



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 16 October 2025

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 16 October 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

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

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, notices of motion 30 and 71 to 73 and orders of the day 4 and 10 and 11, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

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

Game Management Authority – Report 2024–25 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 105

Victoria Police – Report 2024–25 under s 37F of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*

Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner – Report 2024–25 under s 148R of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*

Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board – Report 2024–25 (*replacement for copy tabled on 11 September 2025*).

Business of the house**Adjournment**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:34): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 28 October 2025.

Motion agreed to.***Members statements*****Mill Park electorate early childhood education and care**

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:35): I was delighted to recently host the Minister for Children Lizzie Blandthorn from the other place on a visit to two of our newest early learning projects in my electorate of Mill Park, at Wirrigirri Primary School in Wollert and The Lakes South Morang College. Both brand new kindergartens will open their doors in 2026, giving local families access to high-quality, modern early learning facilities right next to their local primary schools, saving families time in the morning.

At Wirrigirri Primary School we toured the impressive new three-room kindergarten, a project supported through the Allan Labor government's record investment in the Best Start, Best Life reforms. This co-located kinder will cater for up to 99 children at a time, making drop-offs simpler for busy families and supporting children to make a smoother transition into school life. Just down the road in South Morang, construction is well underway on another three-room kindergarten at The Lakes South Morang College. When it opens in term 1 next year, it will provide up to 99 local children with the best possible start to their education, right alongside their future classmates. It was wonderful to hear from The Lakes principal Bill Panas, who told me that families cannot wait for their new kinder to open. The whole school community were very excited.

These are just two examples of how the Allan Labor government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms are transforming early learning, delivering free kinder for Victorian families, building the infrastructure our growing suburbs need and giving every child the opportunity to thrive close to where they live.

Sunraysia Medical Centre

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:37): Today I want to recognise some remarkable accomplishments from right across the Mildura electorate in both health and education. The Sunraysia Medical Centre has been named the Victorian General Practice of the Year by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, which is a first for any practice in the Sunraysia region.

Mildura electorate schools

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:37): To education, Fletcher Holmes-Brown from Charlton College was recently selected as one of just eight finalists statewide in Victoria's VCE Leadership Awards, and he was the only regional school student among them. Speaking of Charlton College, it was recognised among a list of a hundred schools in the recent *Herald Sun* list of top 100 government schools in Victoria, ranking at number eight, making it the top regional school on the list. But my electorate boasted six others: Wycheproof P-12 at number 25, Murrayville Community College at number 36, Hopetoun P-12 at number 70, Ouyen P-12 at number 90, Donald High at number 94 and Irymple Secondary College at number 97. This is testament to the principals, the teachers, the families and the students who take such pride in our regional schools. These are not just small feats, particularly in health and education in the regions. In school corridors, on fairways, on sports fields everywhere through the Mildura electorate – *(Time expired)*

Lisa Fitzpatrick

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:38): I rise to acknowledge the outstanding contribution to the nursing and midwifery professions of Lisa Fitzpatrick AO. A registered nurse by training, Lisa's career as secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation spanned two decades and eight Victorian health ministers, but amongst the cut and thrust of politics Lisa always remained steadfast. There is no dodging the question or beating around the bush when dealing with Lisa Fitzpatrick. Lisa's first and last priority was always the membership. The list of the ANMF's achievements under Lisa's leadership is formidable, including pioneering nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios and working with the Allan Labor government to protect them in legislation, introducing registered undergraduate students of nursing and registered undergraduate students of midwifery, as well as six public sector enterprise bargaining campaigns. Under her stewardship the ANMF grew from 32,000 members in 2001 to 111,000 members today, but the only way to get that kind of growth is to be a leader who gets things done. Lisa leaves a legacy for our healthcare system that Victorians will benefit from for generations to come. I wish Lisa more time with her family and friends and more time watching her beloved Bulldogs. Congratulations to Maddy Harradence, Nicole Allan, Sam Casey and the whole ANMF leadership team on their recent election. I look forward to working with you to further Lisa's legacy and continue the strong and collaborative relationship the Labor government has built with Victoria's nurses and midwives.

Small business support

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:40): I rise to speak in support of small business in Victoria. Just last week I was appointed as Victoria's Shadow Minister for Small and Family Business. In Victoria there are more than 700,000 small businesses, and they are being burdened. They are being saddled by taxes, red tape and industrial relations reforms, which still have not been realised, by an Allan Labor government which is simply not on their side. The Australian Industry Group also this week indicated that only one in every 10 jobs created is created by the private sector. There is so much

more to be done across the private sector to support them, to create the wealth and to create the opportunities for Victorians to stand on their own feet and contribute to our community.

Sandringham electorate schools

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:41): Last week I also visited some local schools with the then Shadow Minister for Education. It was great to visit Mentone Girls' Secondary College, St Bede's College, Sandringham College and Beaumaris Primary School to identify the needs of those schools and to work with those school communities to make them the very best they can be.

Andrew Watson

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:41): Finally, I would like to thank on behalf of my community Andrew Watson, the publican at Hobsons. For 19-odd years Hobsons has been an institution in our community. It has provided a safe haven and a home for everyone. Everyone has always been welcomed at Hobsons, and for circumstances well outside Andrew's control, Hobsons is no more. We thank him for his service.

Take 5

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:41): A big shout-out to Flemington's own Zan Rowe on the conclusion of another successful *Take 5* season. For those of you who do not know, *Take 5* is about finding five songs that have had a profound influence on an artist, and I have got to say this season was a thing of wonder and beauty, and particularly a shout-out to the Paul Kelly episode which aired on Tuesday night, which you can watch on ABC iview, just to talk about and see Paul Kelly and watch Paul Kelly cry – something I have never seen. So do yourselves a favour. It is an absolute knockout.

Ascot Vale Primary School

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:42): I was delighted to go over to Ascot Vale Primary School for their 140th birthday celebrations last week. Ascot Vale Primary School is just such a fantastic school community, and it had everybody out there so excited to celebrate what is a great school community. I think it is just always a great experience to be over at Ascot Vale Primary School.

David Hutchison

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:42): I also want to give a shout-out to David Hutchison. David Hutchison is a Moonee Ponds local – a terrific guy, an absolute legend – who is going through some health challenges at the moment. David, you are admired, you are valued and you are respected by all of us, and we are with you along the journey.

Essendon North Primary School

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:42): Finally, it was just wonderful to be out at Essendon North Primary School last week. Kate Barletta is a fantastic school principal; she is doing a wonderful job leading that school. It was great to be with her and her senior leadership team as well as the school council. Essendon North Primary School is going places; it is going gangbusters. I think it will be probably the largest primary school in the state district of Essendon, and I look forward to working with you.

Donvale Christian College

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:43): This morning I want to acknowledge the amazing year 6 students and staff at Donvale Christian College who have written to me about the local issues that matter most to them. As per tradition now, for the third year running they are watching live from their classroom today from school, and a big hello to them all. The year 6s show their deep care for our

local community: Max called for more soccer and footy pitches so kids can stay active and healthy; Amirthini raised concerns about traffic safety outside the school, asking for a supervised crossing; Cooper highlighted safety issues in Doncaster and suggested better lighting and more police controls; Daniel raised the dangers of crossing near the Oban Road and Warrandyte Road roundabout; Jarvis spoke about the need for better public transport in Manningham, where we still have no train line and limited bus services; Josephine asked for higher wildlife fencing in North Warrandyte to protect animals and drivers; Anatalia expressed concern about moving Gum Nut Gully kindergarten, calling instead for upgrades onsite; Burano suggested an express Warrandyte to city bus to help locals get to work faster; and Elizabeth and Jesse raised the need for urgent safety upgrades to the five-ways intersection after repeated accidents, which I have also been calling for. I thank the incredible DCC students for their thoughtful advocacy. It is a privilege to raise your voices here in the Parliament, and I look forward to visiting your school again soon. Go DCC!

