.

Enver ERDOGAN: I am happy to take that on notice and ask the Minister for Police for an appropriate response in relation to that form of consultation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): It should seem obvious that I am deeply disappointed by that response, given these are comments made by this minister to this chamber within the last 24 hours – today, technically. My supplementary question is also in relation to comments made by this minister, but I will provide a preamble by referencing the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, looking specifically at the explainer from the First Peoples' Assembly, which states:

Under Treaty, Government must speak with us when making laws, rules or policies about us.

In the act there are safeguard provisions that require not only that consultation occur but that any responses are considered in good faith and that there is a response by your government to any issues those bodies raise. Minister, did –

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, President, I did not quite hear Mr Puglielli's supplementary at the start, but I am concerned he may be referring to a bill on the notice paper, and I question the anticipation rule.

The PRESIDENT: I will let Mr Puglielli finish his question. There might be a valid point of order, but I have got a feeling that the minister, given his substantive answer, will respond very similarly in his supplementary.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I will continue with my question. Minister, again, it is in relation to comments you made in this chamber last night. Minister, did you engage VALS on the PSO provisions in a single dot point PowerPoint presentation and characterise it in this place as consultation or did you mislead the house?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:15): President, I seek your guidance and your wisdom. We represent other ministers in this place when there is legislation. During questions without notice, it would be better directed to the Minister for Police, who had carriage of that legislation.

The PRESIDENT: I think that has acquitted the response.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, ministers are able to be asked questions about their portfolio matters and matters with which they are connected. It is impossible to –

Members interjecting.

David Davis: Well, he is responsible for his own response, and if he has misled the house, it is only him who can correct it. It is an entirely legitimate question.

Aiv Puglielli: Further to the point of order, President, if ministers cannot be asked questions about statements that they themselves have made to this chamber, then that is a very dark reflection on democracy in this place.

Renee Heath: Further to the point of order, President, I do want to clarify in order to move forward, because often we are so unclear on who is responsible for what. You will not say you are responsible –

Members interjecting.

Renee Heath: I will wait till you have finished. Is the minister responsible for their own statements?

David Davis: Further to the point of order, President, it may clarify it to look at standing order 8.01, ‘Questions to ministers or other members’:

Questions may be put to –

Ministers relating to public affairs for which the Minister is directly connected ...

An answer given by a minister in this chamber is something that they are directly connected with.

The PRESIDENT: I hate paraphrasing people, but the point of order that has been put to me is that ministers – and it does not matter which political party is in government – have a number of responsibilities to take different pieces of legislation from ministers from the other chamber, so they might have two or three ministers allocated to them; therefore they should answer questions for those four ministers in question time. I am not setting that precedent –

A member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: No, I am not setting that precedent.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point getting upset with me. We all own the standing orders, and it is pretty clear. I will be moving on.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I would ask that you reflect later in detail with the clerks on this particular matter, because it is not setting a precedent about answering questions on other ministers’ areas, it is setting a precedent on ruling out answering questions with which the minister is directly connected. It is a separate point.

The PRESIDENT: No.

David Davis: It actually is. They have said it.

The PRESIDENT: No. The original point of order, which you got up and said ‘further to the point of order’ about, was around exactly what I said – a minister taking a bill through committee on behalf of another minister in another chamber. If people want me to set that precedent and they ever aspire to be in government, they would be a bit silly to do that, I would have thought. So we will stick to the standing orders we have got and we will move on.

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): (1168) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, your Suburban Rail Loop Authority spent \$196,379 on indoor plants. How many indoor plants does this amount of money get you?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:20): Thank you very much, Mr Mulholland, for your question and for your interest in the largest housing and transport infrastructure project that we have.

Nick McGowan: The largest nursery in Australia, by the sound of it, Minister.

Harriet SHING: In fact I will pick up that interjection, notwithstanding that they are unruly. If you want to talk about the way in which we have engaged in delivering social enterprise returns for the largest level crossing removal process and if you want to talk about the way in which that has delivered fundamentally important outcomes in terms of jobs and employment opportunities for people – again, that measure of economic certainty for people – as part of those partnerships across government, Mr McGowan, then let us do that. With 87 level crossings down, we are talking about –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I asked how many indoor plants that amount of money buys you, and the minister has not come near the question that I asked.

The PRESIDENT: I have also got a concern – and there are precedents from presiding officers other than me – around the level of detail in asking a question to a minister which would have been better as a question on notice. But I think the minister is happy to assist, so I will call the minister.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Harriet SHING: The Leader of the Opposition is saying I love pot plants. Not as much as you might perhaps love the various plants who are looking for positions on the opposite side of the chamber. I want to perhaps go to the way in which contracts are managed. We do have a range of contracts that are entered into for the purpose of projects, including small and large projects. These are not contracts that are unique to specific infrastructure services or program delivery. You would know that on the other side of the chamber, because back in 2019 there was in fact an allocation of \$330,000 in today's money to refurbish offices for the opposition. So this is one of those things where it is not an uncommon process to, in setting up modern offices, have a range of amenities provided as part of those offices, and the expenditure is in line with that of other government agencies.

Let me also be really clear: it is my expectation that we are delivering value for taxpayers money. This is where, in the context of this particular project, Mr Mulholland, we are delivering value for taxpayers money. We are delivering a project that is on time and on budget. We are delivering a project that you will axe. We are delivering thousands of jobs that you will cut.

Members interjecting.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, again on relevance, the minister has not gone near the question.

The PRESIDENT: From what I could hear, I believe the minister was being relevant. People ask questions and then their buddies all start yelling and I cannot hear the minister. I was waiting for the point of order about relevance, because it was pretty hard for me to decide. But I will ask the minister to continue.

Harriet SHING: As I was saying, there would be no greater waste of money – perhaps other than, I do not know, large-scale printing contracts that are run out without the appropriate authorisation – than for you to scrap the Suburban Rail Loop. That is exactly what you are saying you will do. We are delivering Australia's largest housing and transport infrastructure project.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I did not ask about those matters. I asked about how many indoor plants that amount of money gets you.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has got 5 seconds if she wants to use them.

Harriet SHING: The contract was subject to a competitive tender process in line with established protocols.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:25): Does the minister believe that spending almost \$200,000 on office plants represents value for money for Victorian taxpayers?

The PRESIDENT: I think it is asking for an opinion. I am happy for Mr Mulholland to rephrase that rather than asking for an opinion.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Is it government policy that spending almost \$200,000 on indoor office plants represents value for money?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:25): Mr Mulholland, I answered this in my substantive answer. It is my expectation that we are delivering value for the allocation and the use of taxpayer funds in the same way that it is my expectation that we would not see misuse of taxpayer dollars, for example, by inappropriately using office funds for other purposes entirely unrelated to the primary purpose of an elected position – not that I am making any comment on that particular matter or any other particular matter that might arise –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, the minister said it was her expectation that these kinds of contracts are value for money. That was not the question. It was whether it was government policy that \$200,000 on indoor plants represents taxpayer value for money.

The PRESIDENT: At the start, the minister stated that she relied on her substantive answer, so that is an answer.

Harriet SHING: It is my expectation that funding is allocated for the purpose for which it is intended, that it is not misused, that it is not misappropriated, that it is delivered in line with established processes. Mr Mulholland, the figure outlined on the Buying for Victoria website represents the total contract value but not the expenditure to date. So let us be really, really clear on that, let us be really clear on appropriate use of resourcing, Mr Mulholland, and let us continue the conversation from here about what that looks like.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:27): This year an additional 1000 Victorian families have moved into or are getting ready to move into their brand new social and affordable homes, all thanks to our \$6.3 billion Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund. While those opposite are still really focused on leaking and undermining their own colleagues, we have been building new homes, like those I visited in Ballarat last week with the member for Wendouree, the member for Eureka and of course the member for Ripon. But sadly, not every community can count on their local member to support the delivery of new homes. Who could forget the Liberal who opposes building 50 new homes in their community because they are too close to a cemetery? Oh, that is right, people could forget that member because he is no longer the shadow minister for housing. When we look at the new shadow frontbench, we see a collection of Liberals who are opposing new homes across key suburbs, like Brighton, Elsternwick and Camberwell. We see the member for Brighton in the other place urging protesters to sacrifice one \$150 dinner that they might otherwise buy on Church Street and instead put that money towards advertising against building more housing in his electorate.

You say that you support more housing in Victoria, but we all know what you really mean, and that is housing, just not in your backyard. So when the new Liberal shadow minister for housing affordability says ‘the Liberal–National parties are not against social housing, but’, we know what that means. When they say government ‘will impose public housing on your community’, we know what they mean. When the new shadow minister said, as recently as yesterday, that the Liberals would pause the redevelopment of the 44 social housing towers to treble the density across 39 hectares of land in the inner city and inner suburbs, Victorians know that means cutting 30,000 new opportunities for Victorians. That is not an anti-housing dog whistle; it is as subtle as the MCG sirens.

Let us not forget the member for Caulfield, our new Shadow Minister for Housing and Building. He has an interest in 18 homes – sorry, 16; I overshot the mark. He says nobody should be smashing up people that work really hard. I think we can all agree hard work should be rewarded – *(Time expired)*

Dingo protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:30): (1169) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Environment. Only a few weeks ago in here in question time I asked the government for an update on the long-promised, nonlethal dingo trials and the \$2.5 million that was allocated to them. I still have not received a response to that question, and I am now convinced that the government only committed to this project to ensure its failure, setting us further back than where we began. Since that time my office has received troubling reports indicating no actual development of these trials and that new legislation could potentially strip back protections and entrench lethal dingo control into law. Can the minister confirm whether such legislation is being considered?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:31): I thank the member for her question. I will endeavour to follow up that information that was originally before the house and seek information in relation to legislation.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:31): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. The Wotjobaluk people in particular have fought especially hard to protect dingoes in north-west Victoria, advocating for Indigenous-led decision-making in the management of these culturally significant animals and directly contributing to the government’s commitment to exploring nonlethal trial methods. Yet we still have no update at all on when these nonlethal strategies will be trialled and now face what appears to be a backward step towards further killing. Has the minister consulted any further with Victorian First Nations communities ahead of any upcoming decisions regarding the management of culturally significant native dingoes?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:32): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question. This will be a matter that will be referred to the Minister for Environment, Minister Dimopoulos, for a response.

Regional development

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:32): (1170) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. The Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund has not been open for applications since 2022. Why does the Allan Labor government keep it on the RDV website when it has no money left?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:32): I thank Ms Bath for her question and the opportunity to talk about the investment in regional Victoria and in particular the support for businesses, because I think that is where you are wanting to go with your question. In relation to the latest budget there was an announcement of the VIF, which has a regional stream and which might be something that you would be interested in looking at. I would actually really welcome any suggestions of businesses that you might want to connect in with RDV to access that dedicated regional stream, because that is all about ensuring that businesses are supported to employ more people in regional Victoria. It is basically a job creation stream. It is supporting existing businesses to expand, introduce new lines and introduce

export lines et cetera. RDV work hand in glove with these businesses to ensure that they can invest their own money with the confidence and support of the state government to ensure that there is leverage funding from us and other supports to ensure that they can grow and, as I said, invest and grow jobs.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, the minister has not actually answered the question that I put, which was: why does the Allan government keep a non-functioning grant fund on the website, in effect misleading the Victorian population because there is no money left in it?

The PRESIDENT: I will consider your point of order at the end of question time in terms of responses.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:34): Regional Development Victoria's annual report shows grant expenditure has fallen from \$370 million four years ago to just \$118 million last year, a 70 per cent drop. Why is the Allan government doing less to support jobs and investment in regional Victoria?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:35): Ms Bath, at the risk of creating work for my office, I think I would be well placed to commit to giving you some information offline, because there are a range of projects that are being delivered under RJIF and I can provide you with details of those. But this is not the only investment in regional Victoria – \$47 billion of investment since we came to government through a range of –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, it was a question about Regional Development Victoria in her portfolio; it is not expansive. It is about a 70 per cent cut – a 70 per cent drop – in the grants.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was relevant to the question.

Jaelyn SYMES: Ms Bath, what I am concerned about in your line of questioning is your lack of knowledge of the funding streams that are supporting regional development. There are projects under RJIF. We have got the \$2 billion regional package that was initiated under the former minister and that is still rolling out through RDV. I just took you through the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. In particular I think what you would benefit from, and I would like all country members to know about it, is the dedicated stream under the Victorian Investment Fund, which has \$50 million for regional businesses. I would really encourage you to get familiar with that so you can talk to your local businesses – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: children and young people

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:36): I rise to update the house on some of the ways in which the Allan Labor government is incorporating the voices of children and young people in our work for Victorian children and families. In our last sitting week I was pleased to endorse the *What Does Family Mean to You?* art exhibition in Queen's Hall at Parliament House. The inaugural National Families Week art competition saw entries from more than 200 children and young people drawing on their creativity and experiences to share what family means to them. It engaged children from as young as 20 months old up to 15 years of age, from rural and regional communities to urban centres, and common themes included love and emotional support, safety and security, togetherness and shared experiences. The stunning collection of art featured a piece from Lucy, aged seven, who shared that she thinks of her family as a treasure, and so she drew them inside a big treasure chest. Lucy said to me, 'My family are the most precious thing in the world.' It was a pleasure to meet Lucy and her family along with other participating children and young people in Queen's Hall for the exhibition, and I would like to thank Michele Lonsdale, the acting CEO, and the former CEO, now National Children's Commissioner, Deb Tsorbaris and their team at the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare for bringing the

exhibition to Parliament House and for the ways on and each and every day they incorporate children's voices and ensure children are heard.

In my role as Minister for Children we listen directly to the views and ideas of children and young people, particularly those who have current or recent experience living away from their families in our care system. The ministerial youth advisory group, known as MYAG, is one of the ways in which we do that. MYAG is an important way in which children and young people with lived experience of the Victorian child protection and care systems have a direct voice to the Victorian government about their experiences. The views and ideas of MYAG members went into the development of the Supporting Stable and Strong Families legislation that was introduced into the Assembly yesterday. I, along with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, will again meet with the members of MYAG next week, and I look forward to our continued conversations about how government can progress our work to keep all children and young people safe, supported and able to thrive.

Floods

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:38): (1171) Speaking as a big fan of pot plants, my question is to the Minister for Water. The recent Ombudsman's report *When the Water Rises* investigated the planning decisions and flood modelling leading to the flooding of the Rivervue Retirement Village and the Kensington Banks estate and highlighted serious gaps in the existing planning systems. Rivervue was built on plans based on Melbourne Water's, in the Ombudsman's quote, 'rushed and flawed flood modelling' and the removal of key planning controls, which led to its subsequent flooding and destruction. Similarly, Kensington Banks has 850 houses at risk of flooding due to the development being based on outdated and incorrect flood modelling. Echoing the recommendations of the inquiry into the 2022 floods, the report recommends the creation of a one-stop statewide flood information portal and regular reviews and updates of flood models. When will the government implement these recommendations?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:39): I thank Mr Ettershank, not just for his question, but for his genuine interest in this whole area for some time, so thank you for that. We thank the Ombudsman and her office for the work that they have done, and we are absolutely alive to the issues that have had an impact on residents in Rivervue but also of course at Kensington Banks. As I said when we last sat, we will carefully consider the Ombudsman's recommendation and will respond in due course. I also have written to Melbourne Water to outline my expectation that they prioritise engagement with Rivervue residents and owners as part of the Maribyrnong catchment flood mitigation study.

I am always open to engaging with members of the community, and I have in recent times received some correspondence, which I am in the process of responding to. As I also have indicated, I want Melbourne Water to prioritise engagement with Rivervue residents and owners. This is absolutely essential. I know that there has been ongoing engagement with the residents to discuss mitigation options, and I think that has been well received. I think that there has been a step-up more generally in terms of the engagement and the communication between residents and Melbourne Water and indeed others that have been involved in the mitigation study. I am heartened to see that there has been a quantum leap in terms of that engagement.

The Rivervue flood modelling was undertaken many years ago; it was in 2003. Since then Melbourne Water's approach and personnel responsible for flood risk and housing statement delivery have been absolutely overhauled. We have the right processes and new people in place at Melbourne Water to ensure that the community is given updated flood risk information, and this is about helping communities plan, manage risk and build homes that are safe from flooding. I am wanting not just to encourage and have that expectation that there is thorough and consistent engagement with Rivervue residents in particular but for the conversations to be real and that they be concrete – (*Time expired*)

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:43): Thank you, Minister, for that answer. That does strike to it. I would like to just drill a little bit deeper into that question of the Rivervue

Retirement Village, because when that village was inundated, 45 of the 47 affected villas were so badly damaged that they were uninhabitable. The affected residents were then confronted by the fact that the village operator had failed to adequately insure the properties, and as a result they now find themselves with villas which remain totally vulnerable to the next flood and are virtually unsellable. The Ombudsman in the Environment and Planning Committee inquiry into the 2022 floods recognised that this atrocious situation was due to the flawed flood modelling that you referred to and grievous errors in the planning process. The Ombudsman has recommended to the government that residents receive compensation from the state, and apparently that is under consideration. I ask: when will the government step up and actually support financially these elderly residents whose lives have been destroyed by failed regulatory processes?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:44): Again, I thank Mr Ettershank for his question, and in particular this supplementary question, which goes to the heart of concerns that he and others have raised for some time. What I can say is what I have previously said, which is that we as a government will carefully consider the Ombudsman’s recommendation and we will respond in due course. There is a fair bit of material that needs to be considered. It will take some time, but we also want to do this properly. We will respond in due course.

Economic policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1172) My question is to the Treasurer. The *Auditor-General’s Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria* was released last week. In the 2022–23 financial year the Auditor recommended that the Department of Treasury and Finance:

work with the government to set specific targets and precise timing of achieving its key financial measures and targets of net debt to gross state product and interest expense to revenue.

I also note the Auditor’s 2024–25 report; he says this has not been implemented. I ask therefore, Treasurer: why has the Auditor’s recommendation merely been noted but not implemented?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:45): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Mr Davis, as has been well canvassed in this chamber and outside this chamber, the government has a five-step fiscal strategy that we are committed to, and it is working. We have achieved steps 1 and 2. We will achieve step 3 at this budget. As I have indicated to the house, we will be the only state on the eastern seaboard to deliver a surplus. We are committed to this strategy, we have communicated this to the Victorian community and we are on track.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): I note that the Treasurer did not want to directly answer the precise question but wanted to go around the block. The supplementary question I therefore ask is: the Auditor further called in the 2023–24 financial year for the Department of Treasury and Finance to:

Enhance its public reporting to demonstrate progress against saving initiatives and efficiency dividends outlined in the state Budgets and the realisation of their benefits ...

I further note in his 2024–25 report he indicated that this has merely been noted but not implemented. Why has the government repeatedly ignored the Auditor-General’s important transparency recommendations? What does it have to hide?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:47): Mr Davis, that probably would have been better as your substantive question, because there is a lot that you have asked in that. In relation to some of the mechanisms and things that have been called out by the VAGO report, there are a number of things that I can point to in relation to transparency and accountability and in particular in relation to reporting. There are a number of ways that we report against our fiscal plan and against our COVID debt recovery plan, and both of those streams are publicly reported in various ways.

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, I would point to things such as the Treasury and Finance annual report. Page 39 is very good for an example of where we have outlined some of the figures you are seeking. In particular, the COVID debt levy projections are in budget paper 5; I would draw your attention to those. I always have a commitment, as I had in the exchange I had with Mr Mulholland and Ms Crozier yesterday in relation to transparency and looking at ways to make sure that information is easily accessible – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: mental health and wellbeing locals

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:48): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s continued rollout of mental health and wellbeing locals. Last week I announced that the new Cardinia, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Port Phillip, Wyndham, Maroondah and Mount Alexander locals have commenced delivering services. Mental health and wellbeing supports are now available via phone or telehealth and will scale up to offering in-person support over the coming months. Once scaled up they will provide the full range of clinical and wellbeing supports delivered in person, via telehealth or through outreach. That brings the total number of locals now to 22 across 24 locations, making it easier for more Victorians to access the mental health and wellbeing support they need free of charge, with no Medicare card or GP referral required. Locals are the front door to the mental health system, offering support and treatment for Victorians experiencing mental illness or psychological distress, including co-occurring substance use or addiction.

It was great to visit the Melton local last week with my good friend the member for Melton Steve McGhie in the other place to officially open their permanent premises in Cobblebank. The Melton local is operating really well, has been operating since 2023 and offers a range of clinical and wellbeing mental health supports to the Melton community, all free of charge. The Allan Labor government is proud to deliver these important services right across the state. They have already supported almost 30,000 Victorians, and we will continue building a mental health system that is community-based, person-centred and guided by lived experience.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:50): Minister Stitt will get a response from the Minister for Energy and Resources in line with the standing orders for Ms Tyrrell. I also thank Minister Tierney, who will follow up Ms Purcell’s questions to the Minister for Environment. In response to Ms Bath’s point of order, I am happy to review Minister Symes’s answers and get back to her before the end of the day.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2041) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. In 2021 the Labor government passed laws that address rental bidding by mandating that rental properties be advertised at a fixed price under rental bidding protections. Just last week a further tranche of reforms came into effect which bans all remaining forms of rental bidding. That means not only will agents and rental providers be prohibited from soliciting offers beyond the listed terms but they are also now banned from accepting unsolicited offers. Rental bidding is an unfair practice. It punishes our prospective renters who take the price of a listing at face value, it encourages a predatory environment that can pressure people into paying more than they feel is fair and reasonable and it impacts cost-of-living pressures for hundreds, potentially thousands, of households. Minister, how will the government’s rental reforms benefit renters in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2042) My constituency question is to, I believe, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the long-awaited planning for the Camerons Lane interchange in Beveridge. The government's own planning timeline states that the business case and planning study for this interchange are expected to be completed in 2025. Naturally, it is now December, and my residents are still waiting. With the year drawing to a close my community has not been provided with any meaningful update. I know the federal government is entirely funding this project because the Victorian government has run out of money, but it is a basic expectation to know when the planning study that the federal government has subsidised will be completed. So my question is: can the minister confirm whether the business case and planning study for the Camerons Lane interchange will in fact be completed by the end of 2025, as promised?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2043) My question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the dust that is being created by the drilling and digging along the Eastern Freeway. Members of my community are concerned about this dust. They are concerned about what it contains, how far it is spreading and what is being done to clean up the dust that is landing on surrounding streets and homes, as well as how, if at all, this is all being monitored. Residents are concerned that the dust may contain silica, which we know can cause serious lung conditions. Minister, can you please update this chamber and the residents of North-Eastern Metropolitan Region as to the contents and amounts of dust that are being put into the air around the Eastern Freeway project? My constituents need assurances that this dust is being monitored and that there are no risks to human health or our environment being caused by this dust.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2044) My question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment. With the Metro Tunnel now open, Arden, Parkville, State Library and Town Hall are already becoming part of the daily life of the people of the Northern Metropolitan Region. These new places and stations feel like they will support businesses in a really meaningful way by creating opportunities and spaces for local traders as passenger numbers grow over the months ahead. These stations are hubs, from coffee shops at Arden to large chains at Town Hall. Just last week at Parkville station I had the chance to meet some of the amazing workers and minds from 7-Eleven and Sushi Sushi. They spoke about what it meant to settle into the brand new station and be part of an incredible generational project that so many Victorians are thrilled to see completed. Importantly, with more people moving through these precincts each day, the role of small local businesses is important in shaping how these areas feel and how other community and commuters are served. My question to the minister is: how will the opening of the Metro Tunnel bring more people and further support for small businesses in the CBD?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:55): (2045) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding the Williamstown Swimming & Life Saving Club redevelopment in my electorate of Western Metro. This project is being delivered by the Community Safety Building Authority and has faced delays since 2021 due to planning issues. The current estimated cost is \$16.85 million, with funding split between government and council. Can the minister please update my constituents on whether the government have any plans to intervene and work with Hobsons Bay City Council to ensure development is complete on time and on budget? The state government must take responsibility for the projects it is funding and delivering, rather than shifting the blame onto our local government. The community deserves clarity and progress.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2046) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. My constituent is a resident of Cranbourne North. He is concerned about the proposed redevelopment of the Cranbourne Golf Club. The site sits approximately 1.3 kilometres from the active Hallam Road landfill, which my constituent reported as a significant source of odour. EPA guidelines determine there must be a 1.5-kilometre buffer between large municipal waste sites and residential developments. This may be reduced to 1 kilometre, subject to an appropriate odour risk assessment. The developer's consultants concluded that a reduced buffer is appropriate. However, a lack of information to complete a level 1 quantitative assessment was noted. Meanwhile level 2 qualitative assessments showed no indication of external peer review or EPA endorsement. My constituent asks: would the government ensure a transparent and independent assessment of landfill odour risks is conducted before the site is developed?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2047) My constituent question is for the Minister for Local Government. I will first start by commending the minister on the Living Libraries infrastructure program, which will enable the Labor government to support infrastructure upgrades, delivering tangible benefits for public libraries, recognising the important role public libraries play in fostering community learning. They facilitate access to information while creating a safe, supportive environment for our communities. This initiative demonstrates the commitment to supporting libraries, which allow free public access to information and technology to support the communities they provide for. It was great to be out there in the great electorate of Kew last week – a community that knows very well that only a Labor government and a Labor member will deliver for Kew. I had the great pleasure of being in attendance, along with Mr Batchelor and Minister Staikos, to deliver the great news of the grant. This library in my local community of Southern Metro received \$550,000 under the Living Libraries infrastructure program for redevelopment. This will help improve their facilities to ensure they continue to enrich our community. My question is: can the minister speak on how the investment in local libraries, such as the funding for Kew Library, supports the government's goals for stronger, more connected communities?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:58): (2048) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. It was great to meet with volunteers at the Axe Creek CFA fire brigade last week. It started in 1912 and is one of the oldest brigades in Victoria. The station have received a refurbished twin-cab tanker, which was an important safety upgrade, but their station facilities are lacking. At present the brigade has no change room facilities; no running hot water or proper hand-washing amenities, only a fixed portable toilet behind the station; no appropriate storage for turnout gear, forcing members to keep contaminated gear in their own vehicles; and no compliant area to clean breathing apparatus, meaning critical equipment is washed in buckets of cold water outside the station. Earlier this year the brigade was advised it was the first or second in line for a station refurbishment. More recently it has been told it may be slipping down the list, with no explanation. The brigade own the block of land next to the station. I ask the minister to consider the need for improved facilities to ensure the safety of volunteers and the communities that they serve.

Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:04 pm.