The SPEAKER: I remind members that comments in the chamber are to be made through the Chair, not through the camera.

The Orange Door

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (09:44): I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of staff developing and working in the services of the Orange Door network across Melbourne's west, in particular in the Brimbank, Melton and western Melbourne regions. These practitioners provide vital support to individuals and families in my electorate of Sydenham and many others around there. For those that are experiencing family violence and needing help and care with the wellbeing of themselves and their children, the work that these workers deliver is absolutely life changing. The Orange Door network in the west is delivered through partnerships with organisations like Western Health, Anglicare and MacKillop, GenWest, the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association. Together they demonstrate what genuine collaboration looks like – an integrated service system working as one to keep families safe and hold perpetrators to account. Back at home in each of these agencies the work continues, supporting families referred from the Orange Door in case management and other types of support. Melbourne's west is one of the fastest growing and most diverse regions, and the complexity and scale of demand continues to increase. I want to acknowledge Family Safety Victoria for its ongoing leadership in strengthening integration across the service system and building workforce capacity. We have a new access point in Footscray, which I am really excited for.

William Richter

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:46): Today I want to pay tribute to a much-admired Kensington local, William Richter, who was tragically killed on his 19th birthday while riding his bike on Macaulay Road heading to a lecture at the University of Melbourne. Since that day so many locals have stopped me to talk about Will – about his kindness, generosity, intellect, humour and warmth. Will was an exceptionally talented student and a star on the cricket and football fields, even kicking the winning goal at Trinity College's historic premierships this year. But what people remember most is something his friends call the Will Richter effect: Will's beaming smile and presence lit up the room and brightened everybody's day. He made genuine connections with others, lifting spirits with his passion and enthusiasm and carrying himself with genuine humility and gratitude. As his parents Tim and Andie, who are in the chamber today, told me, it was these quiet qualities that defined Will. He was a humble high achiever just trying to have a positive impact. Will was deeply loved by so many: his family, his Uni High friends, his Uni Blues teammates, Trinity College friends and the local families who watched him grow up playing with the Kensington Flemington Junior Sports Club.

Our beautiful Kensington community have been devastated by this loss but have wrapped their arms around his family Tim, Andie and Sophie, and that outpouring shows just how much Will meant to everybody. I want to permanently record the kind of person Will was. May we all try to live a little

more like him: authentic, caring, grateful and curious about the world. Vale, William Oberin Richter. What a legacy you have left in our community.

Horseracing

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:48): I thank the member for Melbourne for her statement. On the weekend I was at the Manangatang Cup to watch Holly's Star win an exciting Manangatang Cup. Holly's Star will be back at the St Arnaud Cup next Saturday and I am told is one to watch. Unfortunately I will not be at St Arnaud, because I will be at the valley to watch Australia's best race, the WS Cox Plate on Saturday week. Through the Major Racing Events Fund the Moonee Valley Racing Club received half a million dollars to celebrate the valley at the Cox Plate Carnival, the last one at the valley before its redevelopment. It is a really significant event, and I know that it is going to be packed to the rafters out there at Moonee Valley.

I will be at Caulfield Cup this weekend, where I was really pleased that the government provided half a million dollars from the Major Racing Events Fund for the Caulfield Cup Carnival. It kicked off last Saturday with the running of the Caulfield Guineas. The grant will go a long way to expanding initiatives such as entertainment at the jockey club, building on the success of the 2024 structure and event. The Victorian Racing Industry Fund has provided significant grants in recent times to the Bendigo Harness Racing Club of \$1.3 million to upgrade their LED lighting and technology systems, as well as the Bendigo Jockey Club receiving \$530,000 to replace the track after the Bendigo Cup in a couple of weeks time. And I was pleased to be up in your neck of the woods, Speaker, with the Premier for those announcements. I was at the Benalla Cup grand final on Friday with the Treasurer, a very local Treasurer in the Benalla region, and we announced \$1.55 million for the complete redevelopment of the track.

Casterton storm event

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:49): Today marks exactly one year since the hailstorm at Casterton destroyed or damaged so many buildings. In fact there were 1305 insurance claims from about the 1600 residents in that community. We are 12 months on, but there has been very limited support for that community. Unfortunately it failed to meet the damage quantum required for public assets and therefore there was no funding support provided. We still have many, many people who are displaced from their homes. It has been extraordinarily difficult to access tradies in the local area, and while a number of roofs have been repaired, there are many, many more that have not. I therefore ask the Minister for Emergency Services to join me in Casterton to work out how the government can step up to fill the gap where there has been a gap in service delivery, because the Casterton community needs that support and they have not yet received that support.

Lowan electorate tourism

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:50): I also invite the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events to come out to the far west of Victoria and help to bring back tourism to the brilliant west of the state. The Grampians National Park was devastated by bushfires last year, but it is growing incredibly, and there are so many parts of the Grampians that were not touched by bushfire. Whether it is the north, the middle or the south of the Grampians, it is a beautiful place to come and stay. So I ask the minister to come and bring as many people from Melbourne as he possibly can to support our local businesses and local jobs.

Contact Bundoora Community Centre

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:51): Today I rise to recognise a remarkable milestone: the 50th anniversary of Contact Bundoora Community Centre. From its beginnings in 1975 when a small group of mothers and children met monthly at the Uniting Church in Bundoora, Contact has grown into a welcoming space for everyone, for learning, creativity and connection. This milestone is made possible by the

dedication of the centre's countless volunteers, who have been the reason for its ongoing success. I would like to particularly acknowledge Kath Wills, who has volunteered for nearly 50 years at Contact, averaging 10 hours a week and contributing across many different roles. Kath continues to serve at the centre today, demonstrating outstanding commitment. And for many years the unstoppable Mrs Wilma Stubbs would come to my office to photocopy the centre's program and advocate for the centre's work. I would also like to recognise Merle Foggie, the centre's oldest member, at 101 years of age. Merle began participating in the early years. For over 30 years she taught students with disabilities a variety of crafts and still participates in the cross-stitch class, exemplifying the centre's spirit of learning and generosity. Today, as Contact celebrates 50 years of community learning and caring, I would like to thank and acknowledge all those who have contributed to the centre and its role in making our community a better place.

Treaty

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:52): I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of country across Victoria and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. This week has been a historic week in Victoria's journey to reconciliation. It is a moment to reflect not only on culture and history but on where we go from here. Treaty is not just symbolic; it is a practical way to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. For decades governments of all persuasions have failed to close the gap, yet the gap remains in health, in education, in life expectancy and in justice. Aboriginal people still die younger, earn less and are more likely to be incarcerated or removed from family. These are not just statistics; they reflect a system that has not delivered. That is why treaty matters. It is about involving First Peoples in the decisions that affect them. It is about building better services with local knowledge and shared responsibility. It is good governance, and it just makes sense. As assembly co-chair Ngarra Murray said this week, some seek to inflame division, but treaty is about building something better. It is about improving lives. It is not just symbolic, it is about structural change, mutual respect and justice. As representatives and community members, we must hold ourselves accountable to that vision. I look forward to walking this path together – as the member for Hastings said, walking gently across country, guided by respect, truth and hope for a fairer Victoria.

Williamstown electorate volunteers

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:54): Volunteers are the backbone of our local community in the Williamstown electorate, and last Friday I had the pleasure of celebrating many of them at a special volunteers appreciation event in Spotswood. We are incredibly lucky to have so many dedicated people who give countless hours of their time supporting local causes. They advance the rights of others or simply help their local club or community group to thrive.

After inviting nominations from local organisations, we received many incredible stories of service, commitment and care. Our volunteers come from a wide range of community groups, including the Hobsons Bay Men's Shed; the Hobsons Bay Wetland Centre; the Williamstown Historical Society; the Freedom Sports Foundation; Thrive in 2025; ParKanDo; ParkinSong; Patch in the Park, Altona Community Garden; and the Zonta Club of Melbourne's West. Their tireless work enriches the lives and strengthens inclusion across our community. We also celebrated volunteers from the Williamstown literary festival, the Williamstown Little Theatre and the Williamstown Community and Education Centre. Each plays a vital role in fostering local creativity, learning and connection. Our lifesaving and sporting youth clubs were exceptionally well represented, including the Altona and Williamstown lifesaving clubs, the 2nd Newport Scouts, the Pines Scout Camp, the Altona North Cricket Club, the Altona Roosters Rugby League Club, the Newport-Digman Cricket Club, the Newport Power Netball Club and the West Gate Basketball Association.

Mornington electorate community events

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:55): Last weekend was absolutely packed with wonderful local events. I had the chance to go along to the 50th anniversary of Mount Eliza Secondary College

and to the Pink Train, raising funds and awareness for the Breast Cancer Network Australia, run by the Mornington Tourist Railway. I attended the 60th anniversary of the Kunyung Pre-school; the Mount Martha Fire Brigade's annual awards dinner; and the new bookshop Stories by the Sea, meeting local Mount Eliza author Myke Mollard on Love Your Bookshop Day. I also went to the 160th anniversary of the Mount Eliza Anglican Church, the Mount Martha Bowls, Petanque and Social Club community open day, the opening day for the Safety Beach Sailing Club as well as the Get Busy Living fishing day at Mornington Park, which was run by Projex J. I appreciate locals like Aldo, who invited me along there. They do a terrific job in raising awareness but also supporting people who have gone through and are going through grief. I had the chance there to bump into Melissa from MISS, which is the Miscarriage Information Support Service, and I note that 15 October was Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. Many of us have experienced or have loved ones who have experienced a miscarriage or pregnancy loss, and my heart goes out to them. I also met a lady whose son was lost to her. It was an overcast day, but the sun came over as her son's – *(Time expired)*

Hume young mayors program

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:57): I rise to acknowledge the Hume young mayors program, a terrific initiative by the Foundation for Young Australians. This program empowers young people aged 12 to 17 to stand for election and serve on a youth council working with Hume City Council, giving them a real voice in shaping their community. Right now candidates are actively campaigning across Hume, sharing their ideas and engaging with their peers. It is an exciting time for youth democracy, and I commend every young person who has stepped forward. Their participation reflects a deep commitment to civic life and a desire to make a meaningful impact.

I especially want to recognise the south ward candidates who reside within the Kalkallo electorate: Aekam Arora, Ahmed Yehia, Areej Amir, Bhagavada Bhattarai, Bianca Barbaro, Maha Sajid, Nethuki Prematilaka, Rushil Raina, Tehreem Lughmani, Zainab Jabbar, and a special shout-out to Ammar Mahmoud. Ammar has been a valued member of my Kalkallo youth advisory council since April 2023, and I am very pleased to see him taking this step. The decision to stand for election is testament to these young people's passion, courage and leadership. I wish each of them the very best during the election period and encourage our community to support and celebrate these future leaders, whether elected or not. Their involvement is already a win for our democracy and a sign of a bright future ahead.

National Carers Week

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:58): On another note, this week is National Carers Week. I send my thanks to all carers, not just in Kalkallo but across the state. The work that unpaid carers do is incredibly important, and this week is the ideal time to recognise them.

Crime

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:58): This statement condemns the Allan state Labor government for its failure to address the out-of-control crime crisis across Victoria, as evidenced by the recent release of the state's deeply concerning annual crime stats for the year to June 2025. The stats confirm what every Victorian already knows: we are living through an out-of-control crime wave, with crime now at its highest level in 20 years. The data shows a massive 16 per cent surge in crime, meaning a serious offence is committed every 49.4 seconds in this state. This is not a statistical blip, this is a crisis. Every day 20 homes are violently invaded and 79 cars are stolen – that is a car taken every 18 minutes. And why? Because the Allan Labor government has overseen a revolving door justice system and cut essential frontline resources. In contrast, the Liberals and Nationals have a plan: restore consequences, with 'break bail, face jail' ending the free pass; introduce Jack's law to give our brave police the tools and technology to take knives and weapons off criminals immediately; ensure sentences send a loud and clear message that serious crimes committed in Victoria will face serious consequences; and invest

in programs to divert young people away from crime. It is time to stop the revolving door of justice, properly staff our police force, support victims and toughen our laws.

Mid-Autumn Festival

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:00): October is the month of Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations across my electorate of St Albans and the west. I want to in particular thank the Australian Vietnamese Arts and Culture Association for organising a fantastic Mid-Autumn Festival in the heart of St Albans – performances and all the volunteers. I take this opportunity to thank the St Albans Business Group and the Vietnamese Museum of Australia for hosting a Mid-Autumn Festival in Sunshine and the amazing Quang Minh temple for hosting a Mid-Autumn Festival where thousands of families attended this culturally significant day. Thank you to all the volunteers and everybody for making this a really special moment for all constituents and community members across the west.

St Albans electorate office work experience students

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:01): On another matter, it was great to have Rayan Dawood, a year 10 student from Catholic Regional College in St Albans, and Victoria Nguyen, a year 10 student from Keilor Downs College, complete work experience in my office. They were amazing. The constituents loved their passion and their commitment. It was a fantastic opportunity to have young students in my office. Their skills development was uplifting, and I take this opportunity to wish them the very best in their endeavours.

Diwali

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:01): We began locally celebrating Diwali five years ago, an idea sparked by the kindness of local residents Amod and Shweta in dropping Diwali sweets in to me. Our celebrations in the Eltham town square continue to grow each year. It is a joyous and vibrant festival – the Festival of Lights – holding deep cultural and religious significance for many. While customs and traditions may vary, the message remains universal: hope, goodness and light. These local celebrations are even more special because regardless of background or faith Diwali brings together so many people, highlighting generosity, kindness and friendship. Thank you to our wonderful artists and performers, local restaurants Machan and Ginger Garlic for their delicious food and our local kindergartens, which created many beautiful Diwali lanterns.

We could not celebrate so well without the work and ongoing support of the Nillumbik Shire Council, the Eltham Lions Club and the Eltham Chamber of Commerce. I particularly want to thank Amod and Shweta Joshi, Tarun and Suchi Palta, Prashant and Vasu Pandurangi, Hina Khurana and Peter Talbot. For months these wonderful volunteers have invested countless hours of planning. Thanks to their dedication our celebration is possible. Shubh Diwali.

Peter Talbot

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:02): We value volunteerism and service in our community and few embody these values more than Eltham Lions' Peter Talbot. After years of dedicated service, Peter is retiring from the club, leaving a legendary legacy of community contribution. He was the driving force behind countless local initiatives, like organising fundraising events, supporting local businesses and organisations and helping to deliver vital services through the Lions network. Peter's commitment to community is tireless. His leadership, compassion and generosity has created – *(Time expired)*

Mernda swimming pool

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:03): My community has told me loud and clear that they want a pool in Mernda. A recent survey that I ran for just a short time, very quickly, had 500 people responding that they want to see a pool built. Council approved a pool in 2021. At the time they said:

We heard that residents want 50-metre lap swimming, warm water exercise programs, water play and learn-to-swim areas in the proposed facility ... We're delighted to bring that vision to life in the future Mernda facility ...

On the basis of that, this government has committed \$30 million to the overall regional sports precinct. The council has gotten the stadium underway, but an upcoming decision about making the pool a reality could put the pool at risk. I join with my constituents in making very clear to council that the community still wants a pool. The community wants to see council getting behind them, confirming that the pool is going ahead and getting underway the detailed work to make it happen. This is a longstanding project of the City of Whittlesea that we are proud to support as the state government, and we are ready to see it getting underway in our community.