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:04): (2049) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. On 26 November one of my constituents finally found a little rectangle of dirt in the *Tetris* game that is the Tarneit station car park and got on a train, but in very short order she was trapped in between train stations on a stationary train because of trespassers on the rail line. She tells me that this is commonplace now between Southern Cross and Wyndham Vale and that commuters who are expecting to board a train and get to work on time and get to their appointments

and get their kids to school are trapped with no safe way to disembark and make alternative arrangements. One constituent even lost his job after repeatedly being caused to be late for his shifts. Will the minister advise of the current procedure for removing trespassers from this corridor and what further measures will be taken to reduce the frequency and impact of these disruptions?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:05): (2050) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. My constituent Aubrey recently received a rent increase of \$217 per month, making their housing unaffordable. This has forced them to cut spending, skip meals and endure significant mental health impacts while they feel unable to raise maintenance issues for fear of retaliatory rent increases. This is not an isolated issue. While recent reforms allow VCAT to consider additional factors when assessing rent increases, they do not address the broader and fundamental problem. Victoria has no legal limit on rent hikes. Melbourne remains at record low affordability levels, and four in five renters have experienced rent hikes averaging 17 per cent over just two years. By contrast, the ACT, the only jurisdiction with legally capped rent increases, has recorded the strongest improvement in rental affordability nationwide. Minister, will the government follow this example and introduce rent increase caps in Victoria to protect renters like Aubrey?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): (2051) Acting President Berger, there are a lot of great sporting clubs in the Southern Metropolitan Region, as you well know. My question to the Minister for Community Sport is: can the minister outline how the government is supporting local sporting clubs in the region? One of the great sporting clubs that provides support to others, and particularly others around this place, is the Hampton bowls club, which for the past two years has supported the annual parliamentary lawn bowls evening, which is an event for former members to connect and engage in some lighthearted sporting competition. But not everyone who participates is very good at bowling, and so the Hampton bowls club, particularly Geoff Magrin and Bryan Dickinson, have been extremely patient in providing some coaching advice and support, as well as bringing some equipment and tips and tricks for skills and coaching. It is an incredibly generous offer that the Hampton bowls club makes to help those less fortunate, including former members of Parliament, and make sure that they know how to bowl.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:07): (2052) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Why has the Labor government not properly repaired the electric gates that provide access to Toorourrong Reservoir Park? Fire season is approaching, and it is vital that CFA vehicles have reliable access into parks and bushland to fight fires. But the Allan Labor government is falling behind on essential maintenance that is required to keep access open. I recently asked the minister to fix the automatic electric gate at the entrance to Toorourrong Reservoir Park, which has malfunctioned several times. When the gate stops working, it can trap visitors inside and prevent CFA trucks from entering the park if a fire starts. The minister said that in March 2025 Parks Victoria upgraded the automated system controlling the gate entry to the park, but I am informed that the electric gates are malfunctioning again and will remain open until they can be repaired. The minister must take immediate action to provide a permanent solution to this ongoing problem before the fire season arrives.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (14:08): (2053) My constituency question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Since August 2023, community members in my electorate have raised concerns about the treatment and condition of a flock of sheep in Bendigo. Despite multiple complaints with Agriculture Victoria dating back for years, whistleblowers say that no action has been taken and that the sheep are still suffering. They have reported dead sheep, lice, heavy worm burden, flystrike, dags, uncrutched animals that are carrying more than two years worth of wool and most recently an entire dead pit. One concerned farmer told the media recently, 'These sheep are in the worst condition

that I have ever seen.’ This case is yet another clear example of why the government must honour their commitment and urgently introduce their promised animal care and protection bill, which is now almost 10 years delayed. In the meantime, will the minister request a brief from Agriculture Victoria on what is being done to assist these sheep in Bendigo and release it publicly?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:09): (2054) My question for the Minister for Energy and Resources concerns the asbestos found in wind turbines in western Victoria. WorkSafe Victoria has issued a safety alert confirming that imported asbestos-containing brake pads have been found in lift motors and hoists at Victorian wind farms, despite Australia’s longstanding ban on asbestos. The operators now confirm earlier public reports that a brake pad from the Golden Plains wind farm, near Rokewood in western Victoria, has tested positive for white asbestos and that turbines have been quarantined while replacements are arranged. My constituents want to be assured that workers are safe and, given the propensity of these turbines to shed parts, sometimes hundreds of metres distant, that there is no other asbestos present in any part of them. Queensland have announced a full asbestos audit of every wind turbine. What will you do, Minister?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:10): (2055) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning regarding Preston Market. Minister, my constituents at the Save Preston Market group have campaigned for years to protect the market’s heritage and its role as a vibrant community hub, and on behalf of my constituents I ask: what steps will the state government take to ensure that the heritage overlay, hard won through extensive community activism, is fully enforced and that Medich, a private organisation, manages the market responsibly? This includes keeping the market clean, properly maintaining it for the benefit of traders and the community, preventing it from falling into further disrepair and maintaining a tenancy level of around 90 per cent to allow natural turnover while keeping the market active and vibrant. Minister, the community needs to be notified of any redevelopment intentions and any interactions with the Victorian activity centre plan and all related agreements, meetings and documents to be made publicly available.

Business of the house

Invitation from Legislative Assembly

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger) (14:11): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly has agreed to the following resolution –

- (1) The Legislative Assembly invites members of the Legislative Council to attend a sitting of the Assembly in the Legislative Assembly Chamber on Tuesday 9 December 2025 at 11.00 am for the consideration of the motion endorsing the apology statement to First Peoples.
- (2) The lower public gallery on the Opposition side of the House be deemed part of the Legislative Assembly Chamber and the Assembly standing orders be applied for the time that Council members are invited onto the floor of the House.

Standing and sessional orders

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:12): I move, by leave:

That so much of the Standing and Sessional Orders be suspended to the extent necessary to allow –

- (1) the sitting of the Council on Tuesday, 9 December 2025 to commence 15 minutes after the conclusion of the apology to First Peoples held in the Legislative Assembly Chamber; and
- (2) the following order of business on Tuesday, 9 December 2025 to apply –

Messages
Questions
Formal business

Members' statements (up to 15 members)
Government business
At 6.30 pm Meal break
Government business (continues)
At 10.00 pm Adjournment (up to 20 members).

Motion agreed to.*Motions***Family violence**

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:12): I rise to speak to the motion in my name, a very important motion. I move:

That this house:

- (1) recognises the urgent need for strengthened family violence laws in Victoria, with Victoria Police responding to one family violence incident every 6 minutes;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) Victoria Police attended over 100,000 family violence incidents in 2023–24, a 6 per cent increase from the previous year;
 - (b) coercive control, which is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to control someone within a relationship through manipulation, pressure and fear needs to be recognised as a criminal offence in its own right;
 - (c) other Australian jurisdictions such as New South Wales and Queensland have already acted to outlaw coercive control;
- (3) further notes the government has already voted against implementing Clare's law, a domestic violence disclosure scheme 12 months ago; and
- (4) demands that the government urgently expedite the passage of coercive control laws for Victoria.

I want to put on record the work of my colleague the Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence Cindy McLeish, who has done a power of work in this area. She has been out meeting with not only victims but also stakeholders and Victoria Police to understand the issue at hand. I acknowledge the work that the government did with the Royal Commission into Family Violence, but there is still much to do. When I had this shadow portfolio, I brought to the Parliament and also to my electorate a number of issues that Ms McLeish has also been prosecuting, and I will talk to them later.

What I want to do is really talk through some of these statistics, which are very alarming. That is why the Liberal and Nationals are calling on this to be undertaken, because we cannot wait any longer. The government have had long enough to implement some of these reforms, which quite frankly they have ignored and failed to do. As I said, the statistics are increasing at an alarming rate. The latest Crime Statistics Agency data for the year ending June 2025 show that serious assaults increased by 23.35 per cent from June of last year. Breaches of family violence orders had increased from June of last year to June this year by 16.68 per cent. Victim reports of stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour towards females have increased from a staggering 4878 cases just last year to 5422 cases in this year – and obviously we are not at the end of the year, and those numbers, sadly, will continue to increase.

In terms of this issue around what the police are doing, they are doing their utmost. They are under so much pressure, given the crime crisis that has exploded in this state. They are being called out and there are dedicated units that are doing exceptional work in this area, and I want to place on record everybody's acknowledgement of and thanks for the work that they do in this area, because it is an important area, especially for women, who are largely subjected to this sort of behaviour. But it is not only women, I have to say. There are men in violent relationships as well who are subjected to some of these coercive powers and some of the issues that we speak about in relation to women. But it is well understood that largely women are the victims of these horrendous crimes. Perpetrators of coercive control do use a number of techniques to establish power over their victims, including threats, degradation, isolation from family and friends, monitoring and surveillance, gaslighting, enforcing

trivial demands and alternating punishment with rewards. Victims can be under that control and really feel very isolated and emotional that they have nowhere to turn to, and so they are put under more pressure.

I want to just go back to something that I was doing. I mentioned what the shadow minister Cindy McLeish has been bringing into the public domain, and she has already brought in a great deal and done a lot in putting forward policies to keep women safe and to stop these statistics from continuing to rise like they do. Last year the government voted against a ‘right to ask, right to know’ Clare’s law that we put forward. I want to speak to that because it is a scheme that was introduced in the UK in 2014, and since that time it has facilitated thousands of disclosures, including a total of 58,612 applications in 2023–24 with 24,505 disclosures – and it goes on. South Australia has implemented this scheme. It is something that I am very familiar with because back in 2017 I had a policy on this area, which Ms McLeish has built on. At the time I had gone and spoken to many people. We were watching what was happening in New South Wales, and Pru Goward, who was the Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, led the way in this very important area. They were doing some fantastic work and started the case for Clare’s law in Australia. At the time I met with a woman, Samantha Handley, who was the subject of that, a very sad story but an amazingly brave woman. She just encapsulates exactly the issue around coercive powers and why Clare’s law is required.

I want to go back to an article that I referenced. Samantha stood with me when we announced this policy, which was ridiculed by Labor. It was shameful, actually. It was rather embarrassing too, given the enormity of the issue at hand. Labor just disregarded this and basically ridiculed this important initiative we were putting forward. I was putting it forward based on this woman’s story, and I want to just remind members why we put this policy forward and why we will commit to it in November 2026, should Victorians vote for the change that we so desperately need in this state – because it is policies like this that will improve people’s lives. I am just going to quote from this article of 2016, which was titled ‘Child basher’s ex: why we need a domestic violence disclosure scheme’:

SAMANTHA Handley was with her ex partner for three years before she found out from a shocking newspaper article he had been jailed for bashing an ex-girlfriend’s 18-month-old baby years before they met.

...

She believed she was in a loving relationship, before his control over her slowly built up and she realised he had become abusive.

And even still, she held on to the belief that he wasn’t capable of serious harm until she saw the headline “BABY BASHER JAILED” ...

And the headline is quite shocking.

She went on to say that she believes that if she had the information about her partner, if it had been disclosed – her family members were coming to her saying, ‘Something’s not right with this guy.’ They knew; they instinctively knew. Yet she was in this relationship where this coercion and power was very dominant. She goes on to say:

I think what was going through my head was, I knew logically, I agreed, but I couldn’t understand why I couldn’t break free, I couldn’t break this off ...

I was so isolated from everyone and he had such a hold on me I felt like if he wasn’t present in my life I didn’t have a life.

The article goes on to say:

Samantha says Brown made her feel bad about herself and became emotionally abusive.

Behind closed doors he was controlling her and coercing her into things that were so shameful she felt she could never go to the police or anyone who she was close to about it.

And this was the case. It was coercion and control, it was that power domination of an abuser, and yet he had this horrible, terrible criminal record. She was in Victoria. He was in New South Wales when

he did these crimes, with a former girlfriend – or the ACT; I cannot quite recall, actually, but nevertheless it all played out in the Wagga courts. It was only when her friends and family were coming to her saying, ‘You’ve got to get out of this relationship,’ that she started to dig and was horrified to find this terrible, terrible headline: ‘Wagga baby basher jailed: 12-month sentence for “repugnant” act’. She said that she felt sick when she saw this article about her – well, when this article was being written – partner.

At the time and even now in Victoria, there are no resources available for victims of domestic violence or people at risk to access their partner’s criminal history. That is why we did what we did – and we spoke about Clare’s law back in 2017 for the 2018 election. I am really thrilled that the work that Cindy McLeish is doing is really getting noticed now, because it is not just those coercion laws that we need – and she has highlighted that. I mean, I have tabled the second-reading speech today. You see it in other jurisdictions: New South Wales became the first state or territory in Australia to criminalise coercive control; in Queensland in March 2021 the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce was established to examine coercive control; and the Criminal Law (Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 was passed by the Queensland Parliament. There is, in other states, now an ability for authorities to prosecute patterns of manipulative and controlling behaviour, and that is why Victoria needs to do the same, to catch up to other jurisdictions.

As I mentioned, it was the UK scheme around Clare’s law that really led the charge, and it was former UK Prime Minister Theresa May who established coercive and controlling behaviour as a criminal offence in the Serious Crime Act 2015, which saw England and Wales become the first nations to do so. So it is not without precedent. That was 10 years ago, and since that time the Liberals and the Nationals have been talking about these issues, given the government’s work that they did with the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Here is a big gap, and they have failed over a significant number of years now to really address the gap. As I said, I was talking about Clare’s law eight years ago, in 2017. Eight years ago we were providing to the Victorian public a solution around disclosure. We have brought it back, and we will do this because this government will not do it. That is what our shadow minister has said. Under a Wilson-led government we will implement this. And we will implement laws around coercion if this government, the Labor government, again fails to understand what is happening in jurisdictions in this country and what is happening in other nations.

There are far too many horrible statistics in relation to family violence. We all acknowledge that. More must be done. It has got to have a focus that is concentrating on real, practical outcomes that can actually be achieved and stop these statistics from rising. I think that it is very disappointing that the government has voted down what we have put before the Parliament in the past. It has already voted against, as I said, implementing Clare’s law, which has been in other jurisdictions like the UK for years and in other jurisdictions in this country. What we are proposing with the bill that we put forward into the Parliament – we have not fully debated it as yet – is to create a standalone offence, based on the New South Wales model, with a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment for a course of conduct including emotional, psychological, financial or physical abuse, threats, isolation and surveillance. These are the coercive powers that put too many women into that dreadful, isolated space. It is really a catch-up, as Victoria is lagging well behind other states in this area. You would think that they would be leading the way, but they are not. They are lagging. They are behind Queensland, they are behind New South Wales and they are behind other states on Clare’s law. They have really dropped the ball in this area, and I think that demonstrates another area of concern for many, many Victorians around what needs to be done.

I do want to make, again, those points around Victoria Police having attended over a hundred thousand family violence incidents. This is a 6 per cent increase on the previous year. These statistics are not getting any better, they are getting worse. We know that through COVID and the lockdowns they spiralled out of control, the number of domestic violence incidents that were occurring behind closed doors because of a whole range of reasons in lockdown, and since then it has only got worse. There is a lot that the government has responsibility for. They could be taking more practical measures to

improve outcomes for so many Victorians and to assist the police in bringing those statistics down. The police are doing all they can. A hundred thousand family violence incidents is an appalling statistic. More needs to be done in relation to going to the root cause of why this violence is occurring. We never really do that. The government talks up here, but we are not looking at the root cause of why this violence is on the increase. Why is it? Is it drug and alcohol abuse, is it mental health problems, is it financial pressures, cost-of-living pressures – what is happening here? Is it social media and this terrible perversion of what is seen to be normal for too many young people, what they see on social media. I am not blaming the government for that particular issue – that is governments at all levels. There needs to be a huge amount done in relation to those areas, because too many young people are getting caught up in what is very, very dangerous activity. They see it, and they are influenced far too easily. They need greater guidance, greater education and greater role models to say it is not okay. It is just not okay to be undertaking this appalling behaviour. I am not saying this just to young people but to anyone.

I want to again commend my colleague Cindy McLeish on the work she has done. I would hope that every member of this chamber would support this motion. It is an important motion. It needs to be done. I have to say, given we were talking about Clare's law eight years ago and nothing has been done, I do not hold my breath for the government to undertake this very important work. But I can give this assurance to this house and to the people of Victoria: a Wilson-led government will absolutely implement these reforms that need to be undertaken for the sake of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Victorians.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:31): I rise to speak on motion 1191 in Ms Crozier's name on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This motion follows the Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025, introduced by the opposition to create a new offence in relation to coercive control. That is where a person engages in a course of conduct against an intimate partner that involves abusive behaviour and intends the conduct to coerce their intimate partner to comply with the person's demands or to control them. We are concerned that this bill is a blunt instrument for a complex problem. Despite being modelled on New South Wales legislation, it does not include safeguards that are designed to mitigate unintended consequences that would harm vulnerable communities. While the motion before us today is not this bill and we do agree with encouraging this government to consider the appropriateness of a standalone offence for coercive control, how we go about this needs to be well considered.

The prevalence of family violence is deeply disturbing. Last year Victoria Police responded to 104,786 family violence incidents. That is one incident every 6 minutes – the highest number on record. The LGA with the highest rate of family violence is Casey, in my electorate. Data from the Crime Statistics Agency also shows us that family violence intervention orders are being repeatedly breached. Between July 2023 and June 2024, 2010 people alleged to have breached a family violence intervention order had previously been arrested for a breach, and a large number of those were within 30 days. Alarming, these rates are increasing. In the last six years there has been a 64 per cent increase in people repeatedly breaching family violence intervention orders.

We need to consider where we can strengthen our family violence laws in Victoria. Currently in Victoria coercive and controlling behaviour is recognised as part of the definition of 'family violence' in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008. This allows for coercive control to be addressed through family violence intervention orders, which, if breached, constitute a criminal offence. The relationship between family violence and coercive control is well established. The changes to legislation in New South Wales mentioned in this motion were prompted by a review that found coercive control was a precursor to 97 per cent of intimate partner homicides between 2000 and 2018.

Whether the creation of a standalone offence for coercive control would be more effective than the existing approach in Victoria is contentious. Several stakeholders made their position known in the 2022 consultation on the national principles to address coercive control. They were asked to consider whether these principles effectively described key issues to consider when deciding whether or how

to criminalise coercive control and the potential unintended consequences of criminalisation. At the time the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Law Institute of Victoria, Women's Legal Service Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Domestic Violence Victoria all made submissions opposing the creation of a standalone offence to criminalise coercive control. This consultation found that a focus should be placed upon shifting from the development of a specific offence to a broader legislative response to coercive control. This consultation also found that potential unintended consequences of criminalising coercive control include overincarceration, retraumatisation, avenues for manipulation and exploitation by perpetrators and reinforcing the issue of misidentification, particularly for groups of people who experience discrimination in the justice system.

In their submission the Law Institute of Victoria noted that:

Criminalisation of coercive control is likely to have disproportionate and detrimental adverse consequences for disadvantaged groups.

Research demonstrates that criminal sanctions in response to FDV may lead to victim-survivors being less willing to engage in the justice system, either due to past negative experiences with the criminal justice system or a desire to avoid incarceration or impose a criminal record on the perpetrator.

They also noted that:

As of yet, there is no evidence to suggest that introducing a standalone offence of coercive control increases women's safety outcomes or improves their access to justice.

But since this time a number of Australian jurisdictions have gone ahead to introduce a standalone offence of coercive control. Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia have all introduced the standalone offence. Meanwhile, Western Australia and the ACT have publicly committed to doing so in the future. In New South Wales, between when the legislation came into force on 1 July 2024 and 19 September 2025, they recorded 297 incidents of coercive control, but only nine charges have been laid. As of 19 September none of these charges had been tested by the courts. The three finalised in court related to two withdrawals by the prosecution and one guilty plea.

While we understand that the government is exploring making coercive control a standalone criminal offence, we agree that it is important that the work is not rushed in a way that will result in unintended consequences or the offence being underutilised, like it is in New South Wales. When New South Wales criminalised coercive control, it also put in place protective measures including but not limited to the establishment of a taskforce to provide ongoing advice on the legislation and multiple statutory reviews. We support the Victorian government considering the introduction of coercive controls in Victoria and doing so in a timely manner that considers appropriate protective measures. However, 'timely' does not mean rushed. There is a real risk that a standalone coercive control offence could end up harming more than it could help. We need to do the work to make sure it does not.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:38): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Ms Crozier's name. I understand that this is part of the Liberal-Nationals' most recent attempt to look at politicising family violence, and it is very disappointing. I note that there is also some legislation that is going to be brought by those opposite, but today this motion is about looking at, and I guess trying to undermine, this government's approach to family violence.

What I might say at the outset is that nobody has done more for family violence in Victoria than the Allan Labor government and, prior to that, the Andrews Labor government. That was because we committed to and undertook and delivered on a Royal Commission into Family Violence. That was really a watershed moment in Victoria's history, because it was a really significant deep dive and thorough look at what was going on in Victoria in terms of forms of family violence. I have to say that during the 2018 election campaign the Victorian Liberal Party did not commit to implementing all of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, yet here we are today debating a motion about coercive control. The point is that it is all very rich, isn't it, to now all of a sudden turn up and say that you believe in and support family violence reforms and looking at coercive

control having failed to show up at the relevant times and at the appropriate times. They only want to do it because it is politically expedient to do it. During the 2018 election campaign the Liberal Party was reluctant to commit to all of the 227 recommendations, citing them as a financial impost. Well, the financial impost for Victoria is the ongoing cost and harm experienced by women and children who are subject to family violence. It costs the Victorian economy, it costs people's lives and livelihoods and it does untold damage. The impacts of family violence and coercive control can be felt in family homes, and for children it is something that they continue to experience throughout their lifetimes. It has lasting effects on them, and so the impacts of it are significant.

The Allan Labor government has continued to commit to working on family violence reforms, and coercive control is no different. Coercive control is insidious, it is abusive, it is manipulative, and we stand side by side with victim-survivors of family violence and domestic violence. All of us in this chamber, no matter who we are, see what is on the news. We all see news reports of when women and children have been the victims of family violence. It is devastating. It is heartbreaking to watch, and we all feel powerless that we are unable to protect somebody in our family, neighbours or friends from the ongoing impacts of family violence; it is devastating. But there is no silver bullet to all of this. There is no one right response. There are multiple responses. You only have to look at the sorts of things that the government has been doing to ensure that women and children who are the victims of family violence can be made aware of the supports and the services that they can actually make use of to ensure that they can get the help that they need. Orange Door is just one of those services.

We have implemented every single one of the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations. One of those, as I said, is the Orange Door services – there are 37 Orange Door sites across Victoria, and they provide immediate and simple access for women escaping violence – and establishing the nation's first dedicated prevention agency, Respect Victoria. I want to thank people who work in this sector. It is a very challenging sector to work in. I have visited Orange Door locations in my electorate. I am forever impressed by the work that goes on in those services and the day-to-day stories that I have heard and seen people working with, whether it is women who are having to seek a safe house in a refuge, fleeing with their children and even with their pets. Pets are used as a tool in family violence and as a means of coercive control to make a woman stay in the home because they worry that their pets might be used or abused or in fact killed to control them. There are a myriad of ways in which abusers and perpetrators seek to control women. But the good thing is, as I said before, that this government has implemented every single recommendation of the family violence royal commission and will continue to work on making sure that women and children can be safe.

As I said earlier, those opposite talked about it being a financial impost. Well, it is not a financial impost keeping women and children safe. It is important that everybody in society has a right to feel safe and a right to live whatever their authentic life is, free from violence and intimidation. The fact is that abusers and perpetrators use these sorts of measures to control women's behaviour. We still have work to do. We still have to get to the root cause as to why people and men in particular – the majority of these people who inflict family violence on women are men – feel they need to exert such coercive control measures. That is something that will take a long time to understand, and the work will continue on that. Some of that lies with men as well and getting them to take responsibility for their behaviour and work on their behaviour.

Significantly, the Allan Labor government will do what it takes to protect victim-survivors of family violence and to hold perpetrators to account. We will legislate to criminalise coercive control next year, but we will do it hand in hand with the family violence support sector and victim-survivors. We will get it right for Victorians and for Victoria. We will not copy and paste from other jurisdictions which are completely unlike our own. We have our own unique circumstances here in Victoria that we must make sure we get right, and we must make sure we have at the centre of that the victim-survivor experience and listening to their experiences and what they want us to do.

We also need to make sure that, as I said, the workforce that work in this sector have the right tools and the resources they need to be able to combat coercive control. This lays the necessary groundwork

in order to then put in further measures to criminalise coercive control. People, we know, with lived experience have clearly called for criminalisation of coercive control as part of a stronger system response. In December 2024 a national survey of victim-survivors of family violence found that 87.5 per cent of survey participants believed coercive control should be a criminal offence. But this government will not rush through laws, because, as I said, we want to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure we get it right, and we want to make sure that victim-survivors' experiences are at the centre of it. We are not using this for political purposes like those opposite. As I said, when the Royal Commission into Family Violence was held, those opposite did not support it. They said it was a financial impost. But now here we are in 2025, in the lead-up to the 2026 election, and what we see is political expediency, and we would expect nothing less from those opposite.

While we know this has strong support from people with lived experiences, there are concerns in the legal assistance sector and the family violence support sector around unintended consequences. We understand that, we acknowledge that and we will continue to work with those sectors to work through those issues. As I said, we cannot copy another state and their approach in what they do and what they have done. What we need to do is make sure we have the right context for Victoria and that we listen to victim-survivors in Victoria, not just copy what someone else might have said in another jurisdiction. We will make sure we take a very careful evidence-based approach that centres on lived experience and sector consultation, ensuring that any reforms strike the right balance between accountability, safety and support so we are clear that any future responses must not become another lever for perpetrators to enable them to further manipulate systems to control or harm victim-survivors. We must hold them to account. I will leave my contribution there, but the government will not oppose this motion.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:48): That was another extraordinary contribution and another example of complete doublespeak. What I heard from the member opposite was in fact that she agrees, I believe, with the motion. She agrees with the intent of the motion. She knows that this is following a lot of domestic violence. However, because it was not the government's idea, they are passing up the opportunity to act on urgent matters at the moment. Also, I will just highlight how funny it was really that the example that was used was that they are not copying other states. What I will say is I find it quite entertaining –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Terpstra is leaving the chamber – probably a good thing. She is speaking from out of her chair, and I would ask you to bring the member back to order, given she is being rather destructive to my colleague's speech here.

Sonja Terpstra: There is no point of order, Acting President, and I ask that you instruct Ms Crozier to stop disrupting the chamber.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): On the point of order, members interjecting need to do so from their place.

Renee HEATH: What I was saying was that it is very interesting, the doublespeak. Just last week the Premier literally said, 'If you want to look at some legislation with adult crime, adult time, look to Queensland.' I just thought it is worth pointing out that that is not hatred, that is just pointing out the obvious. Anyway, I rise in strong support –

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, on relevance, Queensland has nothing to do with this motion. I would ask that you bring the member back to the motion.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, Acting President, I think Ms Terpstra is misinterpreting what Dr Heath was saying. Dr Heath has every right to provide context to the motion, which she was providing an example of, which was very accurate actually.

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, there is no point of order there. Ms Crozier was debating the point. I would ask that you ask her to stop interrupting this chamber and that the debate continue uninterrupted.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): On the point of order, I find that the motion does reference other states.

Renee HEATH: I am rising today to speak in strong support of this extremely important and extremely well researched and thought-out motion. I thank Ms Crozier and Ms McLeish for the amazing work they have done. The reality is this is not a nice topic, this is not political pointscore; this is life and death for many, many Victorians. The reason is that almost 100 per cent of intimate partner and domestic homicides – almost 100 percent; 97 per cent – are preceded by coercive control.

In health we talk all the time about how we have to go upstream. If there are people having heart attacks and if there are people having health issues, there is no point just having an ambulance drag them out of the water all the time. What you have actually got to do is go upstream and build guardrails to prevent people from getting there. This is a guardrail. This is something that will protect men and women, but mostly women, in this state and that will actually recognise the emotional harm and torment that a lot of these people are dealing with.

I tell you what, when almost 100 per cent of intimate partner and domestic homicides are preceded by coercive control, it is a little bit late by the time you have got there. That is a physical sign of the torment, the control and the anguish that that person has lived with but has not been able to see because it has been emotional abuse, it has been gaslighting and it has been something that is not seen on the outside. Coercive control does not show up as bruises. Coercive control does not show up as blood on the floor. Coercive control slowly chips away at the person, the actual spirit and the actual personality of who that person is. It is so destructive and it is so damaging. I am so proud of the work that our team have done on this. That is not political pointscore; it is actually important. I am so proud to be standing up.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Renee HEATH: I will just highlight the comments from Ms Terpstra, who just said I am disgraceful.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I ask you to bring the member back to the motion and to not verbal me. I did not make those comments. I ask that Dr Heath withdraw, because I am offended.

Renee HEATH: I am happy to withdraw whatever she is offended about.

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, I ask that Dr Heath withdraw, and she should do so without qualification.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Dr Heath, would you like to withdraw?

Renee HEATH: Can I just continue? I withdraw.

Sonja Terpstra: Thank you.

Renee HEATH: No worries. Here we go. It is a bit touchy in here today.

We will just go through the facts. In New South Wales a similar form of legislation was introduced in 2024 – as of 1 July last year coercive control is now a criminal offence, carrying a maximum jail term of seven years imprisonment. I believe that is important. Secondly, in Queensland since 26 May 2025 coercive control is now a criminal offence, carrying a maximum penalty of up to 14 years in prison. What our laws will do is make it carry a seven-year maximum penalty. Other states, like Western Australia, are taking a phased approach to legislation and systematic reform, education and training. In 2024 Tasmania introduced two criminal offences of coercive control, being economic abuse and

emotional abuse. I think this is so important, and this is something that a progressive state like Victoria should be leading the way in. It is so embarrassing that we are lagging behind, but it is not about the embarrassment. This is about the damage that it does to Victorians, the damage that it does to families. This is going upstream. It is building safeguards around people. It is absolutely setting the tone, saying that the threshold of somebody being beaten, sometimes being killed, is just far too far; this should have been pulled up earlier, before now.