Education policy

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:04): Great news today with the Premier announcing the introduction of sensible limits on digital device use: 90 minutes per day for students in years 3 to 6 and minimal device time for students in prep to year 2. This will save parents about \$500 on devices. This new rollout will coincide with the Australia-wide social media ban for under-16s, which comes into effect on 10 December and is leading the way internationally. The founder of SmackTalk, Wayne Holdsworth, is no stranger to this place. The pioneer advocate of the under-16 social media ban has a message for the Premier and the Minister for Education:

On behalf of all Victorian Mums and Dads I applaud the Allan Labor Government and Ben Carroll for the introduction of the screen time reduction at Victorian Primary schools. I'm particularly proud to be a Victorian today knowing that our kids are being educated in a more balanced environment. This implementation must not be understated it will change the way kids learn to be great Adults and save lives. Whilst it can't change our families situation however my boy Mac would be looking down with a massive smile on his face and ... I am eternally grateful as are all Victorian parents this Morning.

Motions

Middle East conflict

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (10:06): I move:

That this house notes that Victoria welcomes:

- (a) the return of the living hostages after 737 days;
- (b) the ceasefire; and
- (c) the renewed move towards peace in the Middle East.

In moving this motion I pay my respects to those who are grieving the loss of those who did not come home. Whilst there has been internationally both celebration and relief at the return of a number of hostages, I think it is appropriate to start this motion by honouring those families and loved ones who cannot welcome home their family member, who are going to grieve for the rest of their lives the loss of their loved one – either someone who was a hostage or indeed someone who was brutally murdered on that day, on 7 October 2023.

It was two years ago. It feels in some ways both longer and shorter than two years. Two years ago many of us attended an event in Caulfield. It was early days. I know the member for Caulfield was there, the member for Box Hill was there, the member for Brighton was there – many of us were there. I also remember it as an event where there was such a tumult of emotions. There was anxiety at what was going on because so much was not yet known – it was still very early following 7 October. I also remember standing there – it was one of my first big public events as Premier – looking at the faces in

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the crowd, looking at the women who were holding up pictures of family members that they love and seeing the anxiety and the grief on their faces. There were little boys carrying the Israeli flag, knowing that if they were in Israel and they were a bit older they would be called up to serve, and understanding that sacrifice.

I also on that day told the story of a family who had been torn apart in kibbutz Nir Oz, another victim of this act of terror. As we have said on many occasions since that day, they were victims of the largest theft of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust – victims of Hamas. Some of the members of that kibbutz survived 7 October; 47 died and 76 were taken hostage. When I spoke that night in Caulfield I borrowed a phrase from the great Golda Meir: I hoped that the strawberries could one day bloom again in the kibbutz and across Israel.

These last two years have been a living nightmare for the families of the hostages taken by Hamas and the families of those they killed. It is a scar that will never heal. But today, in this week, as the world grasps that possibility of peace, we can see the hope that the strawberries will bloom. As I said at the outset, my thoughts are with all of those in Israel and across the Middle East, across the world and here in Victoria who are still experiencing the echoes of that first devastating, unspeakable act on 7 October 2023, including the people who have lived through the wave of antisemitism and hate that has coursed through the world, into our cities and to the doors of our synagogues. This has been another most tragic consequence, a devastating consequence, of this conflict in the Middle East, that we have seen this wave of antisemitism, this cancer, spread in a way that we thought had been dealt with many, many decades ago. Our love and blessings are with those families who can finally reunite, and I have honoured those families who cannot. Our love and blessings are with everyone who has lost their life and their livelihood in this attack and in this war. As we acknowledge and honour the families and loved ones and the communities who are associated with the hostages, we must too remember the innocent families and children in Israel yes but also in Gaza, in Palestine and across the entire region.

7 October marked two years of conflict. So many children have been killed, so many adults have been killed. We know that this period may not necessarily mark the end of conflict and war. But we all carry in both our hearts and our heads the hope that it starts the path of peace and life, and that is a responsibility here in Melbourne and Victoria, far, far away from that conflict in the Middle East. I say that responsibility to progress the path of peace rests with all of us because of that spread of the cancer of antisemitism that I spoke of in my comments today. We have seen that conflict, that disruption of our social fabric that we hold so dear here in Victoria. It has also been frayed, has also seen conflict and division here in Melbourne and Victoria. I say to everyone: there are no sides here. We should all be on the one side of peace. We have called as a government for some time now for a ceasefire, for a pathway to peace. We have that now, and it is incumbent upon all of us to grasp this opportunity to use our privileged positions as leaders in our community here to hold our community together.

To give peace a chance in the Middle East we have got to give peace every opportunity to thrive here in Melbourne and Victoria. There should be no need for division to continue on our streets, because that would not be in the spirit of what we have wanted to be achieved for the last two years: peace in the Middle East. To continue to support peace in the Middle East, to get that pathway to peace in the Middle East and to support families here in our community, it is time to bring peace to our streets here in Melbourne and Victoria, because that is in the spirit of hope. It is in the spirit of our great multicultural and multifaith state that I am so proud to be Premier of, and it is the way that we honour every Israeli and every Palestinian who has been killed during the course of this conflict, every Israeli and every Palestinian who has lost a loved one, a family member, a friend. We owe it to them to bring peace to our community, as we have been calling for and have seen this week, the achievement of what we are so relieved to see. But it is precious, and we must continue to work together and walk alongside one another on that pathway to peace.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:13): I begin by thanking the Premier for agreeing to do this motion today. I thank every member of this Parliament for doing welfare checks on both me and the

member for Box Hill over this very, very difficult period. For 737 days we have felt helpless in many ways, but we never, ever gave up hope. I think that is something to be proud of, as a member of the Jewish community watching, as the Premier mentioned, the trauma, the devastation and the hurt of many of Melbourne's Jewish community but also the hope that the hostages would still return. As we know, there are still a number of murdered hostages that have not returned, and we pray for them to be returned as soon as possible. Israel has a very strong philosophy of ensuring that no-one is left behind; it is something that has guided Israel from the beginning of its very existence.

The Jewish community is also very strong about celebrating life, and unfortunately in 737 days we have seen the trauma of the very opposite. On 7 October we saw 1200 Jews murdered by a terrorist organisation, Hamas. We must never forget that it was not just a terrorist organisation, but it was an organisation that was the government of Gaza. So this was a government that invaded Israel. On top of the 1200 that were murdered, there were 250 hostages taken. And through every single period the Jewish community, Israel, the Western world have said, 'Bring the hostages home and the war ends.' Very simple – bring the hostages home and the war ends. I know a lot of people have tried to convolute this into other things and rewrite history, that this is a genocide, this is not a war. Well, when somebody invades you, murders your brothers and sisters – and a number of my colleagues have witnessed the 47 minutes of terror of people that had their heads severed, women raped, people tortured, burnt in the most disgusting, traumatic way. I have seen that video twice, and the member for Brighton has as well. It will never leave my mind, and that is where it started. That is where this started.

It started with an invasion of Israel and hostages taken. And what happened literally two days after at the Sydney Opera House is they had people protesting. Whether it was 'Gas the Jews' or 'Where's the Jews?', it was against the Jews. That was two days after, before Israel did anything – Israel had not responded. Israel took six days to respond with an initial defence, 20 days before they actually got involved in a full invasion – 20 days. Yet the Western world stood up and said, 'Look at Israel, look at what they're doing. Look at the Jews. How terrible are they?' This is the rewrite of history that, as Jews, is just beyond belief. Many in the Western world and many Victorians and Australians that have come up ever since have stood beside us and said, 'We know what you're going through.' And we pray for peace. We pray for the Palestinians to live peacefully – there is not a Jew that I have met that does not believe the same – but unfortunately not with a terrorist organisation in control. We saw, once the hostages were returned, Palestinians murdered in the streets by Hamas. They are an evil terrorist regime, and that is what we are dealing with. It is complex. It is not easy.

There were a couple of occasions when we got to go to Israel. The first one was with the member for Brighton, the member for Mornington and David Davis, Renee Heath and Trung Luu from the other place. It was around 8 June – when, historically, four hostages were rescued on the day we were there. It was such an amazing feeling when we woke up to the great news and we went to Hostages Square and we got to celebrate that brief time. Noa Argamani was one of them. You would have remembered the graphic scenes of her being pulled by her hair onto the back of a motorbike and saying, 'Don't kill me, don't kill me.' She was separated from her boyfriend. He was taken separately. He returned only a few days ago to be reunited with Noa Argamani, which is such a beautiful thing. Unfortunately Noa Argamani's mother died during that process, of cancer, and that is part of the trauma. That is part of what was experienced.

One of the hostages that returned was Omri, whose dad Dani was at Hostages Square, when we visited, and Dani was growing his beard. It was normally well kept. He would not grow a beard but was growing his beard. He went up to us and he said, 'I'm growing my beard until my son comes home. When he comes home, we will shave together. That's what we will do. We will shave together.' And he is home, and they can shave together. He took off his necklace of Omri and put it over to Renee and said, 'You wear this necklace and you pray.' Renee is a religious person, and she told him of this. And every day she and her community have been praying, and we got to emotionally deal with that. That was the first part.

The second part was when I visited again with the member for Prahran and went back to Hostages Square to meet with the organisers there and talk about their plight in getting the rest of the world to try and raise the voice, because it was all about the voice. I want to share with you how important the grassroots are. We know it as politicians, because we stand in here quite often and talk about community leadership, but I want to share with you the grassroots, because it was the grassroots that largely brought the hostages home. I know we saw Bibi and Donald Trump, and they did some great things, as much as you might like or dislike those individuals. But what really brought the hostages home, both in Israel and even in Australia, were the grassroots, because in Hostages Square they never gave up hope. Those families camped in Hostages Square every single day and never gave up hope.

In Melbourne we had our own Hostages Square. We had a group of Israelis, United with Israel is what they called themselves – it was just a group that made up the name – and they decided that every Sunday they were going to turn up at Caulfield Park and call for the hostages to be returned. They would do a little video and they would send it far and wide, and that was happening all around the world. I just need to share with you about these Israelis, because people think, ‘Israelis – they come here and they want to talk about Israel and they want to do all this stuff.’ Israelis actually leave Israel because they have had enough and they want to come and just be Aussies; they want to do Australian things and they love Australia. They actually do not really go to synagogue, they do not really connect much with community; they just live and work. Many have become quite successful in their businesses, but they do not really get out there and wave the flag. They actually stood up during this time because they had to make a decision whether to go back and fight, and some of them did; the others remained behind to fight here to combat the antisemitism and the hate. Nirit Elyon, Ravit Glance, Negba Weiss-Dolev, Natalie Gutman, Avishag Rager – they, as powerful women, ran that event every single Sunday to bring the hostages home. They, along with other groups like Project A, Moran Dvir, Lillian Kline, Liora Miller, Ginette Searle, were doing advocacy to ensure the non-Jewish community were hearing about the plight. And J-United, Simonne Whine, Maaian Galant and Tamar Paluch wrote books and got women to talk about their struggle to fight against this – again, they were all grassroots, and so many more did what they could to ensure all of this.

I just wanted to finish by saying that this is largely, as the Premier said, about peace. It is hopefully about people now being able to unite, to bring temperatures down, to hopefully move on. The Jewish community has been traumatised over the last two years, make no mistake. The antisemitism is something that I have never quite seen. I mentioned the Opera House on the 9th. The protest started here on 10 October – three days after, many days before Israel actually entered into Gaza – and protests have continued ever since. There have been 100-plus protests, with \$25 million worth of policing costs, which even the commissioner has spoken about. We would hope that that would end, and I would plead with those people that go out each and every week and disrupt, who are divisive, who are hateful in what they do, to stop. The hostages are back. We are working towards peace. Let us end it.

I remember six years ago talking about Extinction Rebellion coming in and hijacking our streets, costing us \$3 million. Six years on we are seeing it all again. They just moved on to another cause. Now we are the targets, and we have had enough. This is the day to say ‘Enough is enough’. The member for Box Hill has had to cop it. He stood out there fighting the fight. We all have. Federally we have seen your colleague Josh Burns has been targeted. Josh Frydenberg left as Treasurer, but he has come back fighting every day. James Patterson – they are all out there – Julian Leeser and a number of others. We just plead. I know in here we do as much as we can.

Thank you, Premier, for today. I know it has been tough, and I know you have had some tough periods in all of this. Thank you, Deputy Premier. Thank you to all of you. Let us come together. Let us fight against hate. Let us unite and say enough is enough, and hopefully today will be a great day. This pin – I know, Deputy Speaker – that I have been wearing very quietly is not a political pin. All the pin has been about is the hostages’ return. Ironically I ran out of pins on Sunday, because I have been giving them out to anyone that would wear them. This is my last pin, and I will not be needing to wear it again.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:26): I rise also to speak in support of today's motion. Before I commence I do want to acknowledge the member for Caulfield, not only on what he just said but how difficult it has been for him, particularly in the last two years. By far and away the largest Jewish community in our state is within the Caulfield electorate, and I know that he has worked every day of the last 737 days to be with the community and stand with the community in support of particularly bringing the hostages home. I also want to thank the Premier and all of my Labor colleagues for the support they have shown to me over the last two years. Obviously Box Hill does not have a particularly large Jewish community, particularly now; I think it once had a lot more. But being a member of the Jewish faith and obviously having close family connections, connections to places of worship and the largest Jewish day school in the Southern Hemisphere in my electorate, it certainly has touched me in many ways.

The motion deals with three elements, and I want to go through each of the elements and then touch on a fourth element, which is really about the antisemitism in Victoria. It is a really important motion of human significance. It brings together the values that we can all hold dear, of compassion, justice, security and hope. Even though the conflict occurred over 10,000 kilometres away, it has been felt very intensely by communities in Victoria. The conflict in the Middle East, as everyone knows, is ancient. It is layered in history, religion and nationalism, and for many of these reasons it has proven intractable and lasting peace has proved elusive. The latest conflict has exacted an unbearable human cost, from those held in captivity to civilians injured or killed and communities displaced. Hopefully this motion offers an opportunity to offer solidarity to victims of terror and war and to affirm our belief that peace, however fragile, must always be on the horizon.

If I can begin with the hostages, I was just reflecting that tomorrow it will be exactly two years since I rose in this place to speak on the motion condemning the horrific terrorist attacks of 7 October and about the hostages that were taken from their homes and their places of leisure. For more than two years families have lived in agony, unable to know whether their loved ones were alive. They were held under inhuman conditions, used as leverage – bargaining chips – in a broader conflict. For all of those days – days of fear, torment, uncertainty – still there was this hope, as the member for Caulfield said, hope both in Israel and in the Israeli community in Australia, that one day the hostages would return. It must be a terrible burden for those families who have waited for this day to come.

I welcome the safe return of these hostages with deep gratitude, relief and humility. Their release must be viewed not merely as a concession or outcome of a deal but as an essential restoration of human dignity. We must honour not just their freedom but also the memory of those who did not survive captivity and the suffering they endured. We must acknowledge that even for the returned, recovery will be long, painful and multifaceted – physical, psychological and spiritual. My thoughts and prayers are with the hostages and their families today, and we must ensure that support is robust and enduring.