There have been quite a lot of points of order that have eaten into my time, but there are two stories that have really impacted me and made me believe so strongly in this. One of them I have spoken about before. Katie Haley was a victim of coercive control by her partner. The most dangerous time for somebody that is suffering domestic violence is just before a partner leaves. Well, she was going to leave, and her partner beat her to death with a barbell on their son's bed. He – I have spoken about it many times in this place – received 427 days off his sentence, taking him below the non-parole period, because he was locked up during COVID. This is the reality of why this legislation is important.

The second one that I want to talk about in this short amount of time is a lady in my region who was the victim for many, many years of incredible coercive control and abuse by her husband. When she finally said that she was going to leave, he doused her in petrol and lit a match. That lady, an incredible lady and somebody that has become quite a good friend of mine, if laws like this had been in place to take it upstream to protect somebody like that, would not have to live with disfigurement – not only the emotional and mental disfigurement but the physical disfigurement that she now has – because the legal threshold was far too high.

This is important legislation. I am so proud to be here supporting it. I think that it is something that we are seeing the crossbench support because they know how important it is, how vital this is. I think it follows on from the incredible work last week, and it is in line with the fact that with non-disclosure agreements the whole game has changed. This is about giving women supports that they need. It is about going upstream and making sure that behaviour is not tolerated that is just chipping away at people and destroying them as people. I am very thankful to be able to speak to this, and I commend the motion to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:58): I rise to speak on this extremely important issue of coercive control. Coercive control often refers to non-physical abuse in relationships, be it emotional or psychological abuse or be it financial or cultural abuse. However, it is outlined by Respect Victoria that it can also refer to physical or sexual forms of abuse, such as stealthing, which was made a crime by laws passed in 2022. While coercive control is primarily associated with non-physical abuse, it is well recorded that elements of coercive control are often present as a precursor to or early warning sign of violence in relationships. Often signs of coercive control can be an early phase in an escalation towards violence and towards physical and sexual abuse.

Coercive control is currently covered within family violence law under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, which includes coercive behaviour under its definition of 'family violence'. It is altogether right and proper that coercive control be considered a criminal act in this way. The Allan Labor government is, however, exploring making coercive control a standalone criminal offence. Whether we determine that current arrangements are satisfactory or whether we decide that a new piece of legislation may be required, coercive control will never be acceptable or legal here in Victoria. Making a change such as introducing a standalone offence for coercive control is not something which can be rushed on issues this important, issues this sensitive and issues that are impactful on too many people's lives. We cannot afford to rush this piece of legislation through, and we cannot afford to risk a well-intentioned but rushed and flawed piece of legislation which may carry with it unintended consequences which could undermine our government's work to combat family violence.

The fight against family violence is a necessary and an important one and one that all of us here in this chamber are united in. On issues like this it is appropriate that the opposition puts forward a motion so

that we have a chance to debate it. On issues like this one those opposite have an important contribution to make, as do members of the crossbench. Whilst coercive control is not inherently a gender-based problem – anybody can be abused and anybody can be an abuser, no matter their gender or what kind of relationship they are in – women are more likely than men to be victims of that sort of abuse. A 2021–22 national study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 27 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men aged over 18 had experienced violence or emotional or economic abuse by a partner. Clearly both of these figures are too high.

The Allan Labor government is committing to opposing and reducing family violence and gender-based violence at every turn. That is why we currently have a bill before the Parliament seeking to address the issue so that we can keep Victorians safe. Our bill introduces a two-year minimum term for family violence intervention orders and extends their length once the perpetrator is out of prison; ensures that kids listed on the family violence intervention order maintain the protection that they received beyond their 18th birthday; widens the definition of ‘family violence’ to include more forms of abuse, whether they are certain systems of abuse, stalking or mistreatment of animals; enables protective orders for behaviour which occurs interstate; and makes judgements on stalking offences better able to be applied in the courts. Some of these changes are simple, but they will make a serious difference for the number of people affected by family violence. They constitute only a small part of what the Allan Labor government is doing to stand by and support victim-survivors of coercive control, family violence and all forms of gender-based violence.

To give a sense of scale of the reform undertaken by this government over the last decade, when the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its final report in 2016, it made 227 recommendations about how we could transform and improve our state’s family violence services. I was not in this place at the time the report was handed down, but I was very proud to be a member of this place as a recently elected member in January 2023 when it was announced that every single one of those recommendations had been implemented. These reforms took some significant steps. They include the establishment of Respect Victoria, an organisation dedicated to preventing family violence through their work in research, informing policymakers and educating members of the public by producing evidence-based research, public campaign materials and educational resources for the use in schools and other contexts.

Respect Victoria is playing a vital role in making Victoria a safer place for women and all people affected by family violence, including coercive control. Respect Victoria is a vital organisation which seeks to drive the cultural change which is needed if we want to stamp out family violence, including instances of coercive control, for good. They also do important work engaging the public, bringing people with them and inviting them to be part of the change. We saw this, for example, in the role Respect Victoria played in the Walk Against Family Violence 2025 last week, when thousands of members of the public came out to show their solidarity with victim-survivors and their commitment to working until they have a society free from family violence. The reforms also include the establishment of the family violence information sharing scheme, better enabling accurate risk assessment and management across organisations. When we have better information our systems are able to make better decisions. They include the establishment of the specialist family violence courts, which are dedicated to improving access to justice for victim-survivors, enabling them to feel safe when they go through that process.

The royal commission made it clear that we need to invest heavily in our primary prevention systems as well as response and support systems. Our ability to respond when family violence incidents occur and our ability to support victim-survivors is one of the most important things we need to be prepared for as a state, but so too is primary prevention of the utmost importance. Preventing violence before it happens is critical for many reasons. Some people will talk about primary prevention in terms of it being good value for money. It is cheaper to prevent violence than it is to provide support and services to victim-survivors. Further, individuals who experience family violence often experience significant economic disruption in their own lives, which could have been avoided had the violence been

prevented in the first place. These people are right to talk about the issues in these terms because it is true. But family violence is not primarily an economic and financial issue. It is primarily a moral issue about how we keep Victorians safe.

Everybody deserves to be and to feel safe in this state, especially when they are in their own home. The Allan Labor government has already invested significantly in primary prevention work through Respect Victoria. We understand that violence can begin well before the impact is visible. It begins with attitudes towards gender, relationships, entitlement and respect. Coercive control thrives in environments where certain behaviours are excused or minimised. The Allan Labor government has made it clear that there is no such place for coercive attitudes in this state. Section 5 of the Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008 includes coercive behaviour in its definition of 'family violence', meaning it can already constitute a criminal offence.

We stand by victim-survivors of family violence and always will. Our service providers do remarkable work across the state, with Safe Steps, a 24-hour support line providing immediate, confidential assistance to those who need it. The Orange Door is a statewide family violence and wellbeing entry point that is also free and confidential and connects people with specialist support. The Orange Door was a key recommendation in the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence. It highlighted that victim-survivors were being retraumatised by being forced to tell their stories multiple times, services were fragmented and hard to access, responses were varied across the state and there was no way to assess risk or share information. The Orange Door was created to fill these services. It helps tens of thousands of Victorians every year. Its impact includes a coordinated family violence response, specialist support for children, safe housing and safety planning, behaviour change pathways and stronger collaboration between local services. It ensures that nobody has to navigate the family violence system alone. It is these services that ensure that victim-survivors are believed and supported to ensure safety is the number one priority. That is our priority in the Allan Labor government, keeping Victorians safe, reducing family violence and ensuring that victim-survivors are given dignity, support, respect and justice.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:07): I am genuinely pleased to speak today in support of this motion 1191 in Ms Crozier's name. I will start by paying tribute to the work of my colleague in the lower house the member for Eildon Cindy McLeish, who has developed this policy, and to the new Liberal leader and Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson, who has chosen to take this on as her first commitment to new legislation which Ms Crozier introduced today.

I want to speak generally about the topic of coercive control – what it is and why it matters. For too long our justice system has struggled to grapple with a central truth of domestic abuse, which is that the most damaging violence does not always leave bruises. It is not about single acts. A person, usually but not always a woman, can have their life shattered and their autonomy destroyed without a single punch being thrown. The concept of coercive control explains this. It recognises domestic abuse as a regime of domination in which one partner uses threats, humiliation, isolation, surveillance and financial imprisonment to strip the other of independence and liberty. It is not a single incident or a bad argument but an attack on a very personality. Our legal system, like others, has traditionally not understood this and for many years required a discrete incident of assault or criminal damage. To be crude, it needed victims to suffer visible injuries before society would accept that they had been harmed at all. I am very proud to support this motion and the bill that we also introduced, which thoroughly transforms that outdated model.

I want to talk in some more detail about the UK experience. At the time it was introduced, driven by Conservative Home Secretary and later Prime Minister Theresa May, various jurisdictions, including the UK, had previously addressed limited aspects of the problem. Tasmania had criminalised emotional and economic abuse, for instance, and the fact of long-term psychological injury was recognised in a number of systems. However, those reforms were generally focused on individual elements, such as emotional distress, or isolated acts, like threats or withholding financial support. The UK's 2015 law made a conceptual leap. For the first time in a common-law jurisdiction, Parliament

embedded the full sociological theory of coercive control into law. The landmark offence under section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 shifted the focus from isolated incidents to the systematic pattern of behaviour that creates what survivors call invisible chains. The offence recognises ongoing behaviour rather than snapshots in time. It treats the removal of a person's liberty as a core harm and acknowledges the autonomy itself as a legal interest worthy of protection. It captures conduct that aims to make the victim subordinate and dependent by controlling their movement, communication, financial resources, household activity and personal relationships.

Statutory guidance in the UK identifies common examples. These include isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their calls and movements by phone tracking or spyware; restricting access to food, sleep or medical care; controlling finances and income; creating debt in the victim's name; threatening to expose private information; threatening children or pets; preventing education or work; micromanaging daily tasks and personal experience; gaslighting; and enforced humiliation or sexual degradation. These are not mere disagreements; they all add up to nothing short of captivity. Professor Evan Stark, whose work was heavily leaned upon, described coercive control in 2007 as a strategic course of oppressive conduct that creates invisible chains which are at least as coercive as physical abuse.

The 2015 law finally gave a name and a crime to what had previously been invisible and very hard to prosecute. It shifted the entire paradigm of domestic abuse from 'Did he hit her?' to 'Is she free?' I know from people in the UK that it was not just run-of-the-mill legislation discussed in Parliament then confined to the police and courts; it did actually change the way people thought about domestic violence and abuse. There was enormous coverage on TV and radio and in the media, and not just on the news programs. It became a significant subject of public debate and was even featured as a storyline in a long-running radio drama. The reason this change was needed is because previous laws failed victims. Unfortunately, that remains the case in Victoria. Historically, offences have tended to rely on incident-based proof. Assault often implies physical force, harassment requires overt threats and stalking is usually pursued after separation. Coercive control often begins early in a relationship and escalates long before any physical injury occurs and sometimes without any physical injury at all. Police attending a household might see no bruising and conclude that nothing criminal has occurred. Victims have often been expected to produce tangible evidence: photographs of injuries or medical records or witnesses. But how do you prove you have a bank account you are not allowed to access? How can police or a court see constant fear or intimidation? There have also been barriers, including practical and procedural time limits. Charges for offences might need to be laid within a few months, but victims trapped in controlling relationships may be isolated for years before they can find help.

The UK law and now our bill that has been introduced and is the purpose of this motion recognise that harm is cumulative, patterns matter and, in a course of conduct which dominates and deprives a partner, liberty matters. We have the opportunity here to give the police the ability to intervene before the final crisis, be that hospitalisation or worse. The member for Eildon's work recognises that forced dependency is a form of human rights abuse. It brings the law into alignment with what frontline workers and survivors have argued for decades, which is that domestic abuse is not about anger or tempers but about power. Victoria cannot afford to lag behind. We must ensure our legal system reflects the fact that freedom, dignity and independence are not luxuries but an essential part of life, and deprivation of them is every bit as damaging as specific physical harm.

Of course implementation will matter. Police training must be thorough. Community awareness must be strengthened. Support services must be properly funded. These are reasons to commit ourselves to doing this well, not reasons to delay protection that is already overdue. Prosecutions in the UK began slowly but have increased steadily and are now a vital tool for police and prosecutors.

Coercive control seeks to remove a person's will and replace it with the perpetrator's. It is the theft of liberty, which is perhaps the oldest crime in the book. Our law should stand with those whose lives are being stolen in silence. This bill and this motion represent progress. They reflect a more accurate understanding of domestic abuse. They show that Parliament is prepared to listen, to learn and to

protect those who have had their voices suppressed by fear for far too long. I urge everyone to support the motion.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:16): I rise to speak on Ms Crozier's motion before the house today. This is an important motion on an undeniably serious topic. Family violence is one of the gravest challenges facing our state. Victoria Police respond to a family violence incident every 6 minutes. More than 100,000 incidents were attended in the last year, which is a 6 per cent increase.

Coercive control is insidious, manipulative and abusive, and we stand with every victim-survivor who has been forced to live under that shadow. Work is already underway alongside the sector to strengthen our response to coercive control so it will become a standalone criminal offence in this state. This work must be done carefully. It must be done hand in hand with the family violence sector and with the people with lived experience, and it must not create unintended consequences that could harm the very people we are here to protect. We do not support their bill because it is rushed, it is underdone and it is unfit for passage. It is not informed by consultation with the Victorian sector, and we have no assurances that it would not produce dangerous unintended consequences.

I have had a moment to look at the other jurisdictions to see how their processes have gone when implementing similar proposals. In New South Wales they began consultations in October 2020. They introduced their reforms two years later, in November 2022. Queensland began consultations in 2021 and introduced reforms 2½ years later in October 2023. Can I take the time to acknowledge the work of Shannon Fentiman in Queensland, who I know has done remarkable work in this space. That is what a considered, careful consultative process looks like. I want to say that the Allan Labor government will always do what it takes to protect victim-survivors and hold perpetrators to account. We will legislate to criminalise coercive control next year, but we will do it properly. We will do it hand in hand with the sector.

I have got to take some time to actually reflect on the systems that we have here in Victoria, having been involved before life in this place in the development of the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework, which is incredibly important; the information-sharing reforms; and the industry taskforce, which I sat on as a member for, I think, around 18 months, which really was a part of the comprehensive system that leads the nation when it comes to our response to family violence. I was only reflecting last week about my work representing one of the service providers, a peak body in the Royal Commission into Family Violence work.

This is a state that has implemented every single recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence – 227 reforms that have fundamentally reshaped our justice system, our service system and our community understanding of family violence. We have opened 37 Orange Doors across the state. We have established Respect Victoria, the nation's first dedicated prevention agency, and we will continue to lead the country in reform and investment. Victim-survivors continue to call for coercive control to be criminalised – 87.5 per cent of participants in a December 2024 national survey supported this, but the same survey and sector leaders have also raised concerns about unintended consequences, which remain unanswered by those opposite. We will get this right.

I would like to turn to another piece of crucial work before the Parliament, and that is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025 – the women's safety bill. The government does not just stand with victim-survivors; we work alongside them. The bill that I just mentioned includes reform shaped directly by people with lived experience. It includes misidentification of victims. It strengthens protections, and it has been built through extensive consultation with victim-survivors, Victoria Police, the courts, community legal centres, Djirra, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, family violence peaks and others, some of which I have had a long-term partnership and affiliation with. It is true that this is what serious, careful law reform looks like. Victoria leads the nation in preventing violence against women and girls not by accident but because Labor governments have made the investments and done the work. We have invested \$108 million through the women's safety package, including more case management, a co-responder

model with Victoria Police and the Salvation Army and a landmark perpetrator study to identify drivers of violence and design stronger interventions. We have delivered a further \$172 million in investment, including \$80 million to support victim-survivors, \$40 million to embed data-driven risk management, \$41 million for men's behaviour change programs, \$27 million for sexual assault services and \$24 million for family violence legal services. There are 13 specialist family violence courts operating, with the 14th opening in Wyndham thanks to a \$155 million investment. These are not guesses; they are not rushed work. These are real reforms backed by real investment, built over a decade and grounded very much in the lived experience of victim-survivors.

We support the wording of this motion, but the government will not be rushed into flawed, dangerous lawmaking. It is true that coercive control is serious and that law reform must be taken seriously. We will legislate to criminalise coercive control, and we will do it in a way that protects victim-survivors, working with Victorian frameworks and considering the enormous efforts and changes that have already come into our system through the family violence royal commission. We rebuilt the system after that royal commission, invested billions and have reformed every part in our response, and we continue to do the work carefully, responsibly and always with the safety of women and children at the very centre. This is our commitment and this is why this government will not oppose the motion, but certainly we will look at the bill when it comes before the house and likely reject it. I leave my comments there.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:23): I too rise in support of the motion that has been put forward by my colleague Ms Crozier:

That this house:

- (1) recognises the urgent need for strengthened family violence laws in Victoria, with Victoria Police responding to one family violence incident every 6 minutes –

and I must say that some of my region is known for some of the highest call-outs for family violence –

(2) notes that:

- (a) Victoria Police attended over 100,000 family violence incidents in 2023–24, a 6 per cent increase from the previous year –

again, I have to note that in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region our family violence incidence is actually higher than, in many cases, the state average and the national average –

- (b) coercive control, which is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to control someone within a relationship through manipulation, pressure and fear needs to be recognised as a criminal offence in its own right –

and this is because when people use coercive control it limits the ability of the partner who is being coerced and abused in this way to leave, to have any sense of freedom, to find ways to move out of their situation; it actually takes away their thinking powers, their opportunity to have those individual freedoms and individual rights, which of course is one of the values of the Liberal Party, to have those individual rights –

- (c) other Australian jurisdictions such as New South Wales and Queensland have already acted to outlaw coercive control ...

Indeed they had to, because as we know, there have been a number of incidents. If we look at the domestic violence situation with the murder of Brisbane woman Hannah Clarke and her children Aaliyah, Trey and Lailanah, this should never have happened. If perhaps the laws had been a bit tighter and a bit more detailed, we would have had a situation where she might still be alive today. Certainly Victoria has its own nuances and its own problems, where we have situations too which are completely spiralling out of control, and not just with men against women but also in other ways where we need to see restrictions put in place. It further states:

- (3) further notes the government has already voted against implementing Clare's law, a domestic violence disclosure scheme 12 months ago; and

- (4) demands that the government urgently expedite the passage of coercive control laws for Victoria.

I rise to speak in favour of this motion, knowing full well that in the Legislative Assembly one of our colleagues has brought a bill to the house. I was interested to hear Ms Terpstra from the other side saying, 'How dare the coalition stand up for these rights.' Well, of course we are going to stand up for these rights. We are going to stand up for women. We are going to stand up for men. We are going to stand up for people who are being abused, and we are certainly going to stand up for them in the situation of coercive control. To think, once again, that because it is not the government's bill, because they did not propose it, because they have not written it, we now have to wait until next year for coercive control to come in as a bill that they want to have and that is not rushed. Well, nothing is being rushed in this government. They have been in for three years, and we are still waiting for them to get things under control.

The Liberals and Nationals have announced that we will criminalise coercive control through the Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025, which is why we put that forward as an option for the Legislative Assembly. But of course in their arrogance they are not going to listen because it is not their idea. We argue that this will move Victoria from an incident-based approach to one that criminalises ongoing abusive and patterned behaviour.

What I do want to also note is the incredible need for reform in this area – the need for education, the need for people to have the opportunity to learn other patterns of behaviour. You do not change patterns of behaviour simply by locking somebody up. We do need to look at where these patterns of behaviour come from. In some cases coercive control may be generational. Reform needs to take place in the form of actually looking at the causes of it and finding ways to allow people to turn around their lives. It is being done around the world where they are looking at ways to reform and to educate in order to bring about change. If it is illegal – sure, there have to be consequences for actions. But in a situation like this, there are also needs to be opportunity for reform that allows people to turn their lives around.

The legislation that we had down in the Legislative Assembly was put together to provide a framework for those living in fear to understand what is happening, to know that there are consequences and to have that sense of assurance so that we can actually have a drive for cultural change in Victoria. Liberal–Nationals believe that individual people should have the right to control their own behaviours and that it is not okay to continually threaten, degrade, gaslight or force a partner to live in fear. It is not okay to isolate someone from family and friends. It is not okay to monitor their every activity, their phone calls, their emails or where they go. Liberals and Nationals plan to empower at-risk Victorians. We want to help families and friends understand coercive control and put power back in the hands of Victorians to keep people safe, particularly women. Noble words have to be matched with noble actions and effective actions.

Criminalising coercive control is not simple; it is complex. Evidence is difficult to gather, behaviours are subtle and cumulative, and victims often struggle to identify abuse until it escalates. Without proper resourcing, training and cultural change within police and courts, we cannot make this happen. We have the evidence to support our stance. The Crime Statistics Agency's latest crime data for the year ending June 2025 shows family violence serious assault instances increased by 23.35 per cent from June 2024. Breaches of family violence orders had also increased from June 2024 to June 2025 by 16.68 per cent. Victim reports of stalking, harassment and threatening behaviours towards females increased from 4878 cases in 2024 to 5422 cases in 2025, and last year was the first time that family violence incident call-outs to police surpassed 100,000.

In Victoria coercive control is problematic because it is addressed through existing family violence laws. It is defined as a pattern of behaviour intended to dominate and control another person, undermining their freedom and independence. Victoria Police and Respect Victoria confirm that coercive control is often the underlying reason for family violence and can be addressed by the existing

legal framework. Again I say here is an opportunity for reform and for education, but we cannot continue to also ignore these horrific facts.

There are many stories, but we only need to think back to the story of Hannah Clarke, which I mentioned earlier, in Queensland in 2020, when Ms Clarke and her three young children were set alight by her estranged husband. He reportedly controlled, abused, stalked and killed his estranged wife and their children and spent days planning the attack. An inquest found that he was a master of manipulation and that while there had been missed opportunities to hold him accountable and failures by all agencies to recognise the extreme risk he posed to Clarke and her children. Police had handled the situation appropriately. We cannot forget this tragic case. New evidence, according to the *Guardian* on 17 November this year, argues that police made potentially critical mistakes in the months before her murder and they failed to log disclosures of strangulation and stalking, downgrading serious complaints and even coaching her abuser on how to challenge protection orders.

We know that New South Wales as well has taken a more careful approach and that Queensland has had to change their legislation. But even with New South Wales, Victoria cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes. We realise that laws must be accompanied by specialist training for police and courts; investment in victim support services, housing and counselling; and clear messaging so victims and families and communities understand coercive control and know where to turn.

Coercive control must be confronted, and the Liberals and Nationals take this very seriously. We must ensure our messaging is clear, our implementation is careful and our investment in frontline services is real. We need to legislate for protection of those who need it most, and the statistics support this. We feel that this step in legislation will empower those affected, particularly across different populations and ethnic groups where it is prevalent.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:33): I want to thank Ms Crozier for raising a really important issue. It is a really important issue for women and for our whole society. Family violence is not only a crime problem, though. It is shaped by gender inequality, by misogyny and by attitudes that minimise or excuse violent behaviour or even exclude women. I think we all agree on that. It is not possible to talk about coercive control without addressing the power dynamic from a gendered perspective. This motion is framed so narrowly that it completely fails to acknowledge, much less address, these underlying causes of coercive control. The motion does not even have the word 'women' in it. The reality is that the causes of family violence, including coercive control, are systemic, and the solutions must also be systemic. Yes, criminalisation of this behaviour is one aspect of the response, and our government will legislate next year. But on its own, and particularly as drafted by those across the chamber, it will not work.

I want to acknowledge Ms Payne, who mentioned that really what we see is a blunt instrument for a complex problem. And that is exactly what I am saying – I agree. I will give three examples of complexities. One of the examples of coercion is isolation: cutting off contact with friends, family or support systems. How are you going to identify that? What legal instrument will not only identify that problem but also criminalise that behaviour? Monitoring: checking phone messages, emails or social media, or tracking your whereabouts through devices or apps – what specific legal instruments will be used, and what permissions will be given to invade the privacy of a person who is innocent until proven guilty to identify that that is actually happening? There is no mention of that from those opposite at all. Again, there is no depth to the mechanisms recommended in this motion. Financial coercive control: limiting access to money, preventing you from working or taking out loans in your name – there is nothing in this legislation from those opposite telling us how to deal with that. How will we be identifying those behaviours? And how will we differentiate between that and a joint account that looks exactly the same when you look at the figures?

These are the complexities that show that there is not really that much commitment. Those on the other side of the chamber have consistently failed to commit to the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence but also other priorities around gender, and they have

a long record of threatening to cut family violence services if they make it into government. It was a member for Southern Metropolitan, the Shadow Minister for Health, who said the Liberal Party would consider the financial impost of the recommendations of the royal commission. You might as well say, 'We can't afford equality for women.' Or you could say, 'We will do equality for women if we can afford it.' Keeping women and children safe is not a financial impost. It is the right thing to do. Women who are safe and respected thrive at work, thrive at school and thrive at home. These are just a couple of short examples in the very brief time that I have scored this afternoon on a topic that I am very interested in. I would like to see a lot more detail, which to me would demonstrate a lot more commitment to this issue rather than the politicising of women's horrific experiences.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:37): I have been listening to this debate, and there have been some quite extraordinary contributions and outbursts during the course of it. There were accusations of politicisation. It is not; it is about wanting practical measures that will address these issues. As I have said, I have been speaking to victims for many years, as has my colleague Cindy McLeish, who has been doing the work. I find it extraordinary that the government are quite testy on this issue because they have failed to introduce legislation that will address the very issues we are talking about: coercive power, which has terrible impacts on domestic violence victims and sufferers, and the issues I mentioned around Clare's law. They have had years and years and years to do this, and they are finally telling Victorians, 'Trust us, we'll get there. We're doing it.' Well, it has been 10 years, and there are issues.

I had a terrific relationship with the former and late Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence Fiona Richardson. She was very good in her acknowledgement of the importance of this work and would consult regularly with me, and I was very grateful for her contributions and her commitment to this issue. There were problems with the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It was a royal commission that needed to do a lot of things. There were a lot of questions to be asked around that time, and I make no apology for doing so – no apology whatsoever. What the Liberals and Nationals are interested in is getting practical outcomes, and that is what this motion is about and what the bill that Ms McLeish and I have introduced into the Parliament is looking towards: practical outcomes and measures that will make a difference and save lives and assist with bringing the statistics down.

I am pleased that the government is supporting this motion. That is a start. They have acknowledged the work that we are doing here, even though they were pretty picky around the edges, saying it does not mention women or other little bits and pieces. That is just what they do. They are churlish. They zone in on one little thing. Obviously some of them who did contribute were not listening to what I said. They obviously had no interest in what I was saying. They were probably too interested – which is fair enough – and focused on upstairs and on what was happening in question time. But nevertheless this was an important debate on the issues we raised.

To say that the opposition has not done the consultation or spoken to anyone about it – I can guarantee that Cindy McLeish has done more consultation on this than probably many people within the government and probably many people sitting around in cabinet in order to understand the issue. She has undertaken consultation and spoken to international experts where this legislation is in place. She understands exactly what is required, and she has taken on board those issues that they have provided back to her. She has spoken to dozens of victims, as did I when I was in the role. Understanding the implications and the impacts of failures in the law to protect and how to improve it – that is what we were doing and that is what we will continue to seek to do. She has spoken to service providers and legislators in other states, so to say that she has not done the work is grossly unfair and quite frankly wrong.

Here we had many members of the government saying we are politicising this issue. No, we are not. We are bringing practical solutions to the Parliament. That is our role. That is what this is about. Yet, to go to Ms Bath's point again, it has been a churlish pointscoreing implication, almost saying, 'What would you know?' The arrogance of the government in saying to us on this side, 'What would you

know?’ Well, there are members on this side that, unfortunately, know only too well how difficult it is to be a victim of family violence and to be subjected to that.

I say again to all members of the government: thank you for supporting this motion. It is an important motion, which you acknowledged, and it is something that should have been done a long time ago. Ten years is a long time of warning after warning. The issues were there. They failed to do it. I commend the motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Council’s amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad) (15:43): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Bus Safety Act 2009**, the **Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017** and the **Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983** and for other purposes’ the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Motions

Bushfire preparedness

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:43): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes with great concern that Victoria remains inadequately prepared for the forthcoming bushfire season, with excessive forest fuel loads and insufficient mitigation works;
- (2) acknowledges that the Victorian bushfires royal commission recommended the annual fuel reduction of at least five per cent of public forest area, yet the government’s current program achieves on average only 1.5 per cent per year;
- (3) further notes that:
 - (a) Forest Fire Management Victoria has:
 - (i) completed only 67 per cent of planned fuel reduction and 26 per cent of priority works over the past two years;
 - (ii) expended over \$1.1 billion above budget in nine years, with only 5 per cent of expenditure directed to direct fuel reduction activities;
 - (iii) grounded a significant proportion of its firefighting fleet at the commencement of the 2025–26 fire season;
 - (b) over the past 18 years, more than 60 per cent of Victoria’s mature forest has been lost to bushfire, much of which could have been prevented through effective mitigation and early intervention; and
- (4) calls on the Allan government to protect life, property, flora and fauna from preventable bushfire disasters.

This is a very serious and significant motion. I am sure all in this house understand to a greater or lesser degree about the impact of out-of-control bushfires on our fair state. In fact our fair state has been dealt the blow of significant bushfire impacts over the last 20 years. But indeed even as far back as the 1939 bushfires they have had a devastating impact not only on human life but also on our landscape, our forests, our flora and fauna, our stock, our humans and our infrastructure. So it is in this context that I want to raise this debate in this house at the start of December and on the cusp of the 2025–26 bushfire season. The seasonal summer bushfire outlook for 2025–26 has been alerted as a high-fire risk season with warmer than average summers, so we are going to expect a hot summer. We have seen that there have been significant mild and wet winters. The ultimate issue is that bushfires

flourish on, expand on and create intensity on fuel load, and it is something that I am going to spend time addressing today. Because of the topography of Victoria that exists – we have hills, we have ravines, we have grasslands and we have forests and plains – and the weather that is coming, government cannot do anything about the weather in the short term, nor that much in the long term. But what the government can do, the lever that is within control of a state government, is manage the amount of fuel load. It is a significant burden on the state to mitigate bushfires, but prevention has to be better than cure. Prevention, forward planning, preparation and mitigation prior to a bushfire season, through mosaic fuel reduction, has to be the way forward, because we have seen – and I will put on record some statistics – that over the years billions of dollars have been spent attempting to suppress out-of-control bushfires that could have and potentially should have been reduced to a smaller intensity and therefore smaller impact fires had there been preparation made, certainly in the last 10 years.

Everyone knows that bushfire in the landscape is a natural phenomenon of Australia and Victoria. We know that our eucalypt forests have grown up because of bushfires or ignition from back in the day – it would have been over thousands and thousands of years – from lightning strikes. Of course if you read the book by Bill Gammage *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, that academic has read, researched and investigated the early, I will say, explorers, early British colonialists, and the assessment that he made was that our traditional owners, our Aboriginal Australians, First Nations people, cultivated and used fire as a management tool to create expansive grasslands so that the animals that they used for feed and the herbs and medicines that they used flourished. They were managers of this land. Of course settlement disrupted that. However, if we go forward 200 years, governments need to look backwards and see how those cultural burns were done, and how the mountain cattlemen did pastoral burns as well, and learn from this. There is a plethora – you only need to go out and google it, and you will find firestick ecology written about in great detail.

I am not fool enough to think that we can just snap our fingers and go to that philosophy and put it into practice, but I firmly believe and the Liberals and Nationals know that you can walk and chew gum. This government should be and has not been doing fuel mitigation burns as recommended in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendation 56, which prescribed 5 per cent on an ongoing basis for fuel reduction, and that could be through burns or through mechanical reduction. What this government has forgotten to do – it does a lot of lip-service – is embrace that philosophy. That philosophy that was borne out of the bushfire royal commission came from experts, witnesses and people who lived and worked in bushfire zones. Foresters, scientists and traditional owners gave evidence, and that was the target that they set, and what the government has not done over the last 10 years is provide that level of focus and action.

It is okay to have a policy, and the policy that the government introduced in 2015 was Safer Together. If you go out to my region, Eastern Victoria, and talk to a lot of locals down there in the various beautiful towns, particularly close to forests, they will tell you what they think of Safer Together. They think certainly it is ‘unsafely together’, and I will go into that in a little bit more detail. But what we see today at the start of a fire season is a government that is not prepared. We see a seasonal bushfire outlook of high risk, heightened risk and high fuel loads. And that is not a statement from me; go and look it up on the website. That is coming directly from a commission that deals with Australia and New Zealand. There is a website, and very sadly, right across from the western side of Victoria to central, central north and over to the south and west of Gippsland, it is red. It is on high fire danger alert.

What the government does with this Safer Together policy is – there is always devil in the detail and statistics – it takes fuel reduction at a district level, at a regional level and at a state level and then averages it out, so it can say that it is actually doing the work for its target. I challenge that – it is a flawed target – but it says that it is meeting its targets. But if we drill down to areas, we see that in the Grampians it is not meeting these targets; in Port Phillip, basically all of the city area, it is not meeting those targets; in Latrobe district it is not meeting targets; and in the Midlands district it is not meeting targets. I drove through the Yarra Valley recently a number of times when I was tripping around the

state. There is a lot of fuel load in the Yarra Valley and of course in the Ovens Valley as well and in Gippsland, as I have said.

When Victoria experiences these fires – 1.5 million hectares were incinerated in 2019–20 – there is nothing more wholesome and heartwarming than a community that rallies under stress, that rallies in crisis. But we should not be putting these communities under this level of stress. We see the CFA, we see first responders and we see all manner of agencies, both government and volunteer agencies, come to the fore, and we really are at our best. One of the heartbreaking things that I saw during the 2020 fires was authorised officers going out with rifles on their backs, getting flown out to Mallacoota to shoot kangaroos that were maimed through this inferno. That is not saving either our flora or our fauna, and I put it to the government that it needs to be doing more.

If I go to some of the attributes in this motion and we look at, as I have said, the bushfire royal commission, I have put some questions in this house in adjournment debates and in questions on notice to the Minister for Environment, and one that has come back recently to me – it is a public document – states:

Over the past 10 years, an average of 100,700 hectares per year has been treated through planned burning ...

And then it goes on:

Additionally, an average of 15,000 hectares per year ... has been treated mechanically.

If we average that out into the total landscape, that comes to below 1.5 per cent of public forested area that has been treated, well below that 5 per cent of mosaic burns that was recommended by the bushfire royal commission.

The other thing I just want to touch on is this idea of residual risk, because it is a very strange concept. I even asked a gentleman who was one of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) – then known as the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning – staff who actually engaged in this when he was working for the department, and he said it is so confusing – many people get confused. The average – 70 per cent – residual risk is only 30 per cent below catastrophic levels. There is a definition for that – but catastrophic levels. This is calculated – and this is the clincher – after including area burnt by high-intensity wildfires. I have spoken about the 1.5 million hectares in the east and north-east of this state in 2019–20. That area that has been burnt out the government use in their calculations to meet their targets about saving Victorians and community. I challenge the government that this is certainly a flawed system and it needs to be reworked.

I also want to provide some context around point 3(a), that Forest Fire Management Victoria has completed only 67 per cent of planned burns and 26 per cent of priority burns over the last two years. When I was looking at this document and working through this document I was looking at the previous years in the Parks Victoria and DEECA reports. This latest one has just been dumped and is not in my calculations, but the theme is still there and the reality is still there: that Forest Fire Management has a poor track record on bushfire mitigation and fire control and that over the last few years only 67 per cent of its planned burns and a mere 26 of its priority planned burns have been conducted. As I have said, Yarra, Latrobe, Midlands, Ovens and metropolitan Melbourne are the most significantly affected. What we also know is that FFMV, Forest Fire Management Victoria, under the department of environment, spends a significant amount on fire suppression and disaster recovery. If you drill down into the fine weeds of the report, it only is actually spending about 5 per cent on actual fuel reduction, which is a key to bushfire mitigation.

If you couple that with other research that I have done in my time, the Liberals and Nationals are very concerned that, if you look at the stats and go in and drill down and see the management, there are overwhelmingly more managers and more executives, receiving about 70 per cent of the pay of income overall for that section of the department – 70 per cent of people working as a manager or an executive. Flip that, and under 30 per cent are field rangers, field officers, boots on the ground. We certainly feel and are highly concerned that this again reflects a citycentric, centralised decision-

making philosophy rather than devolving the experience out into the regions and working in the department but with community. I will tell you many stories of frustrated citizens that have spoken to me about how it is not working. People are getting cut and hours are getting cut in the department. There is not that local content knowledge.

We argue about bespoke understandings in this place. The government even argues about being aware of what is happening in community. One of the best ways to find out what is happening in terms of bushfire mitigation and protecting our communities and the forests that surround them is to go out to those regions and talk to the experts that have been either working for the department for many years or in the CFA, which has had more constraints put on it. Victorians have seen higher taxes in terms of the emergency services levy. That is not all going to CFA or SES. Overwhelmingly it is for consolidated revenue, which once upon a time was for Emergency Management Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria and the like. We are seeing higher taxes on regional people, including CFA, including farmers, including anyone that owns a business or a house. We are seeing that happening, but we are not seeing the on-the-ground product, which should be bushfire mitigation.

I may be sounding like I am harping on, but in 2019 on 19 December I went to Orbost and I sat with people. One of them was a former department worker who had worked for the government over many different governments, who sat there – a very well respected person – and said, ‘Melina, I can tell you they got the map out and they said the Snowy River fire that occurred in the Snowy River through lightning strikes was let burn through uphill and down dale.’ If there had have been better tracks open, mitigation activity and more patchwork burns – they sat there with a forester, who still had a job at that stage, who had put his life on the line when it came through – it would not have burnt with such intensity all the way down to Mallacoota and in its place taken five lives, destroyed hundreds of buildings and ruined people’s lives. I do not shirk away from the Liberals or Nationals standing up for this issue and putting on the record that more needs to be done.

One of these dot points speaks to the significant portion of the fire fleet that is grounded. I have spoken about this. The Liberals and Nationals have spoken about this at length. We have got 290 G-Wagons and 59 Unimogs that are off the road, that are grounded. This government purchased them for \$32 million eight or so years ago. There were structural defects in them; the government has taken them off. How many and what that meant we tried to ask in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day. We were shut down on that. I have put questions on notice. Victorians deserve to understand what is happening to our firefighting fleet. They deserve to understand how this government is begging New South Wales and South Australia for vehicles to backfill our loss. It also said to the CFA, ‘Listen, CFA, we might need some of your old and aged trucks,’ which are not being replaced at nearly a fast enough rate. You can hear about all the wonderful things the government is supposedly doing, but if you go and talk to the VFBV, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, they will tell you of the reality, of the need to replace ageing trucks so old that they could get plates for vintage cars. This is an indictment on the government – I do put my serious concern.

The other thing that is really, really important about this is that our forests are fragile. I give the context of the alpine forests in those fires that came along around 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 – those sorts of fires up in the alpine region. Alpine ash is a beautiful substance. It was used for hardwood of course, but no longer. What these prolific and returning fires do is that they interrupt the life cycle of mountain ash. Mountain ash need about 15 to 20 years to grow so that they can actually flower and produce seed that can then go and be used for further development. There needs to be a whole lot of work done on seed storage and protection. This government needs to take this seriously.

I call on the Allan government to protect life and property and flora and fauna from preventable bushfire disasters. I am not saying in any way that bushfire disasters are not going to happen. I understand that fire is in the landscape; it will be in our landscape. But what this government can do is reduce the intensity, reduce the impact and start to protect some of that life and property and flora and fauna, because we cannot cope with another season that we saw in the west, in the Grampians. It

is too heartbreaking to cope with these massive megafires that exist in eastern Victoria and through the north. I commend this motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:03): I rise to speak on the motion today that has been put by Ms Bath, and in doing so I acknowledge the incredible importance of this issue. In fact I quite appreciate the opportunity that Ms Bath has given this chamber to discuss what is a significant issue facing this state, with the latest data in from the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council showing large parts of central, southern and western Victoria at increased fire risk for this coming season.

However, I will not be supporting the motion that Ms Bath has put forward today, because while I acknowledge her sincerity and her passion for this issue, I am very much concerned that what she stated to the house is not the factual state of affairs. Notably almost the very first line refers to the preparation and how adequate it is – that is not the case. We have had repeated advice from the chief fire officer, who has assured the government that Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) are fully prepared to fight fires right now. We have had some unseasonable rain across much of this part of Victoria. That is obviously a bit of a double-edged sword when it comes to fire. When it comes to this time of year, we want the ground to dampen, but we also do not want to be having too much vegetation that can dry out when the weather changes. We do have that advice from the chief fire officer that Victoria is prepared right now and is as prepared as we reasonably can be. I do want to correct the record firstly in that respect. This is an important issue for us to be discussing. We should be discussing it, but it is all the more important that we discuss it soberly and stay as close to the facts as possible.

Indeed on that note I would also like to touch on another remark that Ms Bath made in her contribution in relation to the G-Wagon fleet. I understand that this has been a source of much discussion and a big topic of conversation and a topic of concern for many. Ms Bath indicated to the chamber that they are all out of service. That is simply not correct. I can confirm that the majority of G-Wagons are back and fully operational and are ready to go right now. The investments that this government has been making, specifically with the G-Wagons, but more broadly – which I will be happy to go into, time permitting, shortly – into FFMVic, just as investments have been made into the CFA and FRV, and indeed the SES, which is an important emergency service as well, are ensuring that our fire services are as fully equipped and prepared as they possibly can be. We have that advice from the chief fire officer saying that we are as prepared as we can be.

Whilst I welcome the opportunity to debate this, I really, really would hope that members opposite would not use this as a political ploy to try and have a go at the government, because this is a serious issue. I know members across the chamber agree on the severity of this issue. We have all, directly or indirectly, felt the consequences of some of the horrific fire seasons we have had, whether it was the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20 or whether it was Black Saturday of 2009. I vividly recall, in fact, I was on my learners, driving back from the city on Black Saturday on the Monash Freeway, and you could not see the sky through Narre Warren because of the black smoke coming over Gippsland. To be overtaken by 20 fire trucks and of course to later find out that family members had to evacuate at the last minute from their property in West Gippsland – fortunately, they and their house were spared. These are the stories we all have, whether direct or indirect, in this place. It is an important issue, and it is an important for us to be as accurate as we can be. I do note the investment that has been made into FFMVic in particular. We know they have currently over 1700 total vehicles and heavy machinery ready to be deployed, as well as 1500 personnel, again, available right now. This is because of the investments that this government has been making consistently over the 10-year period to FFMVic.

More broadly, we know that whether our firefighters are in green or in yellow or in orange, we are giving them the resources that they need, and we will continue to do so. I will say that the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund is a very big part of that, providing not only that enhanced funding model towards the CFA but, for the first time, a clear, sustainable funding model for the SES as well. Despite other misinformation that has been put out by Liberal and National party members on the

ESVF, we know – and we had it confirmed indeed in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee just last week – that each of these agencies have seen no cuts, despite what those opposite have said. We are seeing increases in investment in FFMVic, in CFA and in FRV.

We know that planned burning is an important part of bushfire management in this state, and we do of course take a risk-based approach to bushfire management, incorporating in those recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. Planned burning is an essential component of reducing that risk, and there is a statewide risk-based target to design, deliver and monitor the effectiveness of the planned burning program on public land in reducing fuel-driven bushfire risk to human life and to residential property. The approach has been repeatedly reviewed by experts in inquiries and consistently been found to be a leading practice in Australia and indeed internationally. We know that the previous 5 per cent target recommended by the royal commission was found by the royal commission's implementation monitor to not be achievable or sustainable over many years as well. What we are focused on is not an arbitrary figure but a risk-based approach that focuses attention to where it is needed most, understanding of course we can never fully predict every possible scenario or be able to respond proactively to every eventuality. But the risk-based approach means that we are doing the very best that we can so that our firefighters can actually prevent these dangers.

We know, though, that in the previous financial year, 2023–24, FFMVic treated bushfire fuel across more than 138,000 hectares, which was part of a planned burning program of 122,000 hectares, reducing the statewide fuel-driven bushfire risk to life and property by an estimated 64 per cent, again reflecting the value of going for the risk-based approach rather than arbitrary targeted figures of 5 per cent or any other. Risk calculations for the year are still underway and will be released at the end of the year. However, we are confident that we will achieve that statewide target once again.

We also know that, as Ms Bath talked about as well, the workforce is a critical component of the delivery of FFMVic's land management, bushfire and emergency response duties. They do have access to, beyond what I have already mentioned, more than 3000 trained, accredited and medically fit emergency personnel for fire and emergency response across several different agencies. We know that our seasonal firefighters play a critical role alongside other experienced crews in responding to bushfires in some of the state's most vulnerable and remote and challenging environments.

I do note the comments as well about CFA fleets, and indeed just about a month ago now I was very pleased to join with the Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward at the CFA state logistics hub, which is in my electorate in Scoresby – a fantastic site, as Ms Watt knows all too well as the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services. I know that she has been out there many times, and indeed we were there to inspect and see the rollout of 50 Isuzu four-by-four crew-cab chassis, which will become light tankers for the CFA and will be rolled out to brigades across Victoria from next year – again, a really important component of continuing the process of upgrading and modernising and that continual renewal of the CFA fleet with modern equipment and safety features. It builds on the \$40 million CFA rolling fleet replacement program, which was announced in December last year, alongside the \$40 million program for FRV and another \$30 million program for Victoria's SES, ensuring that whether you are an FRV or a CFA firefighter or whether you are in the SES as a volunteer, you have got the most modern equipment that you can have.

There is always more to do, I hasten to add. But that is why that we are making these investments, and I will always continue to push for and support brigades and units in my region, especially in those outer suburban areas, that fire risk belt in the outer south-east, which have seen some tragedies, going back a bit longer ago now to Ash Wednesday, but are still very vulnerable. I will continue to fight for my brigades to have the best resources they can.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:13): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion, and I do want to thank my colleague Melina Bath for putting it forward, because this is a big issue, particularly for my electorate of Northern Victoria. I note the motion starts with 'great concern that Victoria remains inadequately prepared for the forthcoming bushfire season, with excessive forest

fuel loads and insufficient mitigation works' and it goes on to highlight a number of issues. I was walking in Melbourne early this week while we have been down here for Parliament, and a fire truck passed through and set off the alarms, with the siren going. It made me think: this is the purpose of this motion, to say to the government that action is required – and urgent action is required. Just today we have had on the steps of Parliament a number of people who have put together a book, *Our Mismanaged Forests*. John Mulligan was one of those that compiled it, and I thank Ms Bath for her work in having them here to present it. They did speak about the significant concern of the fuel loads in our forest and talk through the experience – I think he was 94 years of age – of seeing bushfires over the years and the impact that it has had. The mountain cattlemen were there represented as well on the steps of Parliament today, and they talked about it not being a fire issue but a fuel load issue.

I know from my own husband's experience with the CFA – I remember a night when he was out fighting fires, and our family stayed at a friend's place because the smoke was very thick. We had very young children at the time, and it just gave me that eerie experience of what it is like. Many have lived through that experience. I have spoken with a number of residents that have been impacted by bushfires over the years, and it is horrific. It is an experience that no-one wants to go through, and communities take a very long time – that recovery process is very long. We need to do what we can to prevent these situations from occurring. I know Ms Bath spoke to this earlier and it is also described in the motion itself, but the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended the annual fuel reduction of at least 5 per cent of public forest area. Yet the government's current reduction program achieves an average of only 1.5 per cent per year. I have spoken with people who work in forest fire management, and they are very concerned. I was contacted recently because they are so concerned by the fuel loads in our forests and the overflow of the lack of maintenance of tracks in our forests, which will inhibit emergency vehicles should the need for them arise. That fuel load just does not make any sense. We see, under this government, they have been closing down firewood collection areas, and yet there is so much in our forests. If that was managed better, it would certainly reduce some of the risk.

We have also heard and we have, as has been said, raised concerns about the 290 G-Wagons and 59 Unimogs, critical frontline firefighting vehicles that were taken offline due to chassis and subframe faults. It was good to hear Mr Galea speak earlier about some of those vehicles being back online. But the question is: how did we get to that point, and why did we get to the point where so many vehicles are out of operation? It makes me consider the truck issue and appliance issue that we see with the CFA. I have had many conversations with CFA volunteers who are very frustrated at the slow rate of new fire trucks coming through. Many still have trucks that just have coverage for two volunteers, and the rest of the volunteers and the crew are exposed on the back of the truck. Those upgrades are required to give our volunteers the proper resources to be out there protecting our local communities. Sadly, it currently takes about 5½ years from when they order a fire truck to the fire truck actually being delivered because there are parts of the truck coming from different parts of the world and put together. It is a very slow process currently. What we are seeing is it is going to take years for us to have the proper equipment. The CFA maintains close to 2000 tankers, and many of them are well past their use-by date. We have crews out there with trucks that are over 35 years old, and there is a whole cascading system of trucks where old ones pass on to the next ones, pass on to the next ones, and so it goes on. So many CFA volunteers are out there actually raising funds themselves for appliances. They are out doing the sausage sizzles and meeting with local businesses and trying to raise the funds. That is what they are doing off their own backs to protect their local communities because they care.

We saw a petition recently, signed by over 43,000 people, which flagged concerns about the new emergency services tax because, sadly, this government talks about that being for volunteers, but it is clear from speaking with volunteers that they know that that is not the case. We are seeing this government searching for more funds to cover the costs for public servants that were previously funded under the state budget, yet now we have volunteers being taxed. When I was at Axe Creek station just last week I spoke with a number of volunteers there, and with two of them – I just found this extraordinary – their rates notices are in their wives' names, so even though they have been

volunteering for decades they are not eligible to receive the rebate. I know CFA volunteers have written and they have put this on social media as well. They have voiced the concerns of many brigades, because this government have not been transparent about how many CFA volunteers are actually eligible, or ineligible, for the new emergency services and volunteers rebate. They repeatedly cite figures of over 55,000 CFA and VICSES volunteers being covered by the scheme, and yet there are nearly 29,000 operational members of the CFA but there is no publicly available breakdown of how many volunteers meet the rebate's strict criteria. I spoke with another volunteer, who was very frustrated because he had been asked for information on the back of his rates notice. He said there is nothing on the back of the rates notice. It has been such a slow process for many of them, and questions have been asked in Parliament but the government has not been forthcoming. It is very clear that we need answers from the government about the number of CFA volunteers who meet the eligibility criteria, broken down by brigade and service category; two, the number of volunteers deemed ineligible and the reasons why; and three, the number of volunteers who have applied, been approved or been rejected since the scheme opened.

I have also talked in this chamber today about Axe Creek station and the lack of facilities that they have at the station. They are one of the oldest brigades in Victoria – over 110 years old – and yet they do not have storage facilities there. They only have a portable loo out the back. There is nowhere for women volunteers to change. So I have put to the minister the need to prioritise further assistance there.

I do think that our emergency services volunteers do not ask for much but do deserve honesty and clarity and respect for the service that they provide our community. It is so important that as a state we are prepared for bushfires, because we do have a lot of Crown land, and unfortunately the majority of major fires start in Crown land. So we need to reduce the burden that is on our volunteers by stopping it before it starts. This government could do so much more, and that is what this motion is about today. It is about raising awareness and asking the government to take action, because, yes, people and residents everywhere need to be as prepared as they can, and I encourage them to visit the CFA website because there is certainly a lot of information about what they can do to be prepared for bushfire. But what we need the government to do is to take responsibility, read this motion and ensure that Victoria is better prepared for bushfires.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:23): I rise today to acknowledge the critical efforts of all Victoria's firefighters in the lead-up to this year's bushfire season. Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone regions in the world, and the brave men and women that make up our brigades, agencies and other groups work tirelessly year round to keep our community safe. Forest Fire Management Victoria – FFMV – CFA, FRV, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and several other agencies ensure that the Victorian community remains well protected from the threat of bushfire. The dedicated Victorians that make up these agencies mean that we are fully prepared to fight fires.

Bushfire risk is managed through a variety of measures, including prevention, preparedness and response activities. More specifically, these measures might include fuel management like planned burning and mechanical treatment, maintaining access to our road and fuel break network, maintaining diverse methods of detecting fires early and rapid first attack capability to keep fires small using both ground and air resources. Fuel management particularly is an essential part of this approach, but it works in collaboration with other agencies. Victoria takes a risk-based approach to bushfire management, meaning the resources we invest are directed where they will have the greatest impact on keeping Victorians and the property they value as safe as possible.

Planned burning is an essential component of our approach to reducing our bushfire risk. FFMV uses a statewide risk-based target to deliver, design and monitor the effectiveness of the planned burning program on public land in reducing fuel-driven bushfire harm to human life and to residential property. In the financial year 2023–24 FFMV treated bushfire fuels across 138,454 hectares in Victoria. This included a planned burning program of 122,291 hectares, which reduced the statewide fuel-driven bushfire risk to life and property to 64 per cent, clearly achieving the statewide target to reduce it to

below or at 70 per cent of maximum levels. In the financial year 2024–25 FFMV delivered 270 planned burns, covering 92,473 hectares. Risk calculations for the year have not been calculated as yet, and they will be released at the end of the year. However, we are confident we will achieve the statewide target once again.

In areas where fuel reduction is not safe and is a risk for reduction, FFMV have complemented the planned burning program with a non-burn fuel treatment. That can in cases include actions such as slashing and mowing. 16,163 hectares were subject to non-burn fuel treatments last financial year, and planned burns were compliant and complemented by 17,464 hectares of non-burn fuel treatments. Bushfire risk is not just reduced through fuel management, whether through planned burning or non-burn fuel treatments; it is also reduced in other ways. There is also mitigation, planning, preparedness and response, which all work in sync to support safer and more resilient communities.

On-ground activities are weather-dependent, and parts of the state, as we know from this week, can experience conditions that are unsafe for safe and effective planned burning, while other parts of the state in fact have a window of availability. For example, planned burning when it is too cold and wet is, unsurprisingly, ineffective and risky when it is too hot and dry. FFMV uses weather data and on-ground information to make judgements about when and how to burn safely.

The Allan Labor government will always make sure that our emergency services have the funding, resources and strategies they need to keep Victorians safe. Like all emergency agencies, DEECA receives annual funding through the annual budget process and each year also receives funding supplementation for emergency response activities that are not able to be predicted or quantified at budget time, and it is supplemented each year for urgent or seasonal needs. The supplementary funding will be reflected in the revised budget in budget paper 3, but this excludes the supplementation of emergency response, which will be reflected in DEECA's annual report, as it is typically allocated in late June when all the costs have actually been tallied. Therefore the differences in the opening and revised budgets published in budget paper 3 should not be misconstrued as overspends above budget. Furthermore, whilst direct fuel management costs may present as being a small component of the fire and emergency management revised budget, it is important to note that the direct costs are only costs incurred on the days of specific burn and non-burn operations. These are direct costs and include expenses on materials, plant, aircraft hire, overtime allowances, accommodation and meals. But what they do not cover are substantial indirect fuel management costs such as base salaries, training, vehicles, equipment, planning and community engagement. There are also expenses that sit outside of non-fuel management but that contribute to the work, such as the fire radio network costs, systems and other aviation.

Additionally, the Victorian government has also invested \$290 million over four years for forestry contractor strategy in the 2024–25 budget, which provides DEECA with access to plant and machinery from former timber harvesting contractors, and that is something we have spoken about in this place before. These contribute to fuel management activities.