The second limb of this motion is about the ceasefire, and I welcome the ceasefire with cautious optimism for what it signals and for what it must now deliver: return of the remaining deceased hostages, protection of civilians, unimpeded humanitarian corridors and a foundation upon which to build something better than war. We must acknowledge the painful cost that has preceded this ceasefire. Tens of thousands of lives have been lost. Entire communities do need to be rebuilt, but it cannot reset to the status quo that existed before 7 October. It must be a catalyst to something better. I also welcome the renewed movement towards peace. This is an aspiration that must always follow the end of bombs and bullets, however modest, however tentative, however incomplete. Without a genuine and sustained pathway to peace, ceasefires risk being temporary pauses in suffering and risk resuming a new cycle of violence.

Victoria as a state that treasures multiculturalism, human rights and diversity must reaffirm that we stand for a just peace – a peace that respects the rights, identity, security and dignity of both Israelis and Palestinians. It is not naive to hope for peace. It is not disloyal to Israel or disloyal to Palestinians to insist that peace, not war, must be our enduring goal. Indeed for those who love Israel the strongest security is a durable peace. For those who care about the Palestinians the strongest path forward is the

politics of freedom, rights and self-determination. We welcome any and all efforts towards ceasefire, reconciliation, confidence building, reconstruction, third-party mediation and inclusive governance. I urge the federal government to continue its deep engagement through diplomacy, foreign aid and multilateral institutions and partnerships to press for a future that holds both states living side by side in dignity and security.

Finally, I want to reflect on the pain, suffering and anguish that has occurred in Melbourne over the last two years within our vibrant Jewish community. Following 7 October the Jewish community in Victoria held vigils, prayers and communal gatherings confronting grief, fear and the rise of antisemitism. As the member for Caulfield has noted, it was less than 48 hours before we saw the ugly scenes on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. In the last two years the community has continued to grieve and pray while around them the level of antisemitism has risen to levels that I have never witnessed in this country before. It is not just the protests that we see weekly; it is the vandalism of Jewish-owned businesses, the vandalism of offices of Jewish politicians and of Jewish schools, the boycotts of businesses, the vilification and abuse sometimes directed at kids and the blacklisting of Jewish writers and artists. These are just the incidents that have been reported. I have spoken to many others in the community who have been targeted by this abuse but have chosen not to have it reported in the media.

None of these Australians are members of the Israeli cabinet. None of these Australians have any say in how Israel conducts its foreign policy or its military policy. In fact many of them have openly opposed the Netanyahu government for years and have called for self-determination for the Palestinian people. Yet they have still been targeted because, like the vast majority of the Jewish community in Victoria and indeed around the world, they support Jewish self-determination in the ancestral home of the Jewish people. The antisemitism and vilification that we have seen in this state is sadly not unique. We have seen it in other cities in Australia and other cities around the world. In addition to enduring peace in the Middle East, my hope from this ceasefire is that the temperature of the debate can be turned down and that communities in Victoria can be allowed to go about their lives free from harassment and vilification, free to attend their place of worship without being concerned that they will confront an angry mob on departure, free from going to their place of worship without fear that it is going to be attacked while they are in there and free to visit the CBD where they want and when they want. To those who are continuing to advocate for and incite violence and hate against the Jewish community, I say, 'Your hate stops now.'

We must redouble our efforts to protect and support communities in Victoria that have felt fear, harassment or division during this period. We should increase education on religious tolerance, anti-hate initiatives and strengthen policing and community security within the imperative of civil liberties. Victoria has long embraced the ideals of multiculturalism, tolerance, human rights and social cohesion, and here in Victoria we stand together with all communities that have felt pain, division, suspicion or fear during this conflict. We stand against hatred in all its forms. We stand for a Victoria where our towns, our schools and our streets remain places of safety, mutual respect and shared humanity even when the bombs fall thousands of kilometres away.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:36): Two years ago we saw a rip in the good fabric of the Western world in a way that I am sure the entire Western world did not want to see. What was so shocking about the events of 7 October was the deepness and the closeness of that tear and that atrocity and hate aligned with those in the Second World War, atrocities that every good person around the world probably hoped with some certainty could not happen again. Because though disputes happen across borders, the hatred of 7 October showed and has shown for the two years since that the dispute, the hatred and the atrocity were not only about borders, though they were about that too. They were far more deep-seated. The hatred went to the core of who people are and it runs totally in contrast to what every good person around the world believes we as a humanity should believe in, what we should support, what we should stand for collectively, no matter what our differences are.

I remember on 7 October, in the afternoon as the sirens started in Israel, messaging the member for Caulfield and our first thoughts being absolute shock that events were occurring that we knew at the time cut so deeply into what we stood for as the Western world. Since then, I do not think any good person has been able to be fully settled while this dispute, while this conflict, has occurred. But what was so special this week was the incredible moment of seeing the final hostages return and knowing that, though not every single victim has been returned, some have and we hope that the final victims are returned soon. Seeing that hope, though we have been witness to a tear in the goodness of our world, we have taken a step towards healing that tear this week.

I watched the events first in a community event in Caulfield with the member for Caulfield but then went home and watched it with my two children. I do not often talk about my family in this place, and my wife gets quite grumpy with me, because these are very, very complex issues for little children. My children are aware of me going to Israel twice in the last year and why and the effect that it had on me, but I needed them to see that goodness has prevailed. After two years, goodness in the world has prevailed.

The member for Caulfield and I and some of our colleagues went to Israel soon after the war began for the first time. We sat in the rooms of victims and their families – sometimes sitting with the families and sharing their stories, sometimes sitting on the beds of children who are no longer here, looking at the bullet holes behind us, some of them with the blood the bullet caught on the way through as it killed those victims. We watched the video that the terrorists filmed of what they were doing, and to any member who is offered the opportunity to watch that video I would say to you it is important that you do. It is important that you do so that you can understand what occurred but also understand that the terrorists felt the need and the want to not only commit the worst things that you can imagine being committed but also film them. I can say I have found it very difficult to talk about that first trip to Israel because it was so deeply impactful, I think, on all of us who were there. Since then I have found what I saw very difficult to deal with, and I have not publicly talked about it until recently, because it was so deeply impactful.

The member for Caulfield organised a second trip to Israel and Poland this year, where we took the opportunity to go to the March of the Living and walk between the two death camps. It was hard not to, on that trip, reflect on the similarities of these events – the worst atrocities perhaps we have seen. Because, as I said earlier, these atrocities were not about border disputes. At the end of the day these atrocities were about who people are – attacks on people for what they believe and for who they are at their most core sense. What we saw as we marched between two death camps, though, was a sense of hope – the same spark of hope that we have seen this week, the same spark of people from around the world coming together and saying, ‘Goodness must win. We believe in goodness. We believe in goodness winning.’

This week we have seen what is best about our world movement. The member for Caulfield spoke very eloquently about the last two years and the community movement of that goodness and of that hope. Knowing, as an Australian, that throughout those two years we have seen events not only in this country but elsewhere that clearly lean into hatred and lean into an undermining of social cohesion has not only made what has happened on the other side of the world so deeply painful but made it even more painful to know that the worst things also happened on our own shores, where we had hoped that they never could.

As we have the goodness of this week shine forth, it is an opportunity for all of us, in whatever role we have, to say that it is time that we all lean into the goodness in ourselves, whether that be in the little things that happen in our days and the decisions that we make or whether we are in leadership roles and it is about what we can say externally, and the member for Caulfield talked about the protests. It is time to say goodness everywhere has to prevail, and that means we need to express it, we need to call for it and we need to do it together. It means we need to join hands and call for it in every form where it is clearly not there and where things are clearly wrong. I mentioned the protests – they are

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one example – but that is what the victims from all sides deserve and that is what our world deserves, so my hope is that the goodness of this week can extend to our shores and the future.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:46): I would like to add a few short words on behalf of the Greens on this motion. We too welcome the return of the Israeli hostages to their families and acknowledge the two years of fear and heartache these families have gone through. We wish them peace and healing as they reunite, and we acknowledge the pain and suffering of those whose loved ones did not come home and the impacts on the Jewish community, particularly here in Victoria.