I would like to take the time now to thank the firefighters on the front lines who do the hard work of keeping Victorians safe. Whilst they are doing this difficult job it is our government's job to make sure that these brave men and women are also kept safe. As part of our annual fleet checks before the season starts some structural issues were identified, prompting immediate action to ensure that the crews remain safe. A number of vehicles are being temporarily stood down while they are repaired and returned to service as soon as they are cleared. These vehicles are already coming back online. Contingency vehicles have been sourced to supplement the firefighting fleet, if they are needed, while this expedited inspection and repair program is underway. The expedited repair and return to service program, in conjunction with the sourced contingency vehicles, will see the fleet at or near full strength before the peak of the season.

The Allan Labor government is not just backing in these life-saving organisations with words; we will always make sure that every one of these organisations that works to both prevent and fight fires has

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all the resources they need to save lives. That is why we have doubled the funding in our emergency services. That includes \$1.5 billion for the CFA over the past four years for more trucks, new stations and more support.

I had the good fortune in fact in the last couple of weeks of visiting a number of stations. Can I just say that many are entirely delighted with this investment. All this funding, however, is at risk because of the reckless choices of those opposite, when they say they are on the side of volunteers but have also said that they will walk back key recommendations from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and cut the emergency services dedicated funding stream, the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. This inevitably means cutting new trucks and equipment from our SES and our CFA volunteers.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, Acting President, this is not the time to be attacking the opposition with blatant lies.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I was not listening that closely, I will be honest. Let us not attack the opposition as a general rule.

Sheena WATT: I was about to explore the \$11.1 billion black hole in the budget that is currently being presented to the Victorian community by those opposite, but I understand and will respect your ruling, Acting President.

For the benefit of the chamber, it is worth reaffirming our commitment to our firefighters. I particularly want to highlight again that our government will make sure that they have the right vehicles and equipment to keep all Victorians safe and the proper tactics to protect our homes and our lives.

We also recognise that climate change is making Victorian fire seasons hotter and drier. It is the sacrifices that our fieries on the front line make that keep Victorians safe: the hours of work that they put in, not just when the fires are burning but in the months leading up to the season, clearing fuel responsibly through both controlled burns and other tactics, managing fire risks by observing the landscape from the air and monitoring our state's increasingly volatile weather patterns to make sure that we can prevent bushfires entirely where possible. To all the fieries right across the state who are preparing to face this summer's fire season and their families: the Allan Labor government sincerely thanks you in preparation for the season ahead.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:34): I rise to speak on Ms Bath's planned burn motion, motion 1139. I thank her for bringing it to our attention. We have heard a lot of damning statistics here about the government's approach, and I strongly support that criticism. The speed with which the royal commission's recommendations were ditched should alarm us all. But I want to touch on a couple of slightly different issues.

Firstly, I would like to endorse Ms Bath's comments about Indigenous cultural burns and what that would do to improve the situation. For the benefit of the house I thought I would relay the message I got from the department when I raised this in the past. I thought it might be interesting politically to see how the state government reacted to this proposal, a measure in support of Indigenous practice but also involving environmental intervention. The response exceeded even my expectations. It seems another contributing factor in the government's failure to meet the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission burning targets is a fear that use of traditional techniques would constitute cultural appropriation.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Mrs McArthur to continue without assistance, please.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you stop the clock? I will go back.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): No, play on, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: I thought it might be interesting politically to see how the state government reacted to the proposal – a measure in support of Indigenous practice but also involving environmental intervention. The response exceeded even my expectation. It seems another contributing factor in the government’s failure to meet the royal commission on bushfire burning targets is a fear that use of traditional techniques would constitute cultural appropriation. Here is the exact reply I got when I encouraged the return of slow burns:

The government is respectful of the cultural and intellectual property rights of Traditional Owners. Knowledge of how to apply cultural fire and the purpose of that application is knowledge owned and held by Traditional Owners, not the Victorian Government or the Departments involved in forest and fire management.

Surely we should be prioritising planned burns, not promoting frankly indefensible intellectual property arguments.

The other point I want to raise is a different ideological danger. There is a strong link between the fashionable idea in the department and progressive political party ranks that humans somehow spoil the purity of nature. It is as if the simple act of locking up land equals environmental protection – it does not. The belief that people and nature should never interact is not conservation, it is ideology, and it is seriously damaging to communities, to local economies and to the environment itself. Good land management requires people, and I include in this planned burns. It needs active use through volunteers, campers, horseriders, bushwalkers, prospectors and forestry workers, who serve as the bush’s watchful guardians. Removing these people leaves forests unmonitored and mounting fuel loads, spreading invasive weeds and unchecked feral animals.

I have repeatedly raised fire management concerns in this Parliament. Victoria’s fire management is not working. As discussed today, the government abandoned the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission’s recommended targets. They neglected track maintenance and failed to reduce fuel loads. Farmers consistently tell me that the government is by far the worst neighbour, with land overrun with weeds, excessive fuel loads and poor pest control. The native timber industry’s treatment has been disastrous too. Ending timber harvesting eliminated a skilled workforce that always contributed hugely to fire response. When the next major fire strikes, it will not be urban activists responding, it will be locals who actually know the land.

Finally, there is another important factor: the activists’ lawfare campaigns waged by environmentalists against state agencies. I have previously discussed the problematic relationship between professional activists, charities and academics. This coalition exploits well-meaning but uncritical environmental supporters. They run campaigns, raise funds, employ activists and finance biased research. This research fuels legal cases against the state, generating publicity that drives more fundraising, a cycle that destroys legitimate industries. Forestry demonstrates this perfectly. VicForests could not conduct lawful business. The minister even told VicForests to abandon legal action to recover \$2 million in taxpayer funds from anti-logging group MyEnvironment. The activists won: native timber harvesting was banned and VicForests disbanded. Despite this victory, the ban will likely cause more environmental damage, not less, alongside devastating economic losses. Now they are focusing on planned burns. The native timber ban and the pulping of VicForests is not the end of the story. Facebook pages are fundraising for continued legal action, while Australian National University academic Professor David Lindenmayer has produced research claiming prescribed burning can worsen bushfires. The Victorian Forest Alliance’s Facebook page has mobilised, posting images of an apocalyptic scene of a planned burn, supposedly demonstrating how dangerous and ineffective planned burning regimes actually are. Professor Lindenmayer states:

We’ve understood for a long time now that logging can make bushfires worse, but it’s only in the last few years that evidence is showing that prescribed burning could be doing the same thing ...

The pattern is familiar, and the campaign is gathering momentum. If we want to save planned burns, we need to resist this new development too.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:41): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the motion about bushfire preparedness moved by Ms Bath. Obviously we all understand as Victorians, having in our lifetimes witnessed some particularly devastating fires, that Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone regions in the world, and the ferocity, the intensity and the relentlessness with which fire can burn through our bush and destroy our homes, destroy businesses and, sadly on too many occasions, take lives means that we all collectively, and individually for those of us who might reside or be travelling through bushfire-prone regions at times of risk, have to take the question of bushfire preparedness so incredibly seriously. It is those functions working cohesively, whether it is individual preparedness, whether it is community support and resourcefulness or whether it is emergency services, and their deployments acting in concert that make sure that we as a collective community and those who are at the frontline and most exposed, depending on where a particular fire front may emerge, are best prepared to deal with these issues and these challenges, particularly as we head into another bushfire season that has a seasonal outlook that points to another summer of increased risk throughout our state.

We know that the risk to our seasonal outlook is being driven by long-term rainfall deficits. Despite what may be seasonal fluctuations dampening certainly parts of the soil, we are seeing, particularly in certain parts of the state, long-term trends of rainfall deficit, and that has a sustained and increased impact on the condition of the bush and its propensity to burn should conditions arise. We – some of us at least – believe that some of that activity and risk is being driven by climate change and the way that our climate is changing. That may not be a view that is held universally, but it is a view that is held near universally by those who listen to the science. We know that right across the state now dedicated brigades, particularly those of the volunteers in the CFA but more broadly as well, are getting ready. From the CFA to Forest Fire Management Victoria and across the board, this government is investing to make sure that those agencies have the equipment, the funding and the resources that they need to do their job of helping to keep Victorians safe.

The crux of this motion is wanting to make sure that we are adequately prepared for bushfire risk, and I think one of the ways that we collectively need to be adequately prepared for bushfire risk is by making sure that there is enough funding for our emergency services. It is very hard to be prepared to address bushfire risk if you are cutting funding to emergency services. It is very hard to be prepared for bushfire risk if your emergency services are worried that the funding that they are relying upon, the investment that they are receiving, is at risk of being cut. What this government has done, through the legislation that we have put in place to increase the amount of funding that is available to our emergency services here in Victoria through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, is increase the amount of funding that is available to our emergency services. Every single dollar raised through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, which is appearing on the rates notices of households right across this state – everyone is being asked, on those rates notices, to be part of this system, because collectively we are benefiting – is being invested in our emergency services. That means more money for the CFA and more money for other forms of fire management.

Back to the CFA: this government has invested \$1.5 billion over the last four years for more trucks, stations and support. We have got \$40 million of funding in a rolling fleet replacement program, and \$62 million has doubled funding for equipment grants. Just last week the government announced over \$22 million for the CFA through our volunteer emergency services equipment program – the largest allocation in that program – because of the additional funding that this government has provided through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund already hitting the allocations for emergency services, doing what it is intended to do, making sure that our emergency services, like the CFA, are prepared for the bushfire risk. That funding is not just supporting the CFA; it is also supporting other agencies like the SES, and I know there are two SES units in the part of Southern Metropolitan that I spend most of my time in that are absolutely grateful for the additional support that they are getting.

What they also know is that preparedness in future seasons might be put at risk, because the alternative government of this state wants to take that money away. When the Liberals get up and say, ‘We’re

going to scrap the tax,' what they mean is they are going to cut the funding, because if you scrap the tax you have got to cut the funding. That is how it works, because every single dollar raised from the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund is going into funding our emergency services. If you take away the fund, you take away the funding. That is the program, that is the agenda, that is the promise that the Liberal Party and the National Party are making to the people of Victoria. They will scrap the tax and cut the funding, and they will not come clean about it either. They will not stand up here and admit it: 'Yes, that's exactly right. When we say "scrap the tax", it means we're going to cut the funding.' They will not go round to the CFA or SES units and tell them that the increased resources they have been receiving are on the chopping block because of the policy decisions they want to make to get rid of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. They go around, pat them on the back and have a nice cup of tea with one hand, and with the other hand what they want to do is reach into their pockets and take away their funding, because they promised to do it. They have promised to scrap the tax. They have promised to get rid of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. When the Liberals say they are going to scrap the tax, when the Nationals say they are going to scrap the tax, what they mean is they are going to cut the funding. The reason that people can believe them when they say it is because they have done it before. The last time the Liberals and the Nationals were in government they cut funding to the CFA. They are being up-front at least in saying that they are going to remove the revenue stream that is providing additional resources to our emergency services.

It is incredibly important that communities right across this state are prepared against bushfire risk. It is an obligation that we take incredibly seriously. Recently, in some comments she made about what her biggest priority is at the moment, the Premier in a large tabloid newspaper said that she was incredibly worried about the upcoming bushfire season and it is absolutely on her mind. This government is not only concerned about the risk; we are making sure the funding is in place so that we can deal with it. What we are not doing is going out there and proposing to cut funding from our emergency services. That is exactly what the Liberals are going to do and that is exactly what the Nationals are going to do, because they have done it before and they will do it again. We know the cuts are coming.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:51): Following that might be a little bit of fun, because what we have found this week is that the government have cut the funding to the CFA. The government are out there saying in their budget and in their Department of Justice and Community Safety annual report that the CFA budget was \$352.6 million. But under FOI the actual budget signed off by the minister, Vicki Ward, was just \$345 million. So the government are actually misleading the people of Victoria by saying that they are giving more funding to the CFA than they are actually giving. This is dishonest, and that is typical of this government, which is dishonest.

The Liberals and Nationals, as the government well know, did not cut any funding from the CFA's core budget. The difference in the figure that the government like to bandy about as a cut was actually one-off funding that was given in one year for recovery after the 2009 bushfires, because brigades needed to replace trucks, needed to replace equipment and needed to replace fire sheds that were lost in the 2009 bushfires. So there was a significant amount of money given as one-off funding. It was not core budget funding, it was one year. There was extra funding in there for additional resources that the CFA needed, and that was a one-off funding application, so it did not appear in the next year.

I would like to congratulate Ms Bath on bringing this motion to the house, because this is a really important motion for my electorate. My electorate suffers from bushfires, and my whole career has actually been scattered with bushfires. I was elected in 2002, and it was only a matter of days before most of the eastern side of my electorate was ablaze with the 2003 fires. There were then the 2006–07 fires, the devastating 2009 Black Saturday fires and fires in 2019–20 as well, so bushfires are a real feature of my electorate.

What my electorate is really concerned about is the lack of prescribed burns by this government. Only 1.5 per cent of land has been burnt, when the actual 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that the government rambled on about before recommended that 5 per cent be burnt every year. Yet you

are only burning 1.5 per cent. We know that cool burns are better for the bush. They clear the undergrowth; they clear the fuel load. As John Mulligan said this morning when he launched his book *Our Mismanaged Forests*, Victoria does not have a fire problem, Victoria has a fuel problem. And he is absolutely right. The more fuel there is, the hotter and the worse these fires become. I have seen this firsthand in the Barmah forest, where there have been huge bushfires and the forest has never recovered. There are still stark skylines around Whittlesea and areas impacted by the Black Saturday fires where you just see the dead trees. They are in the alpine areas as well from the 2006–07 fires and the 2003 fires. We see that as country members all the time. We see the damage that Labor are doing to our environment because they refuse to fund cool burns.

Mr Mulligan actually gave a really good overview of history. He is 94 years old, so he has seen a lot. He said he has seen the change from the safe, clean, open forests of his younger years to the dangerous, overgrown, dense mess that we have today, and he is correct. We see that in the Barmah forest as well. We no longer have the big cleared areas and large river red gums growing, because the river has been regulated, so we do not have the floods that come through and clear the saplings. We get a dense undergrowth and saplings that grow, and that creates worse fires.

Mr Mulligan said that over the years the bureaucracy had been influenced to believe that burning was bad. He said it went back to the 1930s, when the bureaucracy of the Victorian forests commission was heavily influenced by an Englishman called Lane-Poole, who did not know how to manage Australian eucalypt forests and recommended that there was no burning in the forests. That began a period where Victoria did not have any burning in the forest, and that led to the huge megafires that we have had: the 1939, 1944, 1965, 1983, 2003, 2006–07, 2009, 2014, 2019–20 and the recent Grampians fires. These are devastating fires that kill forests, and the forests will never recover.

I was surprised with Ms Watt's contribution, because I would have thought that she would have been heavily in favour of the Liberal and Nationals policy, which is to adopt the Indigenous community's firestick policy and actually do proper cool burning of our forests, because our Indigenous people actually did understand how to manage the Australian eucalyptus forest. It is vitally important that this government actually invest in cool burning.

Harriet Shing: They're not 'our' Indigenous people. That is so unbelievably disrespectful.

Wendy LOVELL: When I say 'our' I mean 'Australian'. We are all Australian, so it is the Australian Indigenous people. I do not say that as an ownership thing; I say it as inclusive terminology, because we are all Australians.

It is quite ironic that this government will not adopt cool burning and conduct more prescribed burns to reduce fuel loads and reduce the damage on Victorian forests, because it costs far more to fund the recovery of communities than it costs to actually prevent these fires. Fires are preventable, and the government should actually invest in more cool burning and more resources for our CFA brigades and our SES brigades.

Harriet Shing: Why did you cut 66 million bucks from them?

Wendy LOVELL: I can tell you those volunteer emergency services equipment program grants that you were crowing about just before – the brigades are complaining. They did not get as much as they needed to actually fund the equipment that they need. Everyone got less than they applied for, and they are upset with this government, as is the whole Victorian community, because what this government has done is cost-shift those VESEP grants from government funding to a tax on all Victorian people. We know that everyone used to contribute under the fire services levy, and everyone was happy to do that because they wanted to support our emergency services. But this government not only shifted this to a tax on the people, they included, as things that can be funded out of this, government departments, the office of the emergency management commissioner and Triple Zero Victoria. These are things that were traditionally funded from consolidated revenue but are now funded directly by a tax on the Victorian people. The former fire services levy funded fire services, and the

Liberal and National parties would restore that levy and take away this insidious Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. It is actually embarrassing for the government that they call it a volunteers fund when most of the money is going to funding core government business like the operations of Triple Zero Victoria, the department and the emergency management commissioner. Not every cent is going to volunteers, and you know that.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:01): I will be the last speaker in this debate. Unfortunately this debate has shown where, over many decades, we have found ourselves in this conversation around our public land and bush management. I think it is fair to say that we all want to care for the bush. We all want to keep our towns, our businesses, our assets and everything that is in harm's way safe, whether that is from grassland or bushland fires. There are a lot of strong feelings in this space. We have got people who want to protect our carbon stores, homes for wildlife and trees. As Ms Bath said about the mountain ash, they are being repeatedly hit by fire, and their ability to regenerate is diminishing every time that happens and the percentage of mountain ash we have left diminishes every time. At the same time, we have had the native hardwood industry move out of the bush, and communities are dealing with that change, with that transition, that they are going through. We have got locals, we have got tourists in great parts of our state that come through at the hottest times of the year, we have got threatened species, we have got farms, we have got towns and we have got businesses which are all heavily invested in us getting the management of our spaces right.

My first memory on the farm is of a CFA fire truck coming up to fight a fire at the back of the farm, a burn-off that had got away from a nearby farm. That was a relatively minor event, but it is my first memory in life. Obviously, we have had people talking about 2019 and have had people talking about Black Saturday, and these events stay in people's minds. These events emotionally and financially scar people across our community. It is no wonder it is an incredibly emotive issue, but we need to find sensible solutions to a problem that will not go away rather than playing ping-pong with extreme versions of solutions to a complicated and big problem, particularly, as I think everyone acknowledges, as the ambient soil temperature is getting hotter over time. As we have had more and more significant burns, there are less mature plants that will burn more quickly right up the east coast of Australia. As we saw in 1920, with just huge swathes of Australia on fire, when the conditions are right for it, it is incredibly hard to stop.

Across Forest Fire Management Victoria, the CFA, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and FRV, we have got a workforce that do something that the majority of our population would not dream of doing, whether that is getting out in preparation with burns, with mulching or with road management, let alone getting out there when there is a fire going, getting ahead of it, creating breaks and fighting it with water. We have got our teams that are abseiling out of choppers to go and fight on the ground. I am sure I speak for all of us when I acknowledge everyone working across our emergency services workforce to get ahead of fires and to deal with them when they occur. As Ms Bath said, it is a reality that we all have to accept that fires are going to happen. We have to get to a sensible solution so that over decades we can work to ensure that as our climate continues to dry, which suits really, really bad fire conditions, for the sake of the bush and for the sake of those that live nearby, we have early detection, we have rapid attack and we can get on top of them as quickly as possible.

There was talk about the previous 5 per cent hectare target recommended by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. It was found not to be affordable, achievable or sustainable in 2012 and 2013. The 5 per cent target incentivised the design and delivery of a planned burning program focused on maximising the area burnt rather than delivering smaller burns closer to communities at higher risk. I think it is about protecting the most ecologically valuable sections of bush so we do not lose them – mountain ash and things like that – forever but also ensuring that our towns are safe, whether that is getting around the towns with non-fuel treatments or burning at appropriate times of year as is available.

With limited time left, I just want to pick up on the commentary around the G-Wagons. The fleet is going to be back in service in mid-December. There has been a problem with the vehicle. The

government has identified it and has addressed it. It is critically important that we keep our workforce safe. Some of the commentary around the vehicles has been perhaps a little bit excessive, because nobody plans for the chassis of vehicles to have issues with them. Nobody wants that to happen. It is about being in government and responding to issues when they occur to keep the workforce safe and to enable the workforce to get out and do their job.

I think we have spoken today for 90-odd minutes on an issue that is incredibly complicated and has incredibly high charges of emotion at various ends of the political spectrum. As I have said, for the sake of our rural, regional and indeed metropolitan communities we have to make sure that we find a way over the decades to protect our biodiverse spaces, our people and our assets.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:08): I would like to thank those who contributed to this debate, noting that it was the Liberals and Nationals and the Labor members of Parliament.

I want to pick up on that at least two of the Labor members made comment in their contribution on the fuel-driven bushfire risk calculations being released at the end of the year. If anybody has had a look at their clock, their watch, their diary or their calendar, it is now 3 December, and it is now 18 months since we have seen the last fuel-driven risk calculations. Part of this information is about equipping communities at a district level to understand where they fit in this government's so-called Safer Together program and understand where their fuel-driven risk is, but the transparency is not there. This government has hidden these fuel-driven risk targets and fuel-driven risk outcomes. It will be delivered at the end of the year, I heard. Well, I am sorry; it is December. Are we going to get it on Christmas Eve and just slip it in and hide it from the population? It is not fair. People need to be able to understand what their risks are and act as appropriately as they can on private property, because goodness knows the government is a woeful, woeful neighbour.

Let me give you some facts, and this is actually out of the government's own reports and figures. In relation to the CFA, let us have a reality check on that. Level 3 incident controllers – in 2009 at the time of the Black Saturday fires there were a hundred level 3 incident controllers. Those are the people with their finger on the pulse when the action goes down. They are making good decisions out in the field to support mitigation, to support suppression, to support survival and to support those people who are at crisis point. In 2015, after the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission had come and gone through and just at the end of the Liberals and Nationals' four-year term, there were 150 level 3 incident controllers. And what have we got today? After 11 years of this government, in 2025, we have got 57 level 3 incident controllers. That includes the CFA, the FRV and the SES. That is scary. This government talks about how it has invested in the emergency services, how it is backing the emergency services. Well, the figures say that these people are getting so frustrated they are walking away from this. We have got almost 50 per cent less than we did in 2009 and three-quarters less than we did in 2015.

Let me put some more facts, and this is again out of the department's report. Operational volunteers – at Black Saturday in the 2009 time period we had 39,870 operational volunteers. What have we got now in 2025? In October this year we had 28,755. That is a drop of over 11,000 volunteers. So if you are talking about how you are backing the CFA and the SES, well, just take a look at the CFA. These volunteers have had a neckful of your disrespect, of the way you treat them, of the way you are not funding them and of the way they are having to go cap in hand. No-one out in country Victoria believes the rhetoric that we heard from other members of the Labor Party about how they are backing the CFA volunteers. Nobody out there believes that when we scrap the tax we will not properly fund them. We will scrap that tax, and we will properly fund the CFA and the SES.

All this spin that we hear from government gives no satisfaction to people out in the regions – people who have got high fuel loads and danger in their environment. The government is saying to them, 'Make sure you clean your gutters and cut your lawns.' But you are not doing that on public land. Well, I am sorry, this government has been an atrocious neighbour. It is not a good conductor of fuel reduction burns, and that has been part of my synopsis today. We all know that the greatest threat to

public land is out-of-control bushfires and pests and weeds. This government has been woeful at management of that.

In relation to the G-Wagons, we heard potentially more information from Mr McIntosh in the last few seconds than we have heard from the Minister for Environment in the last two months. We want to know that there are the equipment, personnel and strategies to protect Victorians from bushfire.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (16): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (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

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:20): 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

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:21): I am pleased to rise to speak on this year's budget papers, specifically budget paper 3, page 88, which refers to switching on the Metro Tunnel. What a terrific event it was and what a terrific day it was on Sunday for the official opening of the Metro Tunnel – a year ahead of schedule in fact, and indeed it just snuck in a day earlier even than the recent announcement that it would be December this year. It was so fantastic to see the summer start and opening of the Metro Tunnel. We know that more than 70,000 Victorians came down to Anzac, to Town Hall, to State Library, to Parkville and to Arden stations across these five wonderful new stations going right through the heart of our city and inner city to check out the fantastic new trains and tunnels to see how it is all working together and the new stations and facilities.

We know, of course, that Town Hall connects in with Flinders Street and State Library connects in with Melbourne Central as well. It is all part of providing great new infrastructure for that part of the city and providing those opportunities for new housing and densification in places like Arden. It is also about connecting the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines through to the Sunbury line and freeing up other lines, including from 1 February allowing the Frankston line trains to run through the city loop. It is a very, very exciting project for those of us in the south-east, with the new high-capacity metro trains (HCMT) using the tunnel, and indeed we even see platform screen doors for the first time being used in Victorian stations, which coordinate the doors with the trains.

Earlier this year the Liberal Party made some bizarre statements about the Metro Tunnel. They were not their first and will not be their last statements about the Metro Tunnel. They claim that some of the new trains that are coming in, the new X'Trapolis 2.0s, will not actually be compatible with the Metro Tunnel. They said what an outrage it was: 'You should be fixing it; you should be making these doors

compatible with the Metro Tunnel.’ Never mind the fact that these trains are not actually going to ever be using those lines that run through the Metro Tunnel. Apparently the former and now, somehow, again Shadow Minister for Public Transport Matthew Guy seems to think that the government should be spending money to make these doors compatible with the new tunnel stations, despite the fact that these trains will never actually be using them. We have a dedicated fleet, the fantastic HCMTs, which are already running on the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines and will soon take over full services on the Sunbury line too. Apparently he deserves, in that bright-thinking Liberal Party, a role back in the shadow cabinet as public transport shadow again.

Maybe that is where the latest brainwave came from last week: the shock horror of discovering that if you walk into State Library station, where there is easy connectivity with Melbourne Central connecting those two parts of the network, and then you walk across to Melbourne Central and then you tap out, you might have to pay – the shock horror of it. Now we have actually resolved the issue, if you can even call it an issue. Frankly, it is a bizarre claim from the Liberal Party. If you have already travelled into the city, you are going to have to pay the daily cap anyway, but they think that if you want to cross La Trobe Street, the simplest thing to do is not to just cross La Trobe Street but to go down into one station, walk across into another, and then take the three or four escalators that it takes to get out of the maze of the shopping centre in Melbourne Central. If they think that is the biggest issue, well, wow, what a good issue to have.

Victorians know that this is a fantastic project, and Victorians also know that it is only Labor governments that deliver these projects. The Liberal Party were outspoken from the get-go on this project. When they were in office for four years, it was four years of wasted opportunity. They supported it, then they did not, then they supported it but wanted it to run through Fishermans Bend and actually not connect any of the points that have been opened up by the new tunnel – any of the university precincts, the hospital precincts – or through the central spine of the city. They wanted to waste resources on a project that was, frankly, a dud, and it took the Andrews, now Allan, Labor government and Jacinta Allan, first as transport infrastructure minister and now as Premier, to see this project through from start to finish.

We have seen what happens when you elect Labor governments. We deliver services and we deliver infrastructure, and that is exactly what the Metro Tunnel represents. With the big switch coming from 1 February we are going to see that uplift in services on the Pakenham–Cranbourne–Sunbury corridor of course through the Metro Tunnel but across lots of other parts of the railway network as well. We are already seeing some of those frequency uplifts announced in these same budget papers that I am referring to. As our city grows, whether it is the inner city, whether it is the outer suburbs or whether it is indeed the regions, that is exactly why we need these state-shaping projects. Like the city loop 40 years ago, which the same naysayers over there would have been opposing as well, we need these projects. This is exactly what Labor governments do – they deliver, and that is exactly what the Metro Tunnel is doing.

Planning policy

Petition

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:26): I rise to speak on petition 722, which I sponsored and tabled in the Legislative Council on 2 December 2025. This petition has been signed by 2414 residents and ratepayers of Mansfield shire, and it calls on the Legislative Council to refer the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025 to an inquiry so that consultation with rural councils and communities can occur before any changes to the planning system are passed. I thank the mayor Steve Rabie and all the residents of the Mansfield shire who put together this petition and collected so many signatures in such a short period of time. The petition points out that the bill was introduced with no community consultation, imposes a Melbourne-centric model on rural communities, removes our community’s right to have a say and strips our council of its ability to make decisions that protect the unique country character of the Mansfield shire. It is obvious their view is

completely justified, and this house must take seriously the call to refer this bill for further scrutiny by a parliamentary committee.

Mansfield shire residents and councillors are among the many concerned Victorians and local government representatives who have contacted me to express their deep concern about the impact of these planning changes and the government's complete lack of consultation with stakeholders before these changes were introduced into Parliament. I have received representations on this bill from many of the councils in my electorate – Mansfield Shire Council, Moorabool Shire Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, Murrindindi Shire Council, Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Mitchell Shire Council and the City of Whittlesea – and the peak body the Municipal Association of Victoria. All of them are fundamentally opposed to the drastic changes proposed in this bill. It will expand ministerial direction without accountability and give too much power to developers to decide on their own assessment pathway. It will also massively increase the burden on local council IT systems and planning staff but without increasing their resources. This will have an especially heavy impact on rural councils, which simply cannot access the same planning workforce that city councils can.

Changes of this scale and nature that radically change the relationship of the state to local planning authorities and community voices should never be imposed without significant and detailed consultation with local governments and their residents. The way this Labor government has chosen to force through these planning changes while completely ignoring and bypassing all the stakeholders directly affected shows its sheer arrogance and utter contempt for Victorians. Local government authorities exist for a reason, because decisions should be made by the people who are closest to and most affected by the decision.

Municipal communities have a significant degree of input over changes to their local built environment, rates and fees, capital expenditure, community projects and proposed private developments, but the Allan Labor government has progressively undermined this vital democratic principle in order to assert its own total control over development in Victoria. Jacinta Allan and her Labor colleagues are driven by utopian visions to completely redesign Melbourne and Victoria regardless of what Victorians actually want, and they will not let anyone get in their way. They are riding roughshod over anyone who objects and passing laws to stop people objecting. They have removed third-party appeal rights, they have increased powers for transmission companies to enter private land without permission and now they are taking away the power of local councils to sensitively manage housing developments within their own municipalities.

Little by little Labor have shamelessly removed local oversight and decision-making power from municipal authorities, silenced the voices of those who are affected by their decisions and centralised power in the Premier's office. This bill will not produce better planning decisions; it will force Melbourne-centric cookie-cutter models on rural communities that are totally unsuited for these dense developments. It will destroy beautiful streetscapes and local amenity that have been carefully cultivated for decades or even a century or more. Once large blocks are gone, they will be gone for good, and the spacious, relaxed feel of charming country towns will never return.

Before Parliament allows these radical planning changes to pass it should agree to call in the Mansfield shire petition and refer this bill to a committee which can thoroughly consult on these changes and make recommendations for a better set of reforms to increase housing supply in Victoria.

Victoria's multicultural review

Rebuilding Trust for a Multicultural Victoria

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (17:31): I am pleased to speak on the Victoria's multicultural review report released in September of this year. This report found that now more than ever multicultural communities are turning to multicultural-led and multicultural-oriented organisations for support with cost of living, health and wellbeing and social connections. Among the recommendations of this report was the creation of a new statutory body called Multicultural Victoria

to take over the Victorian Multicultural Commission, led by an independent chair called the multicultural affairs coordinator general, supported by two deputies. Frankly, these militaristic titles and top-down approaches are concerning. They suggest control and hierarchy rather than the collaborative community-driven approach that multicultural communities need. This is especially concerning given the report itself identifies an erosion of trust in government and its institutions.

While I welcome the government's recognition of the important role that multicultural communities play socially, economically and culturally, there are serious concerns about its approach to action. The idea that shared values should be enforced through committing to a social cohesion commitment statement, which has now changed to the *Victorian Values Statement*, is outright absurd. Although the government claims this is not a punitive measure, it is undoubtedly framed around control and coercion. The requirement that grant funds will not be dispensed unless organisations applying for any grant pledge or commit to upholding social cohesion effectively places a compliance obligation on multicultural communities. This whole idea of social cohesion pledges was first touted last year at a press conference by the Premier with her usual kneejerk reactions to issues on which she has done little policy development. And can I add this was only targeted at multicultural communities. Once again, this is a carrot-and-stick approach that will not work in the long term.

My question is: why is the responsibility for social cohesion again being placed squarely on the shoulders of multicultural communities rather than being recognised as a shared responsibility of the government and all Victorians? Multicultural organisations should not be expected to carry the load or demonstrate social cohesion on behalf of the entire state.

The multicultural review report also highlighted the persistent rise in anti-Muslim hate, antisemitism and racism against black and brown communities. A major barrier to effectively addressing these issues, the report notes, is the lack of comprehensive data collection, which limits the government's ability to make informed evidence-based decisions. Multicultural organisations have been sounding the alarm on this particular barrier for a long time across all domains. So my question calls on this government: where is the data collection? Why aren't your departments collecting the data so you can document the gaps, barriers, issues and opportunities to make the system better and fairer? If this government is serious about protecting multicultural and multifaith communities, it must invest in resources to mandate data collection. How can it act effectively on the review's findings if it does not have the evidence to show the extent of the problems communities are reporting? This includes working with other departments like the police, education, health and youth justice to ensure it truly is a whole-of-government response, meaning these departments should also be collecting appropriate data so we can see how racism hate is being experienced across all these domains by multicultural communities.

We all know that racism does not happen in a vacuum. It is very much alive and well. If you are not collecting the data, how can you adequately address the scale of the impact it has on marginalised people? Important recommendations from this report are 10 and 11, related to adequate funding for the anti-racism strategy and the government funding and coordinating a centralised whole-of-government data and evidence collection system for reported incidents of racism and hate crimes in the community. This system should gather information from sources including the Community Security Group, the Islamic Council of Victoria, Victoria Police, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and schools. The collected data should be used to guide investment and inform the design of place-based responses developed in genuine partnership with affected communities. Hate and racism are only escalating, and our communities deserve safety, inclusion and the right to live free from violence. This government needs to act now to ensure that there is racial justice for all.

Ombudsman*When the Water Rises: Flood Risk at Two Housing Estates*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise to speak on the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation report *When the Water Rises: Flood Risk at Two Housing Estates*, which was referred to the Ombudsman by the Environment and Planning Standing Committee following its inquiry into the 2022 flood event in Victoria. Water is life. But as we saw in October 2022, it can also be devastating. That month was one of the wettest Victoria has ever recorded, and the floods that followed caused widespread damage and heartbreak. Sadly, as climate change accelerates, these events will become more frequent and more severe, and we must prepare. The Ombudsman's report highlights critical lessons. First, flood modelling must be accurate, current and forward-looking. It cannot rely solely on historical data, because climate change is reshaping our environment. Second, planning schemes must reflect updated modelling. I thank the minister in the other place for progressing flood-related planning scheme amendments to address this.

Let me turn to the case studies that were examined in the report. They were Rivervue and Kensington Banks. Rivervue was a failure of process and oversight. Melbourne Water's 2003 flood modelling for the site underestimated flood levels. That error flowed through the development plans into 2022, which then used incorrect figures, meaning homes were built without adequate safety buffers for any rising floodwaters. Melbourne Water should have identified this. Compounding the problem, a flood overlay was removed in 2016 at Rivervue's request and approved by Moonee Valley council based on the flawed 2003 modelling. While the Ombudsman found this did not directly cause the flooding, it left residents without official flood guidance. Today, Rivervue residents, many older and with mobility or health challenges, live with real flood risk.

Kensington Banks presents a different picture. It did not flood in 2022, but the underlying issue is similar – outdated modelling. The last comprehensive update for the lower Maribyrnong catchment was in 2003, and Melbourne Water failed to meaningfully incorporate changing run-off conditions or the impacts of climate change. In 2024 Melbourne Water released new modelling, and many homes are now classified as flood-prone. Residents face uncertainty, higher insurance costs and the need for urgent mitigation works. I highlighted a few of the main themes at the start of the report. But it has also been identified that, going into the future when planning new developments, future conditions need to be properly taken into consideration, not just how things have functioned in the past, and that people also deserve better and more contemporary information. The residents at Rivervue were not expecting flooding. They thought their houses were adequately protected. The residents at Kensington Banks now have a brand new fear – one that should have been identified long ago and would have been identified if there were new and contemporary flood maps.

Overall, a better understanding is needed that the world is changing. The impacts of climate change are here, and it is real. We need to take this into greater consideration in our everyday lives, because we never know when a flood may come, so everyone definitely needs to be prepared. I commend the report to the house.

Ombudsman*'We Just Want to Finish Our Home': Management of Domestic Building Insurance Claims by VMIA*

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak on another Victorian Ombudsman report, the investigative report into the management of domestic building insurance claims by the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, aptly titled *We Just Want to Finish Our Home*. Colleagues who were in the chamber at the time might remember this referral was actually moved by me in this place and supported by most colleagues. It really goes into the treatment of young families in their time of crisis. They described what happened to them as 'a double catastrophe'. First they were dealt a huge blow, losing their deposits, sometimes their life savings, due to the collapse of building companies largely due to the inflationary effect of the mismanaged Big Build. Then they were dealt

another blow with the VMIA basically torturing them into submission, not able to get what they were entitled to, which was their insurance that they had signed up to.

We saw on display the treatment of young families in this by the VMIA themselves. If I could quote some of the comments from Labor's VMIA staff, one domestic building insurance team member said:

I hate them all

Another DBI member said:

him on fire today, called a C**t owner at 8.15 this morning, put her in her place

Another said:

just called an owner and woke them, score

stupid effen query

That is the kind of contempt with which staff members in the public service have treated young families at their time of crisis. It is all well and good for Danny Pearson to apologise, but what I want to know is: are those people still working in the Victorian public service? Victorians and young families have a right to know that. It is all well and good for the minister to apologise today after seeing those comments. Obviously now we know why the same minister was stomping up and down the crossbench hallway trying to get support to defeat my motion to support these young families. Now we know what these young families were up against. They were up against a brick wall of an incompetent, under-resourced VMIA, which was not equipped to deal with the crisis that came, even though we know from the minister's briefs, which we obtained, that he was warned about the crisis in the domestic building industry.

We of course saw the use of top-tier law firms to manage away the young families in this crisis when the VMIA knew that those young families were entitled to their deposits back. They received advice from top-tier law firms that they could actually refuse those claims and maybe only pay them out if they challenged their claims. We know that young families – and I have spoken to them – were told by way of letters that they would have to go to VCAT if they wanted to challenge the refusal and that if they lost they would have to pay the VMIA's legal costs, even though we know that that advice was actually wrong.

At the time I put in a freedom-of-information request requesting the amount of money the VMIA was spending on top-tier legal firms to push away young families. After a year and a half of refusal the information commissioner came back and said, 'These documents should be released; there is no reason to refuse them.' What happens next? The VMIA has taken me to court to refuse those documents, to try to withhold those documents. The Victorian public ought to know and those young families ought to know what the government is hiding and how much it is costing young families – people like Suzi Ralph, who is with us today, a Porter Davis customer, and Alex from Craigieburn, who was paying rent in Glenroy while paying for a concrete slab in Craigieburn. There are countless stories from young families who were let down by this tired, old Labor government, and it is on show in this report that was tabled today.

Victoria State Emergency Service

Report 2024–25

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:44): I rise to speak on the Victoria State Emergency Service's annual report 2024–25, tabled here on 20 November. In doing so I want to shout out the amazing SES Glen Eira unit and the SES Moorabbin unit for all the hard work they do in the inner southern and Bayside suburbs. It is really appreciated. Our emergency services personnel do incredible work in the community. They answer the call when we are most in need, and they serve without getting paid. They volunteer their time. When the weather says stay inside, they are the ones who are getting ready to go out and help. The annual report tells us that in the 2024–25 financial year

VICSES personnel volunteered more than 342,000 hours, responding to more than 35,000 incidents. The report says:

With an increase in the frequency and intensity of severe weather events due to our changing climate ... VICSES is experiencing growing complexity and demand for the services we provide, and increased pressure on our ... operating model.

It is obvious that VICSES need support. They need more support. They need funding for equipment so they can respond to the floods and the storms. That is one of the reasons why the Victorian government legislated for the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, and through the ESVF we are investing to deliver things like a rolling fleet replacement program for our emergency services, of which units such as Glen Eira can be beneficiaries. Through the fund VICSES volunteers will be better equipped for the future. Every dollar raised is going to emergency services, funding vital, life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff training for volunteers, community education, recovery and support when Victorians need it.

Most recently the government announced recipients of the volunteer emergency services equipment program. This year \$30 million was made available for volunteer groups through VESEP, double last year and the largest round ever. We increased the maximum grant from \$100,000 to \$250,000, with the state government contributing \$2 for every dollar raised locally, and the boost has been made possible through the funding from the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, every dollar raised going back to supporting our emergency services. The VESEP funding will be doubled over the next four years, with an additional \$62 million invested in support. We have seen increased demand. We are seeing increased need for our volunteers, so it is only fitting we provide them with increased support. Several of the emergency services organisations in the Southern Metropolitan Region have received support through this grant round recently. They do an amazing job. I want to thank them. We are here to support them.

Victoria State Emergency Service

Report 2024–25

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:47): I rise today to address the Victoria State Emergency Service's operating grant income as outlined in the 2024–25 annual report. This report demonstrates that the government has absolutely no respect for our emergency services workers or volunteers. I hear all this talk about the money that will be going to the emergency services through this levy, and I know for a fact that there will be pressure on the government – if it gives this money to any of these services – to give it to Fire Rescue Victoria over and above the SES and the CFA, who are in many cases operating with old vehicles, particularly the CFA.

Without consultation or consent the Allan Labor government have imposed a \$3 billion emergency services tax on volunteers, farmers, small businesses and home owners, claiming that it is to properly fund the emergency services. But we have also learned that they slashed \$10 million from the SES operating grant income in the previous financial year. The SES engaged in 342,000 hours of operational activity, making 2024–25 the fourth-busiest financial year on record. The Frankston unit, which operates partly in my region, was the second-busiest unit in the entire state, fielding 1167 requests for assistance. I was proud to attend and stand alongside many of the SES Frankston volunteers at a Remembrance Day service at the RSL last month. They are incredible people from all walks of life. They are our SES volunteers, and they give up countless hours of their own time, often at their own personal cost, to rescue Victorians facing car accidents and natural disasters, as do the CFA. And it is more difficult for these people working in their own local area, because they live in the area and they very often know the people that have been in these accidents. Sadly, I have not heard a word from the member for Frankston Paul Edbrooke about this cut. In fact I understand he is a former firefighter himself, so I would hope that he would put his politics aside and call out the minister presiding over this mess.

In the previous financial year 51 per cent of the SES requests for assistance occurred in the summer period. That is no surprise given that the temperature rises have been happening and people travel on holidays and so forth. But on Monday the summer period commenced, so volunteers require an assurance from the government that this cut will not occur again in the current financial year. We need more investment in modern vehicles. I note that when I was looking around and seeing how all this money had been cut – and Labor members were talking about how they have given money to emergency services – well, I can say the Skye CFA have not received a replacement for their old truck and their old gear. We need a lot more investment in modern vehicles, flood rescue gear and community education programs which are tailored to our diverse population. Meanwhile all we see here is that Labor continues to ignore our volunteers.

My Liberal and National colleagues are going to continue to stand with them. We know the emergency services need the funding, and it is simply not good enough to have a levy that is being charged with a whole lot of promises when you can go out to any CFA station across the regional areas and in parts of my region in the south-east, and you will find that there are people operating with very old trucks. I myself have climbed into the back of one that is open. How on earth can we have open trucks used in fire areas where people sit on the back with absolutely no covering? It is not good enough. It is not good enough to use words and to simply say that we are providing this funding to help them, and then we see the slashes, according to the reports, in the funding. It is simply not good enough. We want to have more accountability, more transparency and more support for our emergency services.

Petitions

Crime

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

What happens when Victorians fight back against thugs that invade their homes? This is a question that many Victorians do not really know the answer to. Firstly, I would like to congratulate Carly, the petitioner who put forward this petition, who managed to garner 20,554 signatures from Victorian citizens. Carly did not do this because of some ideological concern or policy belief; Carly did this because she herself is a victim of a home invasion. I believe Carly is in the gallery right now.

Many Victorians have been in the unfortunate situation where their home has been invaded by violent people to rob them or do them harm, and some of these Victorians have fought back. There is a man who I have met in my electorate. His name is Aaron. His home was invaded. He lives with his wife and teenage daughter. His home was invaded in the middle of the night, and his wife called the police. Aaron, being a resourceful man, had a baseball bat near his bed, and he went and chased this thug out of his house. We do not know if the man that was robbing him was armed or not. I went to visit Aaron. He lives in a beautiful place in Clyde, a beautiful area. All the neighbours know each other – people from all around the world, very peaceful – yet their suburb, the place they live in and call home, has been constantly attacked by people invading homes. I asked Aaron, ‘What would have happened if you’d hit this guy in the head with your baseball bat?’ He said, ‘I don’t know,’ and I said, ‘I don’t know either.’ In fact, most Victorians do not know.

Under Victorian law, you are entitled to defend your home, but it must be what they term a ‘proportionate’ response, and what is considered proportionate is left up to the police and the courts. It is quite unrealistic, I believe. Put yourself in the mind of someone who has had their home invaded, who is concerned about their family and what might happen to them. They do not know if someone is armed. People are not considering what is proportionate force; they are considering what might happen to their family and thinking, ‘I’m going to do whatever it takes to defend my family against these thugs until the police arrive.’ There are many Victorians like this.

What this petition is proposing and what I have proposed in this Parliament before is to look at something called castle law. What this does is it basically sets the default of the law so that it sides on

the side of the home owner that is defending themselves. As long as they are not doing anything egregious and they are genuinely defending their home, then they know that the law has their back. Even under the current system it is not clear to Victorians; the government has not told people what they can and cannot do in these situations. People are concerned that if they fight back, they might very well end up getting in trouble with the law. In fact it happened not too long ago in Queensland. A man defended himself against a violent home invader. That man, who was attacking him in his home, ended up having a heart attack and passing away. The home owner was charged with murder and stood trial, and the only reason that he was acquitted was because they got an expert witness that was a medical expert who said that the heart attack that the man suffered was not due to the attack from the home owner, it was due to the assailant's methamphetamine addiction, which damaged his heart, and that is why he passed away. The man was acquitted. Nevertheless he was dragged through the courts for an extended period of time. He lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees, which has put his family in a terrible financial situation, not to mention the mental stress that this poor man had to go through. I do not want Victorians going through that.

I think that Victorians should know that the Parliament has their back, that the law has their back, when they fight back against violent thugs, and I think that is what this Parliament should do. The government claim that they are being tough on crime. You cannot claim that you are being tough on crime when you turn your back on those who want to fight back against thugs.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:57): Thanks for the opportunity to speak on this issue. I would like to start by thanking and acknowledging all of the petitioners, and in particular Carly, who you mentioned, Mr Limbrick. That must have been an awful experience, and it is indeed an awful experience for anybody who is a victim of crime. I would also like to acknowledge Mr Limbrick's continuing advocacy in relation to victims of crime. You have been truly influential in shaping some of our legislation in relation to victims in this term of government, and I thank you for that.

We have recently had a very similar debate on this topic in this chamber, so some of the material that I will cover this evening is likely to be no surprise. I would like to start by saying that any victim of crime is one too many, and that is why we have continued to crack down on offenders with a range of new laws that back the work of Victoria Police. I want to urge Victorians to always call the police in an emergency or when there is danger or a threat to safety, whether it is in their home or whether it is elsewhere. Police have the training, the equipment, powers and support to respond to crimes, threats and other emergencies. Attempting to respond to a perceived threat or unlawful behaviour is risky and can result in unintended harm to you or others. And let us face it, no material possessions in your home are worth your life. Treating self-defence in the home differently to self-defence outside the home has the obvious potential to encourage people to equip themselves for such defence, and it is unfortunate that that use of weapons too frequently ends up with the person trying to defend themselves being injured themselves and escalating the behaviour and response of those who engage in unlawful activity. Kat Berney, the director of National Women's Safety Alliance, in relation to calls for capsicum spray legalisation, which I have responded to before, said:

What are we suggesting will happen when a potential victim is armed with pepper spray? What happens when the violence escalates and the perpetrator is also armed with the same weapon?

Ms Berney also quoted a 20-year-old review into people with pepper spray injuries from the *Journal of Clinical Toxicology*. The review found that patients with pepper spray related injuries tended to be older children and young adults.

Just before I finish up, the Crimes Act 1958 provides that a person will have acted in self-defence if they believe the conduct is necessary to defend their lives and if it is a reasonable response in the circumstances as they perceive them.

In closing, I just wanted to quote a piece of research. This is from the University of Oxford, and it is a study on crime, public risk and public health and safety:

Stand Your Ground laws, designed to protect individuals who actively defend themselves from crime, have not improved public safety ...

That is their conclusion. That is certainly, I acknowledge, in the context of widely available guns in the US. But also, since 2013 in the UK, there is no discernible trend either way in the results of self-defence changes similar to what Mr Limbrick is referring to.

That is my thinking and certainly the thinking of the government at this point. But I thank you for raising the issue and causing me to reflect on it again, and I thank the people in the gallery.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:02): I rise to support this petition, and I commend all of the petitioners for coming together and raising this issue, because as we all know, the criminals are in charge in this state. In Victoria you can be asleep in your bed, your children asleep in theirs, and if you hear a noise and you get up and you find someone in your house, a man in a balaclava moving towards your children's door, your heart is going to stop. You are not going to be thinking. You are just going to instantly and brutally defend – not property; nobody cares enough to die for property of course. But for our children who are also in our homes – yes, we would die for our children. Yes, we would risk any kind of injury for our children. No, we would not hesitate, and we should not be punished for that. That is a totally healthy human instinct and the only one worthy of any kind of parent.

Police are trained; they are equipped. We just got told: 'If this happens, we are encouraging you to call the police.' I just cannot believe that, actually. I will read it out. In Victoria:

Police shortages have led to widespread underreporting and a growing number of unsolved cases. The reality is that many offences go undetected are not investigated simply because our police force lacks the resources to respond.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee figures showed that we have got a shortfall of 2333 available recruits. That includes approximately 700 officers on workers compensation, 300 senior officers expected to take early retirement packages, 233 staff on extended sick leave and 1100 vacant positions yet to be filled. The acting police commissioner acknowledged it could take up to five years for Victoria Police to return to full operational strength. We cannot just call the police. There are not enough police, and there is an excess of violent crime. Then we get told if we get injured, 'Well, you escalated it. That's really incitement, isn't it? If you've got a weapon, then that's just escalating things.' No, no, no – there is no good reason for a stranger to be inside a home uninvited. They have already crossed the line. They have already broken the law. They have already demonstrated that they are there for no good reason.

What the petitioners are asking for is extremely reasonable. They are not calling for vigilantism. They are actually just calling for clarity, the kind of clarity that already exists in many other jurisdictions. In Western Australia householders are allowed to use any force they reasonably believe necessary. In South Australia the laws are relaxed in terms of proportionality in home invasion cases. Queensland has a specific defence of dwelling, and it is strengthening it further. And as we have heard, in the United Kingdom the law protects householders unless their actions were grossly disproportionate, recognising that fear, darkness and urgency shape a human response, especially because it is in your home. There is no category where it is reasonable for this random stranger to be in your home. That man in Queensland who we heard about before found the man in his house, as I understand it, near his child's cot. I would not blame someone for whatever they did if they found a strange man over their baby's cot – absolutely nothing. I would probably give him an award.

These laws in other jurisdictions have not caused chaos. They have not unleashed violence. What they have done is remove ambiguity, protect the innocent and send a clear message that in your own home, when strangers enter, threatening violence or not, you are not going to be punished for reasonably assuming the worst and defending yourself as a person without any training and without having been

negligent in any way for not having that training. These are just families in their homes. In Victoria they are families in their homes with no police on call that you can rely on. There is no good reason for uninvited strangers to be in our homes. There is no good reason to expect frightened parents, lone grandparents, single women and teenagers to behave like trained professionals. There is no good reason for the law to hesitate when any of those people do their best to survive and to protect their children. In the hallway in that moment the only thing that matters is protecting the family.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:07): I thank Mr Limbrick for sponsoring this e-petition, which reached the high bar of 20,554 signatures. We know that the petitioners are requesting the Legislative Council to call on this government to amend the legislation to provide more clarity and protection for self-defence in the home, in line with the United Kingdom's approach. The United Kingdom has special provisions for self-defence in a person's home, where people only contravene the law if their actions are considered grossly disproportionate. This recognises that people have more at stake in defending their home than they would in public, but Australian law does not recognise this distinction.

Victorians are frightened in their own homes, and the headlines make it impossible to ignore why. A 60-year-old man in Gladstone Park was stabbed repeatedly, attacked with a hammer and shot. His wife, 57 years old, was threatened at gunpoint. In Kew East a husband was stabbed 11 times. In Mount Waverley, in a crime so barbaric it shocked the entire nation, a pregnant woman and her partner were decapitated in their own home. These events represent a rapidly escalating pattern of violent home invasions in this state. The Crime Statistics Agency reported 30,545 residential burglaries in the year to June 2025, a 13.9 per cent rise compared to the prior year. Aggravated burglaries have surged by 22 per cent, reaching 7856 incidents. Victorians are living with this reality every day, and they are demanding change. That is why this petition smashed the threshold of 10,000 signatures required for debate. That is why it received 20,554 signatures. Victorians have sent us all a very clear message: review our self-defence laws and tackle the crime crisis.

Right now our laws are simply not keeping up with the danger that our families face. The petition today is about the extent to which a person can defend themselves in their own home. It was Sir Edward Coke who put it plainly centuries ago, stating, 'A man's house is his castle,' a principle rooted in English common law. Your home should be a safe place. We all remember the old Australian movie from 1997, the comedy called *The Castle*, about restoring and keeping your family home. But this would not be a comic film if we had to make it about the burglaries and the thefts that take place in people's homes, where people are so scared that families and parents are resorting to self-defence, as they have done in my region. A mother made sure that each of her children had a baseball bat under their bed or under their pillow because they knew that the home invaders were coming back. They had taken their car keys, and the police said they would return. It took a week, but they did return, and by the time they returned, the fear had escalated so much and the father's instinct to protect his family had escalated so much that it was a miracle that they ran off, given the rage that the man had to protect his home and his family.

In Victoria today the principle is compromised by ambiguity. Our self-defence provisions in part IC of the Crimes Act 1958 are meant to protect people acting in fear for their lives. Self-defence was first codified in 2005 under Labor Attorney-General Rob Hulls. His activist reforms replaced longstanding common law and reshaped our justice system, but it was not always for the better. The Labor Party ushered in judicial activism, softer sentencing, greater complexity and a shift from impartiality towards social justice. In 2014 further well-intentioned amendments were made primarily to combat family violence, especially after defensive homicide was being misused by violent men. Section 322K of the Crimes Act says a person is not guilty if:

- the person believes that the conduct is necessary in self-defence; and
- the conduct is a reasonable response in the circumstances as the person perceives them.

But herein lies the problem – ‘reasonable’. That single word is arguably vague and subjective, and I mentioned that when we were talking about some of the bills that have come before the house to do with children – ‘reasonable’. In a violent home invasion it is impossible to measure in a split second what ‘reasonable’ might be, and people should not be expected to become legal scholars in the dark of the night as an armed criminal forces their way into their home. Other countries use clearer standards, and we need to do so as well in Victoria. It is simply not okay.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:13): I thank everyone that has contributed to this debate today. I will just respond to a couple of things. Ms Ermacora said that possessions in your house are not worth dying for, and certainly that is true. My television is not worth dying for. My PlayStation is not worth dying for. My microwave is not worth dying for. But do you know what is worth dying for? My family. I think that every parent in Victoria feels the same way, and they want to know when their family is under threat from violent criminals and they fight back that the government and the law have their back and that this Parliament has their back.