I do also think it is important to acknowledge the Palestinians who were released at the same time, who have not yet been mentioned in this debate, many of whom have been held captive by Israel without charge, many for a lot longer than two years. I note that the UN has said that many more children and adults, including many captured health workers, are still held arbitrarily in Israeli detention centres and must be released. I acknowledge that over the last two years over 67,000 Palestinians, a third of them children, have been killed in what the UN has deemed a genocide, and many were also killed before this. I acknowledge the impact that this has had, especially on the Muslim community, including here in Victoria.

The second part of this motion talks about ceasefire. We welcome peace and we welcome ceasefire, but we are also disturbed by reports of continued attacks on Palestinians by Israeli military forces and reports of the withholding of agreed aid. We call for a true ceasefire and lasting peace and the uninterrupted flow of aid, and we acknowledge that any peace plan must include Palestinian involvement and a clear path for Palestinians to exercise their internationally recognised right to self-determination and an end to the occupation. May peace prevail. May justice prevail.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:48): I want to add a couple of comments to this motion. I thank the Premier for bringing it to the floor of this Parliament. The horror and atrocities perpetrated against innocent Israelis on 7 October 2023 marked the single largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. That is not something we should ever lose sight of. This was a profound event, and it is an event that has, in my experience, crept into every single interaction, every event, every encounter with members of Melbourne's Jewish community over the course of the last two excruciatingly painful years. It was a day of unspeakable terror as families were slaughtered, children were murdered and entire communities were traumatised, perhaps forever, by the brutality of Hamas.

But the suffering did not end on that day, because hundreds of hostages were taken – men, women, children, the elderly – and many of them have been held in captivity for most if not all of these two years. Some of them, sadly, are returning not to the loving arms of their family but in coffins. The awful pain, the awful truth, that attaches to the joy of the hostages returning is those who are not returning alive. This has been a profoundly important event for Melburnians, and I think it is entirely appropriate that this Parliament takes the opportunity to talk about it, because the impact on Melbourne's Jewish community has been profound. I have never seen antisemitism in my lifetime like we have seen in the last two years. When antisemitic graffiti makes it all the way to the footpaths of Mitcham, you know that you are dealing with something that is not confined to a radical rabble in the CBD or confined to areas in Melbourne's southern suburbs. It is something that has gone way wider than that, and my great fear is that we now have an established narrative of antisemitism, that we now have a pattern of antisemitism that will take a very long time to properly combat.

I want to thank the leadership of my friend the member for Box Hill, who has shown such extraordinary strength through this very, very difficult period, particularly within a party where there is a diversity of views around these matters. It is uncomfortable territory when you are in the left and you find yourself agreeing with Andrew Bolt on things or agreeing with others from the right on things, but I have found myself, perhaps surprisingly, at one level agreeing with the absolute condemnation of Hamas, the absolute condemnation of these attacks and the willingness to support those who support Israel and to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who believe in the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, as I do.

We ought to be very, very careful not to concatenate the Netanyahu government with Israel or concatenate Judaism with Zionism, or to concatenate being a Melbourne Jew with being an Israeli decision-maker, as the member for Box Hill so eloquently explained. We do not often say, ‘America has done XYZ.’ We frequently say, ‘Trump has done XYZ,’ and yet somehow in this debate it is always ‘Israel has done X’ or ‘Israel has done Y’. You can proudly stand shoulder to shoulder with Melbourne’s Jewish community and proudly support the existence of an Israeli state whilst disagreeing with some of the actions of the Netanyahu government, and that is the position I find myself in. I think it is so important that we approach this debate about what comes next with nuance.

Winning back the hostages has been really, really hard. Winning peace will actually be harder, and I urge everyone to respect the nuance of this debate, to respectfully disagree, where they need to, with actions taken on either side of this debate but to do so in a way that is respectful of Melbourne’s Jewish population, that is respectful of Melbourne’s Muslim population and that fundamentally recognises the core and gross injustice at the heart of this issue – the extraordinary attack on civilian life, the extraordinary targeting of civilians. It has been an incredibly painful period for Melbourne’s Jewish community. I am so pleased that some of that pain has now ended, but I am very conscious of the fact that it is not over. It is not over in terms of winning the peace. That will be a very, very difficult part of this process, and of course I want peace to prevail in this part of the world.

This Parliament has a duty to uphold the values that bind our democracy: freedom, tolerance, mutual respect and the protection of all citizens, regardless of faith or heritage. The anti-hate-speech changes that were made through this chamber, I think about a year ago, were important changes, and I supported them. I will continue to support Melbourne’s faith communities, irrespective of what faith they are, in peacefully practising their faith. But let us never lose sight of the extraordinary terrorist act that commenced this process and the profound injustice that sits at the heart of it.

My heart breaks for Melbourne’s Jewish community. My heart breaks particularly for young Jews whose schools have been vandalised or who have been pilloried whilst attending university campuses. Their experience has been horrific throughout this period too, and as Victorian legislators our first duty is of course to those Victorians who have done it tough as a result of the egregious, disgusting and appalling acts of Hamas on the other side of the world. So today we stand with the Jewish community. I want to extend to them and to the member for Caulfield and the member for Box Hill our love and appreciation for every single thing that Melbourne’s Jewish community has done for us and for our state, our great delight that the hostages are home and our very best wishes for better days ahead for Melbourne’s Jewish community.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:56): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

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 **Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025** (the Bill).

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

Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to acquit the Victorian Government's public commitment to:

- implement fuel price caps as part of Phase 2 of the Fair Fuel Plan
- establish the Portable Rental Bond Scheme (Scheme) announced as part of the Government's Housing Statement released in September 2023
- give effect to further rental reforms, including reforms announced on 30 October and 19 November 2024, to better protect Victorian renters and improve compliance with rental minimum standards
- make minor amendments to Housing Statement reforms relating to CPD requirements for property professionals.

The Bill amends laws across the Consumer Affairs portfolio, including amendments to:

- the **Residential Tenancies Act 1997** (RT Act) to:
 - introduce the Scheme to reduce the financial burden for people by mitigating against the 'double bond' issue which occurs when renters must pay a bond to secure a new rental property before the bond from their previous tenancy is returned
 - introduce evidentiary requirements when claiming bond money on a rental property
 - prohibit rental providers or their agents from charging the cost of background fees to renters
 - extend gas and electrical safety requirements and checks to all rental properties
 - introduce a requirement for gas pre-draughtproofing checks prior to draughtproofing work commencing
 - strengthen evidentiary requirements in relation to compliance with prescribed minimum standards.
- the **Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012** (ACLFT Act) to introduce a 24-hour fuel price cap and fuel price watch mechanism, including mandatory reporting of fuel prices
- the **Estate Agents Act 1980**, the **Owners Corporations Act 2006**, and the **Conveyancers Act 2006** to refine continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for property professionals so that:
 - the Business Licensing Authority can set mandatory CPD activities
 - regulations can be made to prescribe matters concerning CPD providers, including approving or prohibiting CPD providers from providing approved CPD activities
- make other minor and technical amendments.

Human Rights Issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- Freedom of movement (section 12)
- Privacy and reputation (section 13)
- Freedom of expression (section 15)
- Property rights (section 20)
- Right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination, is equal before the law, is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This section also clarifies that measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination.

Discrimination under the Charter means discrimination within the meaning of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of that Act (including, for example, age, sex and disability). Discrimination can either be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable.