I think it is absolutely essential that we have clarity on this. The government has not provided clarity to people on what happens in these situations. Unfortunately it is becoming all too common that people have their homes invaded. The people that I mentioned before, Carly, the petitioner, and also Aaron – as is common for people who have had their homes invaded – no longer feel safe in their homes. They leave. In fact both of these people are leaving their homes. It is such a sad and traumatic thing that we even have people leaving our state because their home was invaded. I urge the government to act on this. I know that the government sees aggravated burglary as a serious crime; they have laws that we will be debating this week on this very topic and how serious it is. If they really feel it is that serious – and it is serious – then they should be talking about what people can do to defend themselves against these violent thugs that invade their houses.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:15): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1180, and orders of the day, government business, 1 and 2, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:15): (*By leave*) I seek to circulate amendments to be moved in the committee stage of this bill in my name.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:15): I would like to withdraw my instruction motion.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

*Committee***Clause 1 (18:17)**

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, can I ask: with the reportable conduct scheme moving to the Social Services Regulator from the Commission for Children and Young People, will organisations still be left to investigate issues within their own centres, or will the SSR investigate circumstances of abuse, neglect and sexual abuse?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The way the reportable conduct scheme works is it is almost as if they contract out the investigation. That will still be the case, but there will be the increased level of oversight of the regulators being brought together and the reportable conduct scheme being within the Social Services Regulator sitting alongside the child safe standards and working with children check, and that information will be able to be shared much more freely.

David ETTERS HANK: I would like to circulate the amendments that are in my name.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: How regularly would this investigation by SSR happen? Will it be with every case, or will it be in exceptional circumstances or adverse situations?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Sorry, Ms Gray-Barberio, just to clarify your question, are you referring to the own-motion powers?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Sorry, I think it is because we got cut off. But it was a follow-up question to the reportable conduct scheme moving to the SSR. How regularly will this investigation by SSR happen? Will it be with every case or cases that are considered adverse or special cases?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It would be at the regulator's discretion.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: If you could just please clarify for the house, Minister: when you say 'at discretion', what does that mean? Is there going to be a checklist, or how would they be able to determine the scope of discretion?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: There will be a risk assessment framework. There will be certain factors which would then be measured in each and every case, and at the discretion of the regulator, depending on the seriousness of what is being alleged, the investigation would then proceed or otherwise.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Will there be any oversight of how SSR handles reportable conduct matters?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The SSR is obviously an independent regulator, so the usual provisions apply and then the usual oversight of independent regulators also applies. It is subject to obviously the usual reporting mechanisms in the usual way as well as the other oversight functions of government.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Could you just, please, I guess, reassure the house that the structural issues that we saw with the quality assessment and regulation division (QARD) are not going to be repeated at the SSR landscape?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I assume when you mean the structural issues, QARD was obviously a part of the Department of Education. The bill that we passed previously, as I know you well know, establishes the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority (VECRA). It sets up an independent early childhood regulator. The SSR, while it is 12 months in and being fundamentally restructured through this process and looking somewhat different to what it looks like now, still is a statutory independent regulator. It is not really comparable to QARD from the outset, let alone with its new functions. I can certainly assure the house that it is subject to the usual oversight and auditing and IBAC et cetera. That will all be the case, as it is for any other statutory entity.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: How will complaints about authorised officers of the regulator itself be handled?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It would depend on the nature of the complaint. Obviously in the first instance complaints could be made to the regulator themselves, but certainly also the Ombudsman and again other similar functions that apply to whole of government.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Is there an independent complaints pathway and external investigator for complaints against the regulator if they are not performing their functions adequately?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I would refer you to my previous answer, but it would depend on the nature of the complaint. As I said, there is the usual oversight from IBAC in terms of anti-corruption through to the Ombudsman, in terms of effective operation of government in accordance with the regulatory framework in which it exists, for example. There is that option, but it would depend on the nature of the complaint which of those is the answer to your question.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What are the potential risks of moving all education and guidance regulatory functions to the Social Services Regulator?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: We believe that, in establishing an independent regulator and bringing those functions together, we are actually reducing risk rather than creating further risk. I think it will. We do not foresee any in particular, but if you have got a more specific question, I am happy to go to your concern.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: No, I did not have any specific example; I just wanted to understand how the regulator will be able to respond to those potential risks. We are bringing in the reportable conduct scheme, the worker screening, as well as the working with children check into the Social Services Regulator, and we want to ensure that there is accountability and transparency but also information sharing to ensure that we are not having predators that are able to exploit loopholes in the system. Can you please just explain and once again reassure the house that this is the answer to closing those loopholes?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It has certainly been my long-held and firm view, as the house well knows, that bringing regulatory functions together actually improves information sharing and ensures that we have systems that can talk to each other and assess the risk together and that we do not have, as the child safety review referred to, breadcrumbs of information sitting in different parts of government, where – as we have seen in some of the terrible cases that have come to light – one piece of information may have sat with one entity or one regulator and another with another and those breadcrumbs never joined up. Very clearly what the rapid review told us is that we need to join up those breadcrumbs. I was already clearly a firm believer in bringing regulation together, because I think there is an inherent interconnectedness in people's need for regulation to be brought together, because people do not usually just have one issue. There might be a child with another particular vulnerability, and if you can bring the information and the services and whatnot together, then I think you will improve information flow.

David ETTERS HANK: Are these working with children check provisions designed primarily to address childcare workers and early childhood educators?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The working with children check is obviously a scheme that applies for anyone who works with children. My view is that children should be kept safe wherever they are learning, wherever they are playing and wherever they are being supported in their wellbeing and growth, and the working with children check strives to assist us to do that.

David ETTERS HANK: Would it be your assessment that the regulator has the ability to deal with a very large and diverse range of workers in addressing its responsibilities under the bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Yes.

David ETTERS HANK: So could you just confirm: would the provisions here apply to, for example – apart from, obviously, early childhood workers – also teacher aides, kindergarten workers, secondary and primary teachers and tertiary university teachers and lecturers?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Teachers, for example, are separately regulated by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) and so there are different schemes that apply in different ways for different parts of the workforce. What we are seeking to do here is implement the recommendations of the rapid review into child safety in the working with children check, and we are making the improvements that it recommended.

David ETTERS HANK: Would it also be correct that it would potentially apply to all bus drivers and all taxidriv ers who might be involved in transporting children?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Again, Mr Ettershank, we are seeking to keep children safe wherever children are learning, wherever they are playing and wherever they are being supported in their growth and wellbeing, and where that requires somebody to have a working with children check, these reforms would obviously apply to them, but that is principally child-related work.

David ETTERS HANK: Are you saying then, Minister, that if the complaint against the person who is the holder of the working with children check is not to do with children, this bill would not have relevance? Or will it deal with all complaints about someone, which could strike to their ability to retain their working with children check?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: We have made it very clear, Mr Ettershank, that what we are seeking to do here is implement the recommendations of the rapid review into child safety in the working with children check. They told us that we needed to make these reforms in order to keep children safe wherever they learn, wherever they play and wherever they are being supported in their wellbeing and their growth. If they are a working with children check holder – the particular provisions that allow them to have a valid working with children check are about keeping children safe.

David ETTERS HANK: So if a complaint is made about a bus driver that that bus driver is rude to a child, would that fall within the purview of the Social Services Regulator?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I said, what we are doing is seeking to keep children safe. If children's safety is at threat or is being threatened by the activity of the working with children check holder and it is child-related, then it would be potentially impacted by some of the changes that we are making in the bill. But the work needs to be child-related. It is directly child-related. We are not talking about incidental conduct, and that is clearly set out in the act. But what we are doing here is implementing the rapid review recommendations, which said that we needed to make these improvements to the working with children check in order to keep children safe.

David ETTERS HANK: I am sorry, I did not quite understand your answer. I think we all understand your motivation and drawing on the rapid review, and we will come back later to whether your rapid review trumps the royal commission. But for the purposes of this one, could you just answer me the question, please: if there is a complaint against that bus driver that they have been rude to a child, would the course of action be that a complaint could be made to the Social Services Regulator that that bus driver has been rude and they would be captured by this scheme?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I have been very clear, Mr Ettershank, we are not seeking to capture incidental conduct issues, as the bill – and I would urge those in the house that have not yet read the bill to read it – retains the unjustifiable risk threshold for determining when someone's working with children check clearance must be refused or revoked. That is, a clearance will only be granted where there is no unjustifiable risk to the safety of children. This is principally about the paramount safety of the child, and the bill will strengthen and clarify the risk assessment test to enhance those protective purposes, as was recommended by the child safety review.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, could you tell me if this would apply to effectively all nurses in our public and private health systems?

Lizzie BLAND THORN: Again – and I am happy to start referring you to my previous answers, Mr Ettershank – this is child-related work, and there is clearly a test where there is an unjustifiable risk threshold for determining when someone’s working with children check clearance should be refused or revoked, and that is where there is an unjustifiable risk to the safety of the child. The scheme, as I said, applies wherever there are people working with children and children are being supported in their learning, in their growing, in their wellbeing, in their playing, because this is about keeping children safe wherever they are.

David ETTERS HANK: I think perhaps we can help you with some briefer answers, Minister, in terms of saying that the primacy that we accord to the safety of our children is not in dispute. I think we can all agree on that. This is a question, in my mind, first, about unforeseen consequences of hastily drafted legislation and, secondly, about having some due process and natural justice applied to workers. In the first instance, because there is a bit of ground we are going to cover here, I want to try and get an understanding of the breadth of the workforce that falls within this scope, because it has been largely understood that this is primarily about childcare workers. But I would like to suggest to you that it is actually much, much broader than that, and that is my intent. I am going to take it as a yes that this could apply to every nurse in the state. Could I also ask you: would it therefore apply equally to occupational therapists, physiotherapists, mental health nurses and all aged care workers?

Lizzie BLAND THORN: I have never reduced the working with children check or safety of children issues just to early childhood services, and I actually resent the accusation. The fact that this bill has taken so long to get to this stage of the debate is because I have been trying to protect the breadth of the application of this bill well beyond just early education – because my greatest fear is that we settle on a system that protects children in early education – and in particular, in relation to some of the issues I know you have been interested in in relation to disability, to ensure that we clamp down on child safety in early education at the same time as the Commonwealth is asking us to set up a new system of foundational supports for children with disabilities. And we say to all of the evil people out there who might find those cracks in the systems where there are vulnerable children: go over there instead. My point has always been that child safety is not only about children in early education systems but about children wherever they are learning, wherever they are playing and wherever they have been supported or are being supported in their growth and wellbeing. This should have the broadest possible application so that when someone is working with children – we are not talking about incidental activity, Mr Ettershank; we are not talking about non-related child work – and when, unlike the VIT system for teachers, we do not have another system that ensures that there are those protections around them, we have a system that we know we can have some trust and some faith in and that families and children themselves can have trust and faith in that will protect and uphold the paramount safety of the child.

David ETTERS HANK: Again, I think we are in furious agreement about the principles that underpin the legislation. What I am trying to get to at this stage, whilst I understand that there was a dispute over its application to the disability sector and that that has been temporarily addressed, is that my concern is that this regulator is being set up in such a manner that it potentially captures hundreds of thousands of Victorian workers who come in contact with children and who work with children directly or indirectly. We will come back to the incidental clause later, but if we look at the provision of that incidental clause, manifestly it has challenges in its interpretation. Also, in terms of triaging, there are issues. In terms of the rights of workers who have lost their check, then they have lost their jobs. When they have lost their jobs under this bill, they have no right to have that review, or in fact even to know what the allegations are against them, for up to six months, and that is a devastating thing which this bill does.

In clarifying the breadth of this I want to make it clear that I am asking you that because I know this has been sold as a childcare thing but it is much more than that. This is the whole section of the

workforce that interacts with kids. We are talking about transport workers, we are talking about educators and we are talking about most of the health workforce falling within this purview. I presume, Minister – please tell me if I am wrong – that this would apply to all foster carers. It would apply to, for example, sports coaches and instructors. It would apply to ministers of religion. Have I got any of those wrong, Minister?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Child-related work is defined in the act in section 7, if you would like to have a look at it, Mr Ettershank. We are not changing who the working with children check will apply to. At the current point in time there are not hundreds of thousands but 2 million cardholders with working with children checks.

I reject the premise of your question – it was really a statement, not a question – that this is in some way weakening procedural fairness. I too have had conversations with unions and others around what that looks like. As you well know from discussions that you and I have had, we were with a range of stakeholders – with everybody in this Parliament indeed and with stakeholders who support or do not support all or other elements of this bill – trying to present this bill in a way in which it got the broadest possible support, because I know that everybody in this chamber, certainly all of those representing the workforce and indeed the vast, vast majority of those who work with children, have the paramount interest of the child as their number one concern. I do not doubt that. But what the rapid review told us was that the law and the regulations do not put the child first, and that is what they asked us to do. It is what we have done in the two bills that we have just passed, and it is what we are now seeking to do in this bill.

While we have tried ad nauseam, at length, to resolve or give comfort around some of the things that might be concerning stakeholders, unions, the workforce or indeed members of this chamber, ultimately what we have to do is weigh up how we protect, through this bill, the implementation of the largest part of the rapid review that we can possibly do. The number one recommendation that Mr Weatherill and Ms White made at the outset was the paramount interest of the child and that these changes to the working with children check needed to be made in order to protect child safety. That is what is happening here. We have sought, within the parameters of the bill, to build into it as much as possible all of the things that you speak of, Mr Ettershank – we believe that they are there – but at the same time I make no apology for child safety coming first.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, good on you. I think we all agree that child safety should come first. I think that one is probably a bit of an empty horse. But moving on and recognising that we all accept the primacy of caring for kids, would it be fair for me to describe what has happened over the last week or two as a fact that there were indeed negotiations with multiple unions, that there was agreement in principle to a set of due process and natural justice amendments and that those were removed today?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: This response to the child safety review is three bills. The first two of those we have passed without issue. There were some good conversations around those and people worked collaboratively, and indeed there was a particular amendment made to one of those, I think with the unanimous agreement of the house that that was the case. What we have sought to do, as I just outlined in my previous answer, is work with all of the stakeholders, unions included, to come up with a package of reforms that protects the integrity of the bill that the government was proposing and in the broadest possible sense fulfils the objectives of the child safety review. Absolutely, we have sought to try and give comfort to those who were concerned about the inclusion of the disability services commissioner and the Victorian Disability Worker Commission, for example, and we have also sought to give comfort to unions which have raised certain issues in relation to procedural fairness.

From my perspective, in the implementation of the review it was critical that that was a package of reforms that in the broadest possible sense achieved all of the objectives of the review. Through the negotiations and the discussions which you have referred to, Mr Ettershank, it has become clear that we cannot achieve all of those things. What the government has had to do is pick a pathway for this

bill to succeed, because we cannot wait for the child safety reforms. We have waited too long. We have tried for three weeks now to resolve everybody's issues, and it has become apparent to me that I cannot resolve everybody's issues and have a majority vote for this bill. I cannot in good conscience, and there are some aspects of the bill that I would have preferred to have seen and the government would have preferred to have seen, particularly in relation to protecting children with disability, because as I outlined to the house in the previous sitting week, recommendation 8.1 of the review very clearly said – and indeed Ms Gray-Barberio's questions went to this before – that there should be a 'no wrong door' approach and that we should have an interconnected regulatory system that ensures that those breadcrumbs are vacuumed up and that we do not leave pieces of information about a child over here and then over here and then over here and never actually talking to each other. The rapid review was very clear in relation to 8.1 what needed to happen. We have sought to negotiate with parties to come up with a pathway that protected all elements of the bill but, sadly, it is clear that that cannot happen.

The fastest way to ensure that we can implement these working with children check changes, which in my view are the most important, the most critical, because they go across the whole of the system – as I said, there are 2 million cardholders. It applies wherever there is child-related work, as defined under section 7 of the act, if you need to go and have a look at what actually counts as child-related work. But wherever there are working with children check holders who are working with children, wherever they are, as I said, learning, playing, growing and being cared for, the rules around those working with children check provisions are clear. They are improved and they will become nation-leading, rather than needing to catch up, going to the opposition's point that the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report be implemented. This all needs to happen now. So while I would have preferred to have resolved everyone's issues, it was very clear to me over the course of the last two weeks – it is probably why I have no voice – that is not possible. So while I would have preferred that, the pathway that we are on is the pathway that will get the majority vote in this house for making sure children are safe through the implementation of the working with children check changes.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, I am lost for words for where to go now, but I am going to have a punt at it. Are you saying that you agreed with the unions to –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Ettershank, if you can ask a question, not interpret what the minister is saying. Committee stage is very important for the interpretation of the legislation, so it is not about putting words in the minister's mouth. The minister will answer for herself if you can just frame a question, please, rather than trying to interpret what you think you understand from the minister's answer.

David ETTERS HANK: I am sorry, Deputy President, but that is why I started the sentence with 'Are you saying', because I am seeking clarification. What have I missed?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Okay. I thought you were going to interpret what she said, and it is better to just ask a straight question.

David ETTERS HANK: It was just a very long answer, so I am trying to pull together a couple of threads.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Okay. I will allow it this time.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, are you saying that you have previously agreed with the unions to a set of natural justice and due-principle amendments and they were binned today because you could not get the numbers in the house to get the bill through if you granted those basic workers rights?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: No.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you for the brevity of that answer, but perhaps we can find a happy medium with a slightly more elaborated answer. Could you explain to me how those two are connected? Because that is pretty much exactly what you just said.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Mr Ettershank, what I outlined at length – I will not repeat myself, and you indeed have asked me to be brief – is that we have sought to give comfort and resolve people’s concerns. It is clear that we cannot do that, but what we have here is a bill that meets the child safety review, that implements the child safety review, and that is what the house is being asked to consider.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, you have referred repeatedly to the rapid review, which has recommended vacuuming up breadcrumbs. If I take, for example, the question of the disability workforce, if I look at what has been said there about the regulator, because I want to move on to the question of the regulator, because we are saying now that the regulator potentially captures 2 million workers or volunteers or whatever – I thank you for providing that number; I was unaware that it was just so huge – this regulator will be expected to be able to address, subject to the incidental provisions in clause 7, and to deal with 2 million workers. If I look at, say, disability workers, they do have their own channel, apparently – possibly, hopefully – without pre-empting the deliberations today. If I look at the comments from Julie Phillips, the CEO of the Disability Discrimination Legal Service and the chair of Disability Advocacy Victoria, she stated in a recent letter:

... disability service providers do not in any way shape or form represent the disability community, and indeed have been heavily involved in subjecting them to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation ...

She went on:

... a few people with disabilities on a reference group, who do not represent the disability community, and indeed are not allowed to share their discussions with the disability community, does not constitute consultation ...

I am wondering what your response to that would be, given your previous statement about the extent of consultation in the formation of this bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I have already outlined for the house previously, including in my summing-up, the extent of the consultation that was undertaken in relation to the bill.

David ETTERS HANK: Did that consultation extend to the transport industry and the Transport Workers’ Union?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I refer you to my previous answer, Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: Sorry, I missed how that connected. Could I ask: was the transport sector and the Transport Workers’ Union consulted about the application of this legislation? Yes or no would be great.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The rapid review consulted widely, Mr Ettershank, and consultation was further spoken to in my summing-up. I refer you to *Hansard*.

David ETTERS HANK: So are you saying that indeed the transport industry and the Transport Workers’ Union were consulted by the rapid review?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I refer you to *Hansard*, Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: This is getting interestingly circular. Could you indulge me and share with the chamber what we would find if we were to refer to those pages in *Hansard*?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: There was extensive consultation on the bill. I have outlined it previously to the house, and I refer you to *Hansard*.

David ETTERS HANK: Well, that is interesting. Let us see if we can get some different reactions. Were the acute health sector and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation consulted by the rapid review?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Again, the rapid review consulted widely. I did not conduct the rapid review. Jay Weatherill and Pam White conducted the rapid review, and they consulted broadly. As I

have indicated previously, there has been further consultation in relation to this bill. I have outlined it to the house a number of times, and I refer you to *Hansard*.

David ETTERS HANK: I am really none the wiser. Would it be fair to say that you are just unaware of whether or not the nurses federation and, for example, the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association were consulted? Is it just that you do not know, or is it that it has actually been covered in *Hansard* and I just need to go away and read it?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The rapid review sets out quite clearly who they consulted with. I have also detailed in the house on a number of occasions who I have consulted with. Consultation has been broad. It is publicly available. It is available in *Hansard*, and I refer you to those opportunities.

David ETTERS HANK: I put it to you, Minister, that in fact the transport industry and the Transport Workers' Union were not consulted.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I have said, who has been consulted is publicly available. We can keep asking the question a number of ways, but I will therefore continue to answer in a number of ways. I have detailed for the house on a number of occasions the consultation we have been through. The thing I would add to that was the rapid review was open to anyone who wanted to be consulted to apply to do so.

David ETTERS HANK: Let us assume that in fact the transport industry and the Transport Workers' Union were not consulted. Are you saying that it is incumbent upon them to have approached the rapid review, which was pretty rapid? Are you saying that it would have been incumbent upon them, and if they chose not to approach the rapid review, then that is their fault, and if they are captured by the legislation, that is their fault?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I do not appreciate words being put in my mouth, Mr Ettershank. I have outlined for the house on a number of occasions who has been publicly listed in the rapid review as having been consulted, including that it was open to others to put forward submissions to the rapid review if they wanted to, as well as the suite of reforms. Again I note that none of these questions were put by you, Mr Ettershank, when it came to the other two bills. But in relation to all three bills, they are all in response to the child safety rapid review, and the consultation around the whole of the rapid review, including all three bills, has been detailed a number of times now.

David ETTERS HANK: Sorry, I am not quite following you there, Minister. Are you saying to us that the other two bills had a similar application to around 2 million working with children check people?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Particularly the bill in relation to the national law has huge ramifications right across the sector. While I do not have available in front of me the number of people impacted by that bill, it is clear to say that it has a sizeable impact as well. What I am saying is that this is a package of reforms that are, as a package, a response to the rapid review and that the rapid review consulted broadly and invited anyone who wanted to submit to it to submit to it.

David ETTERS HANK: I think we might come back to this one. When we have had the dinner break, I will go and check the rapid review, and no doubt that will resolve the question.

Minister, the Office of the Public Advocate's *Community Visitors Annual Report 2024–2025* states that the Social Services Regulator has a record of poor enforcement, low accountability and a lower benchmark for minimum standards of care. I am wondering why you would imagine that should give confidence to the 2 million people that are potentially falling within the scope of this bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for a new question. As I have outlined to the house previously, the SSR was established on 1 July 2024, and it has undertaken a substantial amount of compliance, enforcement and education activity in 2024–25, contrary to your accusation. A key focus of the regulator has been on implementing the scheme, supporting providers to transition to the

scheme and implementing a streamlined registration process. However, it used its broad regulatory powers, where warranted, to address risks to service users. For the record, in 2024–25 the regulator approved 64 new registration applications, bringing the total number of registered providers to 361; received 3896 notifications of notifiable incidents, 1088 of which were subject to a more detailed review; conducted 184 compliance inspections against the social services standards; completed 173 compliance activities relating to the child safe standards; processed 6233 worker and carer exclusion scheme database checks; issued seven exclusions and three interim exclusions against individuals working in the out-of-home care sector; and published a wide range of guidance material to support establishing the scheme in 2024–25. I could go on, but it is clearly evident that the Social Services Regulator in its first year has had a particularly busy and productive year.

It is also fair to say that what this bill does is fundamentally change the nature of the Social Services Regulator as it currently stands. It turns it into a new piece of social infrastructure, if you like, and with all of the new functions that it will have, as I have assured the house on other occasions, it will be adequately resourced to undertake those functions. It is not as if we are leaving the existing structure of the Social Services Regulator and simply asking it to do a whole lot of other jobs. We are fundamentally changing its balance, its nature and the way in which it works and setting it up so that it succeeds in doing the job of keeping children safe.

David ETTERS HANK: Sorry, Minister, I would hate that there was a suggestion that I was accusing – I think that was your expression. I was literally quoting the Office of the Public Advocate. Does that change your position in that regard?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I have outlined the successes of the first year of operation of the Social Services Regulator in its current form, I have spoken to its new form and I have assured the house it will be adequately resourced to undertake the new functions that it has been asked to do.

David ETTERS HANK: They were pretty impressive, the stats you rolled off there – hundreds and hundreds of complaints and things resolved and dozens of others. That is great. The resourcing that you are going to provide to the Social Services Regulator – in your mind, will that be adequate to cover the 2 million people that will fall within the scope of this bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The government has committed an initial investment of \$42 million to implementing the recommendations of the rapid child safety review, including supporting the shift of the working with children check to the Social Services Regulator so it is adequately resourced to meet its existing and expanded remit. As I said, that is the existing number of cardholders that are currently resourced within the existing structure, who will be, as part of this, moved into the Social Services Regulator. So it brings with it those resources, plus the government has made a further investment of \$42 million. It is our view and indeed it is the recommendation of the review – and as I said, we are committed to the recommendations of the review – that it be adequately resourced to undertake its functions.

David ETTERS HANK: Can I just take that as an unequivocal undertaking that the regulator will be resourced, staffed and managed in such a manner that it will be able to adequately and contextually assess the ability of workers to retain their working with children checks across that diverse range of industries that we have agreed fall within the purview of this bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: At the outset, I refer you to section 7 of the act, Mr Ettershank. It is not about what you agree falls within the purview of the bill but what is defined as being in the purview of the bill. As I have assured the house, we will implement every recommendation of the rapid safety review.

David ETTERS HANK: Minister, could I take you back to the understanding that existed with the unions and the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Is it your view that the issues that they raised with you were of sufficient merit that they would warrant amendment of this bill?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I am not going to give a blow-by-blow description of private conversations and consultations that I may have conducted, Mr Ettershank, but as a former union official, I made it very clear to those representing the workforce that coming from the perspective from which they were coming, I could understand why they were seeking comfort around some of the things that they sought comfort about. But at the same time, it is my view that the bill adequately provides for those issues. While we did seek in a number of ways to work with all stakeholders – not just unions, others as well – to try and address what they saw as risks or concerns in the bill, we think the bill fulfils the child safety review and balances the needs of workforce providers and others at the same time as fundamentally being about the paramount best interests of the child. What we are doing here is ultimately implementing, in the broadest possible sense, as many as possible of the recommendations of the rapid review.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, if I can just ask you some questions around worker screening, what oversight mechanisms will there be for providers to make sure that they do not misuse the personal details of the workforce or the educators, and how will the register protect worker privacy?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It will only be those with authorised access within the regulator. Obviously, as we talked about earlier in response to your questions, all of the necessary oversight protections – the Ombudsman’s protections and IBAC et cetera – apply around that to ensure that there is no corruption of that. But it will be authorised access within the context of the regulator.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, if I could just ask a question regarding new part 3.4A, section 92B(3), is that consistent with human rights law for a person who commits an offence as a child to be considered an adult in any circumstance?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Ms Gray-Barberio, sorry if we have misunderstood you, but are you referring to the compatibility with the charter of human rights?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The bill obviously pursues the important objective of protecting child safety. In doing so it promotes the protection of a child’s best interests in accordance with section 17(2) of the charter, which seeks to protect the bodily integrity, mental health, dignity and self-worth of a child. The bill also seeks to promote the rights and protection of service users, including their rights to equality, life, privacy, freedom of movement and protection from inhumane and degrading treatment. The statement of compatibility notes that the bill engages and limits some charter rights but that overall the limitations are justified by the need to achieve the paramount consideration of protection of the children and of service users. The statement of compatibility notes that the decision-making procedures of a working with children check and the ability to revoke or suspend are likely to engage some other rights. Does that speak to that particular part of your question?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes, thank you. Minister, why does the paramount consideration not apply to the regulator in carrying out functions for the working with children checks or the working with children clearance holders?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Within the Worker Screening Act 2020 there is already the paramountcy, but it was not in the SSR, so that is what we are putting in.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I have just got a couple more questions. Minister, when are you hoping to implement this bill? Will it be sometime in January next year?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Parts of it are progressive, but royal assent is when some of the earliest functions will come in – for example, the reportable conduct scheme – and then others will follow.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: My last question is just around who is actually going to be appointed to be leading this regulator. How will that process happen?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: There is an existing Social Services Regulator. Mr Jonathan Kaplan is the regulator. The bill obviously, as we have talked about, provides for associate regulators, for example. They are also Governor in Council appointments, so they would be new appointments within the infrastructure as well.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Great. Thank you.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (19:14): I move, by leave:

That the sitting be extended for a further half-hour.

Leave refused.

Progress reported.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Albury–Wodonga hospital

Gaëlle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:16): (2194) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Health regarding the Albury–Wodonga regional hospital redevelopment, a project that has become a symbol of broken promises and poor planning for regional health in Victoria. This project was announced just weeks before the state election as a \$558 million investment in October 2022, funded by Victoria, New South Wales and the Commonwealth, with a promise of consolidating two ageing hospital sites into one modern facility. Yet despite planning dating back to 2011, the reality today for the border community is deeply disappointing. Earlier this year the value management process stripped the project of critical elements to squeeze it into the budget. The helipad was removed, and key facilities are now being built as empty shells awaiting future funding on top of the broken promise of a single hospital. It is a compromised plan that fails to meet the urgent needs of the fast-growing border community.

In the Albury–Wodonga region surgical waitlists are amongst the highest in the state, with over 3500 patients waiting for surgery and extensive wait times due to insufficient beds and lack of capacity causing a backlog. Some patients end up too unwell for surgery, while others are forced to travel long distances for care. This is a direct consequence of underinvestment and a lack of priority for regional health by this government. Victoria's funding contribution to this project is minimal compared to other regional centres. When the Bendigo Hospital was redeveloped in 2018 for a similar catchment of 300,000 people, the state allocated \$630 million. Since then, construction costs have risen dramatically. Over \$655 million was allocated to Ballarat Base Hospital for a major rebuild that includes a helipad for a population catchment of 250,000. The redevelopment of Warrnambool Base Hospital by 2027 has been allocated \$396 million, yet Albury–Wodonga hospital has been allocated just \$225 million by Victoria. It is 320 kilometres from Melbourne and over 550 kilometres from Sydney, yet there is no helipad at the site.

I visited Albury–Wodonga last week to tour the hospital and meet with management and staff. I also met with council representatives and doctors and spoke with residents about their concerns. The frustration in the community is palpable. Patients and medical professionals are angry. There is tension between decision-making groups, and the absence of genuine community consultation shows this government's strongarm approach. This project is now dependent on future funding just to meet needs that were identified years ago, and concrete pours for the new building will not fix the fundamental problem. This upgrade is going to be incomplete, underscoped and unable to deliver the care the community urgently needs. There are also concerns being raised about the soil being problematic at

the site, with some movement and works that need to be done. The ongoing uncertainty in the region's health care is the cause of significant distress for many residents and health professionals. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently review this project and provide critical investments into health infrastructure, rather than deliver hollow shells that will require years of additional funding to become functional. The community needs access to high-quality, accessible healthcare services that meet the increasing demands of a growing population.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region road safety

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:19): (2195) I ask that the Minister for Roads and Road Safety update me on how the government is improving road safety and easing congestion for my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Mansfield road safety

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:19): (2196) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety too.

Michael Galea interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: But I have got some real action that I seek, not that poxy performance that you have just given us. The action that I seek is that the minister join me in meeting with the Mansfield Shire Council to discuss and address their road network issues. I spend a significant amount of time calling out ministers who ignore the requests of local government. This time I am following up on several written requests from the mayor and CEO of Mansfield shire, dated 25 June 2024, 20 March 2024, 25 July 2025 and 3 September 2025. Disgracefully, these requests have either been ignored or have received dismissive and unhelpful responses from the minister or her department.

On the road maintenance front, Mansfield shire has identified state government roads in a dangerous condition. Critical roundabouts are also needed on Mount Buller Road and Highton Lane, Midland Highway and Dead Horse Lane, and Greenvale Lane and Mount Buller Road. Sadly, Department of Transport and Planning responses have been nothing short of hopeless. In one letter they referenced works on roads that are not even in the Mansfield shire, and in a subsequent letter they only committed to considering short-term fixes rather than permanent ones. Mansfield shire does not even feature on DTP's 2025–26 maintenance schedule, which indicates there will not be any substantive works till late next year.

Alongside Mayor Rabie and Cr Clark, I have stood near the intersection of Mansfield-Whitfield Road and Dead Horse Lane. I can tell you that it looks more like the surface of the moon than a road in a developed country like ours. There are potholes all over, and if action is not taken you will have more than a dead horse, you will have vehicle write-offs and potentially casualties. Mansfield shire has applied for funding through the federal black spot program to install a \$2 million roundabout at this intersection. The funding has been granted by the Commonwealth, but for the roundabout to be installed the speed limit must simply be reduced to 60 kilometres an hour. Sadly, this commonsense request has been entirely ignored by the department. Recently Mayor Rabie was forced to pen an open letter detailing these failures to ensure that ratepayers were made aware of the Allan Labor government's complete disregard for road maintenance and safety. On Facebook Mansfield's post about the mayor's letter received significant engagement. One person predicted that someone will have an accident just trying to avoid the huge potholes. Minister, stop ignoring Mansfield and get the roads fixed.

Corrections system

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:22): (2197) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Corrections, and the action I seek is for emergency management days to be automatically considered in all cases. We recently both had the pleasure of attending *She'll Be Apples*, a performance by the women in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre run by Somebody's Daughter Theatre company. The

performance was a powerful exploration of trauma, abuse and isolation. It also touched on how lockdowns triggered by staff shortages at the centre isolated women and impacted their wellbeing. At one stage it was unclear whether this performance would be able to go ahead because of the lockdowns, but thankfully it eventually did, albeit slightly delayed.

While these lockdowns thankfully appear to have eased, they highlighted several issues with the way these kinds of staffing shortages are handled. When these lockdowns were at their peak community legal services and support service providers raised significant concerns around access and restrictions on appointments, given the gates were only being unlocked for an hour to allow restricted movement. We were also concerned by reports that the Department of Justice and Community Safety was obstructing the women's ability to know and enforce their rights by withholding mail, policing service providers, monitoring documents they bring in and telling service providers they cannot provide emergency management day application forms.

Emergency management days are a limited number of days that can be taken off a prisoner's sentence if they suffer a disruption or deprivation beyond the usual disruptions and deprivations of imprisonment. This measure recognises the additional burden placed upon prisoners in these circumstances. It is also disturbing that service providers would be told that they could not provide emergency management day application forms. It also reflects a fundamental problem within the existing application process – that is, the burden for applying for emergency management days is often put onto the prisoners rather than being automatically considered. This leads to unequal outcomes and challenges when applying, particularly where access to legal assistance is limited, as was the case during the lockdowns at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

Changing the process for emergency management days from an application process to automatic consideration will not reduce safeguards, including eligibility being restricted to people who were on good behaviour at the time. There is also precedent for these changes. During the pandemic Corrections Victoria implemented an automatic consideration process for emergency management days. So I ask: will the minister allow emergency management days to be automatically considered in all cases?

Treaty

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (19:25): (2198) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins. Victoria's Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 has now passed, which includes the establishment of Gellung Warl to give First Peoples greater responsibility over matters affecting their lives. The action I seek is an update on how this next phase of the treaty will improve services and outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Ballarat North planning

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (19:25): (2199) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the Ballarat North growth zone. This is a zone which is slated to have 5000 new homes in coming years, and at this point in time there is not the enabling infrastructure to make it a livable area. Anyone that knows that part of the world well will know that currently there are two overpasses over the Western Highway to access that zone, one on Gillies Road and one on Creswick Road. They are very important arterial roads to access those areas. Planning documents that I have seen show that there will need to be a third crossing over the Western Highway to enable good traffic flow and not have gridlock in that particular area. This matter was raised with the Ballarat City Council at their last planning meeting, which from memory I think was on 12 November. They raised a number of significant concerns to the state. Traffic management and the gridlock was one, but there were other concerns about drainage and appropriate infrastructure and public transport. There is a train line that goes right through that area. What I am led to believe is that a lot of the concerns that have been raised to the state have been responded to, but not in an adequate way to address a lot of the key growth issues that are going to transpire over the coming years.

The action that I seek from the minister is an explanation about how she intends to address these issues, because it is just not good enough to say that two crossings over the Western Highway are sufficient. If you want gridlock, that is fine, but it does not cut it for the 5000-plus homes, potentially 10,000 to 15,000 extra residents, in the City of Ballarat that are going to have to go through this. It is already quite congested at the moment, and this is pre growth. I can only imagine what it is going to be like when those stages of growth start to happen. The action that I seek from the minister is to detail how she intends to deal with those challenges to ensure that the people of Ballarat are not going to be left in gridlock in the future, because that would be unacceptable.

Montrose quarry

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:28): (2200) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the government to listen to the calls coming from the community, from my Greens colleagues and me, and even from some of this Labor government's own MPs, to deny the expansion of Boral's Montrose quarry. The fight against Boral's quarry led by the community of Montrose dates back to the 1960s, but most notably the community came together to stop the mass expansion of the quarry in the 1990s and early 2000s due to the adverse impacts on its surrounding residential population and the surrounding environment. Some MPs in this Parliament were already here in this place and so may remember this. Boral tried to expand and encroach onto nearby people's homes, their schools and their child care and the surrounding natural landscape – and when I say nearby, I mean within metres. They failed back then, but decades later they are back trying it all over again – but even bigger this time. Not only does the quarry not comply with EPA rules, but residents of the surrounding area are already experiencing adverse impacts. Angela said:

We live with the blasting and the putrid possibly toxic smells from the Montrose quarry. Please no expansion. The quarry's impact on our street and community, on our little children, elderly residents and everyone is horrible. An expansion surely cannot be allowed in a residential area.

Cathryn said:

My husband and I moved to Montrose this year for the semi-rural environment, not realising the quarry was even there. It took us a while to discover the reason we were experiencing times when the whole house shook.

Judith said:

I don't want to breathe anymore silica dust. I do not go outside my house or open my windows or doors when Montrose Quarry is crushing rock.

But it is not just local residents or people who are concerned about the local environment that are worried about the impacts of the expansion. Separate to the community's ongoing petition on this issue, the Labor member for Monbulk has been sharing a petition with the intention of 'strongly opposing' the expansion of the Montrose quarry. I applaud her for opposing this, but it begs the question: what is the point of having a government MP if they are being ignored by their own government? The community does not want this expansion. The local environment does not need this expansion. The local member does not want the expansion. Minister, do not give in to Boral; stand up to these corporations.

North Balwyn Community Men's Shed

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:30): (2201) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers in the other place, Minister Spence, and I am pleased to hear that the recipients of the 2025–26 men's shed funding program were announced. Men's sheds are pivotal in supporting men's mental health across the state. These spaces provide positive wellbeing outcomes for men by creating opportunities for social connections among people at risk of isolation. With more than 360 men's sheds across Victoria, these spaces are a vital part of the Victorian community, which is why the Victorian government continues to invest an annual fund of \$1 million in men's sheds across the state and through the men's sheds funding program. Last year North Balwyn Community Men's Shed received a \$10,000 grant from the 2024–25 men's shed funding program. The action that

I seek is for the minister to visit the North Balwyn Community Men's Shed with me to see the incredible work they are doing in supporting the Southern Metropolitan community.

Mernda–Wollert rail line

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:31): (2202) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that I seek is for the minister to immediately release both the Wollert transport corridor study and the Wollert rail feasibility study. Extending the Mernda rail line from Lalor to Wollert is essential within the next 10 years as Whittlesea council expects the local population to almost triple, with the number of people in Epping North and Wollert going from 35,000 in 2019 to 95,000 in 2041. In 2017 a rail corridor from the existing Lalor station to a proposed Wollert station was identified and incorporated into the precinct structure plan. In that same year the government published the *Victorian Infrastructure Plan*, which committed to commencing the Wollert rail feasibility study within five years. At the end of 2017 the state government also announced it would spend \$3.8 million acquiring land for the rail corridor, and now the land sits empty and unused, a stark reminder of Labor's unfulfilled promise. In 2019 Jacinta Allan promised the City of Whittlesea that the state government would conduct a feasibility study into the Wollert rail extension by 2022, and in 2022 the federal government got on board and contributed \$250,000. The Victorian government was expected to provide a matching contribution and carry out the study, but due to Labor's obsession with Big Build projects and its neglect of the northern growth suburbs the idea never progressed.

In 2024 the study was two years late, and the Allan Labor government had still not provided its half of the money for the study. The project seemed permanently stalled, so in May last year, as traffic congestion continued getting worse and the rail extension was becoming ever more urgent, I demanded that the Minister for Transport Infrastructure finally allocate funding for the feasibility study. The minister replied in August 2024, saying the Department of Transport and Planning would soon commence the Wollert transport corridor study. This study began in September 2024, and the Labor member for McEwen also announced that the Wollert rail feasibility study will be completed by early 2025, but that deadline was also missed. In October this year the Albanese government updated its webpage for the Wollert rail feasibility study, which now says the expected completion date is late 2025. Well, it is December, and you cannot get much later than that in 2025, so I can only assume that the feasibility study is finished. For years this project has been stuck, just like the commuters in Epping North and Wollert who get trapped in standstill traffic because the Labor government has abandoned the northern suburbs and completely failed to plan for growth and invest where it is needed. A resident of Wollert contacted me recently to express his ongoing frustration with the Labor government for its lack of progress on this vital infrastructure project.

Energy policy

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (19:34): (2203) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources. Recently we saw the return of the massive protestival Rising Tide at the Port of Newcastle. Thousands showed up to camp together, attend workshops, listen to music and take to the bay to blockade the port, demanding an end to new fossil fuel projects and a 78 per cent tax on existing fossil fuel export profits to pay for the damage caused by fossil fuels and to fund the transition away from them. The protesters successfully turned back three coal ships and showed once again the huge power of a community determined to shift away from fossil fuels in a way that supports the people and communities that currently are dependent on this industry.

Coal exports are in structural decline. South Korea, Australia's third-largest coal customer, recently announced it will shut down all 62 of its coal plants by 2040. In China, our largest customer, imports are expected to drop 22 per cent this year. Without a clear government-led phase-out, communities like Newcastle and indeed Victoria's Latrobe Valley will likely be abandoned when fossil fuel multinationals decide it is no longer profitable for them to stay. Despite this clear global trend and the

urgent need to phase out coal if we want to maintain a livable climate, we see Australian governments clinging to the delusion that we can keep burning coal indefinitely. In New South Wales the Labor Minns government has just announced that it will be extending the life of the Eraring coal plant beyond its planned closure in 2027, which itself was an extension from its planned closure in 2025.

Coal is bad for the environment, bad for the health of locals near the plants and a death sentence for our climate, and it is increasingly expensive. Governments across Australia and the world should be rolling out clean, cheap renewables to drive down emissions as well as people's power bills. Minister, I seek that you rule out copying the mistakes of Labor in New South Wales, rule out extending the life of Victoria's coal-fired power stations like Yallourn and ensure there are clear plans to transition communities into a future with good jobs and abundant clean energy. We need to facilitate renewables and get cracking on transmission lines because every day that Labor fail to meet their own renewables targets and prop up dirty fossil fuel giants, they burn another 100,000 tonnes of the world's most polluting coal and make climate change worse.

Working from home

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:37): (2204) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Industrial Relations, and the action I seek is for the minister to outline how the government will use the findings of the recent consultation to strengthen and protect the right to work from home in Victoria. The consultation results show overwhelming support for flexible work. More than 74 per cent of the 25,724 employees surveyed said working from home is extremely important to them, yet over 3200 people did not feel they could even ask their employer for it. Of those who requested it and were refused, nearly all felt that the decision was unreasonable and that it created further challenges at work. Workers were clear about the benefits: saving time, with more than 13,300 respondents commuting over an hour each way to work; saving money, with over 9200 people spending between \$25 and \$49 a week on travel; and being able to focus without workplace distractions. More than 28,700 participants also reported higher productivity levels when they were working from home. Two days a week was the most common and preferred arrangement. The consultation generated strong engagement, including more than 700 in-language responses and 295 formal submissions. Employers who participated highlighted employee satisfaction, access to a wider talent pool and higher productivity as key advantages. These findings make it clear that working from home is now an essential part of modern work. I therefore ask the minister to outline how the government will ensure that reasonable access to working from home is preserved and supported into the future.

Stonnington City Council

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (19:38): (2205) My matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and it concerns the decisions of the Stonnington council – a council in my area – in the last few days. The council voted the other night, on Monday evening, on the question of whether a menorah would be put up ahead of Hanukkah time. My view is that this is a very modest step. The menorah would be placed at the Malvern town hall for the eight-day Hanukkah festival. That received strong support, I am told, from the gallery. There were heckles and strong support. But there was a pushback when Cr Steve Stefanopoulos sought to delay a decision on the menorah. I am not sure why he would do that. Tom Humphries, who moved the motion, was called on to withdraw, according to the paper remarks that he made, in which he said the decision was 'nothing short of antisemitic'. I do not know whether it was antisemitic, but it was certainly unhelpful. I think that a modest thing like putting a menorah up for a few days of Hanukkah is the sort of step that could be required.

What I would like the minister to do is talk quietly to the mayor and to other councillors and to indicate that this is squarely within the support that I think we should be offering to the Jewish community. The Jewish community has had a very rough time of it, really, since the events in Gaza. There have been enormous attacks and problems on Jewish community members, not least the Adass bombing and the burning of that synagogue. I think this is really a very sad and difficult time for many in the

Jewish community. I think in my own area in Stonnington it would be the right thing. I will certainly be talking to the council and saying that I think they should put the menorah up for just that period. I think this is something we can do as a community to send a clear and strong signal that we support the Jewish community. I note that the article referred to Stonnington resident Michelle Ajzensztat, who said that the vote was ‘extremely disappointing’. She said:

We’ve got Nazis marching in our streets, we’ve got anti-Semite stuff everywhere ...

It’s all about having candles lit for a very positive festival that doesn’t denigrate anybody.

She makes the point that she is very happy to have Christian festival points marked but would also like that festival to be marked. I am calling on the minister: will you please talk to the Stonnington council and ensure that the menorah is put in place? I note the strong support from many.

Trevaskis Road, Wyuna

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (19:41): (2206) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to order Department of Transport and Planning officials to conduct an investigation and/or safety audit into the viability of reopening Trevaskis Road, Wyuna, between the Murray Valley Highway and Hawdon Road. I was recently contacted by a constituent inquiring as to why this section of Trevaskis Road was closed, as it had long been used as a popular thoroughfare by local residents. In response to a letter to Campaspe Shire Council I was informed that while Trevaskis Road was a council-managed road, the Department of Transport and Planning closed the road in 2021 due to a number of serious collisions at the intersection with Hawdon Road. Obviously driver safety is the most important factor when considering altering traffic conditions on Victorian roads, such as the closure of Trevaskis Road in this instance. I appreciate the department’s intentions when making the decision to close this section of the road nearly five years ago. On behalf of the local community my constituent has asked legitimate questions regarding the status of Trevaskis Road and whether a number of upgrades to the intersection of Trevaskis Road and Hawdon Road would allow the road to reopen whilst also keeping motorists safe. An investigation or safety audit carried out by DTP officials would determine the viability of upgrading safety at the intersection to allow Trevaskis Road to reopen. I ask the minister to order DTP officials to carry out an investigation and/or safety audit into the viability of reopening Trevaskis Road between the Murray Valley Highway and Hawdon Road in Wyuna.

Wallan wallan regional park

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (19:43): (2207) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment. The action I seek from you, Minister, is a commitment to the protection of wallan wallan regional park following the feasibility report, which identified 2800 hectares of land for preservation and restoration of terrestrial and wetlands ecosystems for inclusion in the wallan wallan regional park. Minister, as you may already be aware, this has been an ongoing issue that has garnered strong community support and interest. Many groups have come together over the years to advocate for the protection of this regional park. I recently visited the site in Wallan at an invitation from the Merri Creek Management Committee, Friends of Merri Creek and Wallan residents to see for myself this mosaic of wetlands that is home to endangered native species of birds and a mecca of flora and fauna. With the housing development now established in Wallara Waters, residents are expressing serious concerns about your government’s approach to planning in the northern corridor. They worry that the wallan wallan regional park will be left unprotected and overlooked as planning decisions are made for this part of the Northern Metro Region.

A regional park in wallan wallan would create a landmark intergenerational legacy, restoring a wetland of national significance and linking it with planned trail networks throughout Victoria. It would serve as a key destination for wildlife moving along the Merri corridor and provide permanent habitat for a wide range of fauna species whilst supporting aquifer recharge and improving the local watertable. The park would also become a regional hub for nature-based recreation and ecotourism, enhancing livability and complementing the major developments planned for the area. Importantly, it would

function as a flood buffer, containing the fivefold increase in stormwater run-off expected from urban development and helping to prevent downstream flooding. The regional park would soften the effects of the intermodal transport hub planned for Merriang and act as a green buffer between Wallan and Beveridge. While we are on climate mitigation, Minister, the regional park would also reduce the impacts of the heat island effect of massive hard surfaces in tight urban areas. Minister, it is clear the regional wallan wallan park delivers a variety of benefits to the community, the environment and the climate. Will you please assure residents and environmental groups that wallan wallan regional park will be protected in your whole-of-government plans for the northern corridor?

Metro Tunnel

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (19:46): (2208) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the new Metro Tunnel stations. Last Sunday Arden, Parkville, State Library, Town Hall and Anzac began welcoming passengers, and they mark a significant change in how people will move across our city. These stations are the result of years of planning, designing and construction, and their opening represents another moment when our Labor government is delivering transformational infrastructure for Victorians. These stations will serve a wide range of Victorians every day – students travelling to classes, hospital staff working long shifts, families navigating prams, older people needing clear and reliable access and visitors finding their way through the CBD will all depend on these new spaces working well. These new stations are part of daily life for many, and so their accessibility is important. How people enter, navigate and move through these new stations will have a big impact on their experience from the very beginning. These new stations introduce a different kind of space for passengers, with deeper platforms and larger concourse areas. These world-class stations include features that are intended to support accessibility at every stage of the journey. As thousands of Victorians begin using them every day, clear navigation and reliable connections will make a great deal of difference to people as they move through the network. The action I seek is for the minister to provide information on some of the ways that these new stations are leading the way for accessibility and are designed to ensure that passengers' diverse needs are met, so that I can communicate that to people with accessibility needs in the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Drug driving

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:48): (2209) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is for the minister to urgently address the recently released Victorian police data that has identified south-east Melbourne – including Greater Dandenong, the City of Casey and the city of Cardinia as a drug-driving hotspot. The government must urgently outline what specific measures it will take to strengthen roadside enforcement, review prevention initiatives and invest in community education campaigns in south-east Melbourne. The government must commit funding and set a clear timeline for these actions to ensure that residents in the local government areas of Casey, Dandenong and also Cardinia – in fact we could include the City of Frankston in this as well – are protected from drug-driving offences. Dandenong has been recorded as the suburb with the second-highest rate in the state, recording 114 offences under the influence of illicit substances in the past financial year. Pakenham, which is just outside the electorate boundary of the south-east region, has the highest, with 358 drug-driving offences recorded, and I can say quite categorically that some of those people would be living in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Frankston is the third-worst suburb for drug-driving in the state, and it is also out in the south-east in my area. The south-east municipalities of Casey, Cardinia and Dandenong account for nearly one-fifth of all drug-driving incidents in Victoria, with more than half of the offenders being repeat offenders. It is not just a statistic, it is a public safety crisis.

Our community is being put at risk every single day. Police enforcement alone is clearly failing. I am not being critical of the police; they can only do what they can do with the resources that they have available. But the data clearly shows that without urgent intervention, drug driving will continue to endanger lives on our roads. The fact that 58 per cent of offenders are repeat offenders demonstrates

that current measures are not deterring dangerous behaviour. The government needs to do more, rather than depending on an overworked and under-resourced police force. It is clear that we need a comprehensive response that goes beyond policing and penalties. Drug driving is not only a law and order issue, it is also a health and community safety issue. South-east Melbourne already faces significant challenges with unemployment, housing stress and youth disengagement. These factors compound the risks and make it even more urgent that the government steps in with targeted programs. Road safety campaigns must be tailored to the realities of these communities, not just big, generic messages that fail to resonate.

Rail freight services

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:51): (2210) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Ports and Freight. The government recently published *Victoria Delivers: Victorian Freight Plan 2025–30*. It is a nice shiny document with a bunch of nice shiny statements contained within it and some pretty nice pictures too. This document was apparently drafted with input from a wide range of stakeholders, and it says many of the kind of things that you would expect: freight is really important; many of the products that Victorians buy come from overseas, and a large portion of these come through our ports; and 3 million containers per year are handled by the Port of Melbourne. But there is one aspect of this report that I want to focus on: the rail freight network. I recently had the pleasure of visiting the South Dandenong rail freight intermodal terminal. This represents a vision for future productivity and efficiency for freight in the south-east. When completed, it should offer the opportunity both for importers and exporters to more rapidly shift containers to the ports. The government mentions this project throughout all kinds of strategy documents going back years, and this is exactly the type of investment and innovation that will be needed both to keep Victoria competitive and to deliver on the stated objectives of the government's own freight strategy. But as frequently happens in Victoria, after getting a clear picture of someone trying to build something amazing, I get the story of why it is not happening. It is the government, and it nearly always is.

It is quite depressing to stand there right on the ground where a sophisticated freight terminal is ready to be built, and look up and see the rail spur constructed, the signal lights switched on but the terminal not being built. I am told there are two key things holding back the completion of this project. One is certainty about freight pathways on the network. The other is the equalisation of charges for road and rail freight at the Port of Melbourne. Despite all of these various plans and strategy documents highlighting the need to shift more freight to rail for efficiency, for environmental reasons, to reduce the impact of road freight on our road network and to simply expand capacity, the investment is not happening. The reason it is not happening is that rail freight is currently penalised with higher charges, and this is holding back the investment that would complete the South Dandenong rail freight terminal. My request is for the minister to work with the port authority as soon as possible to equalise freight charges between road and rail and enable the investment to complete the Dandenong South project.

Cat management

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:53): (2211) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for him to revoke the use of the Felixer grooming traps in Victoria. I had to find out via a post on Facebook that this government has backflipped on its commitment to not deploying these cruel devices and will now permit their use to kill cats deemed invasive in the state. These traps spray cats with a coating of toxic 1080 gel, relying on their instinctive grooming to lick and ingest the lethal poison. This kind of death is not quick, and it is certainly not humane. For those unfamiliar with how 1080 works, when it is ingested symptoms may take hours to appear, and the death that follows is incredibly distressing. Common symptoms include frenzied behaviour, vomiting, uncontrollable urination and defecation, convulsions, seizures and haemorrhaging. There is no known antidote, and it is lethal to all life forms.

Its effects do not stop at the initial target. While Felixer manufacturers claim the devices can distinguish species based on body shape and movement, this technology cannot prevent secondary poisoning. The toxin carried on the fur of the first victim can then be transferred, including to a native bird using poisoned cat fur for a nest. A single poisoned cat can trigger a chain of suffering across an entire food chain. Victoria has killing programs for every unwanted species and yet adverse effects continue to persist. For cats, removing them from one area allows for new populations to move in, creating a cycle that does nothing to reduce long-term populations. For these reasons reckless killing does nothing to protect native bird species, as the industries who support the Felixers' use claim.

In 2023 the then agriculture minister made a clear commitment that Felixer grooming traps would not be included in Victoria's cat management strategy. She also emphasised that decisions in this area must be balanced with animal welfare considerations. The government's reversal of this decision is neither balanced nor humane. In fact it is yet another unsurprising betrayal that leaves more animals in Victoria to suffer. If we are serious about sustainable wildlife management, we must explore long-term, evidence-based solutions such as immunocontraception as nonlethal population control. I therefore call on the minister to immediately revoke approval for Felixer grooming traps and pursue humane evidence-based alternatives instead.

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (19:56): There were 18 adjournment matters raised tonight. All of those will be referred to the relevant ministers.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (19:56): Just before I call the adjournment, I did commit to Ms Bath to responding to her point of order around an answer to her from Minister Symes. On reviewing it, I do agree that the question needs to be responded to in writing in line with the standing orders, but given the lateness of the hour, rather than the one day, I think it should be two days.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:57 pm.