Criteria and eligibility for financial hardship and payment plans

Clause 5 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law by inserting section 423D into the RT Act to provide the power for the Secretary to issue guidelines in relation to hardship criteria and eligibility requirements for access to payment plans for the recovery of debt owed to the State where a transfer of bond from one residential rental agreement to another has occurred. Further, clause 5 of the Bill inserts section 423S into the RT Act to allow the Secretary, upon written application by a renter, to offer a payment plan to a renter who owes a payment of bond debt to the state and meets the eligibility criteria developed in the transfer of bond guidelines issued under the Bill. This clause has been developed to implement a clear process around the hardship criteria ensuring that people undergoing hardship are not discriminated further by repaying any bond moneys owed to the state through an agreed payment plan and to ensure any payment collected is not exacerbating a person's hardship by requiring immediate repayment.

The introduction of a payment plan system ensures that people suffering financial hardship are not affected disproportionately, or disproportionately punished, by owing a debt to the state. The Bill does not impose specific eligibility criteria for payment plans; the Bill creates a head of power for the Secretary to issue guidelines. By developing guidelines for eligibility to enter into a payment plan, it can be ensured that debts owed to the state are managed effectively and that people experiencing financial hardship are protected from any actions that may arise as a result of being unable to immediately repay debts owed to the State.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to recognition and equality before the law under section 8 of the Charter.

Freedom of movement (section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria, to enter and leave it, and has the freedom to choose where to live. This right extends to accessing public spaces, such as the ability of individuals to move through, remain in, enter or depart from public spaces, including freedom from physical barriers and procedural impediments.

The right extends, generally, to freedom to move throughout the State without impediment or restrictions (both physical and procedural) and a right to access public places and services. This right is, however, not an absolute right under the Charter and may be subject to such reasonable limitations as are demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, including the property rights of others.

Clause 5 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to freedom of movement by inserting section 423F into the RT Act to allow renters to apply to the Secretary to have a rental bond held by the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (the Authority) against a terminating rental agreement to be held against a subsequent rental agreement. An application is required to be accompanied by a prescribed fee and any outstanding amount of bond the renter would owe following transfer of the bond on the terminating rental agreement to the subsequent rental agreement. Clause 5 of the Bill also inserts section 423G(1) into the RT Act to allow the Secretary to direct the Authority to transfer bond money where the Secretary is satisfied that the application meets the requirements both of inserted section 423F and the eligibility criteria in inserted section 423G(2) of the RT Act.

The Bill reduces the financial burden of renters having bond money held against multiple rental properties while a renter moves from one rental property to another. The Scheme ensures that a renter who is in the process of moving from one rental property to another does not face the financial restriction that the requirement to make bond payments for two properties at the same time creates in the process of moving from one rental property to another. The Bill further promotes the right to freedom of movement by providing the Secretary with the power to direct payment of bond claims made against the renter in respect of the first rental agreement where the bond has transferred to a subsequent rental agreement and establish a debt against the renter for any amounts owed.

Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with the right to freedom of movement under section 12 of the Charter.

Privacy and reputation (section 13)

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

Power for Secretary to request information when a renter makes a request to transfer bond

Clause 5 of the Bill may limit the right to privacy by inserting new section 423F in the RT Act, which provides the Secretary the power to require a renter to provide any further information as the Secretary thinks fit when a renter makes an application to transfer their bond. The purpose of this clause is to allow the Secretary to

seek additional relevant information that is reasonably required for the Secretary to consider in determining an application to request a transfer of a renter's bond. This information may include personal information.

To the extent that this clause may limit the right to privacy and reputation by providing the Secretary with information gathering powers that include collecting personal information, I am of the view that the clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, it is not arbitrary and is in accordance with law. The Bill only creates information gathering powers for the Secretary where they may need additional information, for example details of the second rental agreement as part of their consideration of their decision to transfer a renter's bond. It is reasonable for the Secretary to request information that relates to the eligibility criteria under section 423G(2) from the renter that is used for the purposes of determining an application to transfer bond.

Power for Secretary to request information for claims for rental bond monies

Clause 9 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting section 411(1A) into the RT Act to provide that where a residential tenant provider seeks to make a claim for rental bond, that person or their agent must provide bond claim evidence to a renter to support a claim at least 7 days before the claim is made. Clause 8 of the Bill inserts the definition of 'bond claim evidence' into section 3(1) of the RT Act to include an invoice; a receipt; a quote; a photograph; or any other prescribed evidence. The purpose of this clause of the Bill is to ensure that landlords seeking payment of bond money have sufficient up-front evidence in making any claim to a tenant's bond money.

To the extent that clause 9 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by requiring the provision of information that may be of a personal or private nature, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy and reputation will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. These amendments are reasonable as the information to be disclosed to a renter is restricted to an invoice, receipt, quote, photograph or evidence prescribed in regulations and the purpose of the documentary evidence is to substantiate and justify the bond claim amount. The use of this information is limited to supporting a bond claim or an application to the Tribunal under clause 10 of the Bill. The Bill engages powers, the scope of which are clearly defined and exercisable in circumstances set out in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, and are required to substantiate the relevant claim, or to enable the Authority to discharge their statutory duties in relation to the bond lodgement. For these reasons, I am of the opinion that these provisions are compatible with the right in section 13 of the Charter.

Person's second rental provider must provide bond lodgement form to Authority

Clause 5 of the Bill limits the right to privacy by inserting section 423K into the RT Act to require that once signed, a person's second rental provider must provide a bond lodgement form to the Authority. The purpose of transferring the bond lodgement form is to ensure that the Authority can commence the transfer of bond money held by it in respect to a renter from being held in the previous place of residence to the renter's updated place of residence.

To the extent that clause 5 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by requiring the transfer of information that may be of a personal or private nature, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy and reputation will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The amendment is reasonable to ensure that the smooth transfer of bond moneys is undertaken in an accurate and timely manner by the Authority and ensures that the transfer of a person's bond money is undertaken without requiring any action on the part of the person that may restrict the implementation of the Scheme.

Fuel retailers to provide information to the Director

Clause 20 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting new section 106B into the ACLFT Act to require that a fuel retailer provide particular information to the Director, including the name, position title, email address and telephone number of the primary contact person for each of the fuel retailer's service stations. A fuel retailer for the purposes of Part 5.3 of the Act may be a natural person. Clause 20 of the Bill also introduces section 106D into the ACLFT Act to require that a fuel retailer notify the Director of any update in information required under section 106B of that Act.

To the extent that clause 20 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by requiring the disclosure of information that may be of a private nature, I consider that any engagement with the right to privacy and reputation will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The Bill engages powers the scope of which are clearly defined and exercisable in circumstances set out in the ACLFT Act. Additionally, the information required to be disclosed is required for operational and compliance and enforcement purposes, and therefore not arbitrary.

Disclosure of information is required as, in practice, once the Director receives the information from a fuel retailer, the Director will then 'onboard' the fuel retailer onto the system, so that the fuel retailers can report on fuel prices. Information such as contact details for retailers is needed to enable them to be contacted in the case of an alleged breach or for other purposes concerning the administration of the scheme.

Information sharing

Clause 20 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting section 106M into *the ACLFT Act* to provide that the Director may collect, use, disclose or publish any information to the extent necessary for the Director to perform a function or exercise a power under Part 5.3 of the *ACLFT Act*, subject to anything to the contrary in that or any other Act. Clause 21 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting section 109(la) into the *ACLFT Act* to provide the Director with a new function under the *ACLFT Act* to collect and publish information relating to the prices at which fuel is offered for sale to retail customers, in which the Director may perform in collecting information under section 106M of the *ACLFT Act*. Clause 20 and 21 have been developed to allow for information about fuel prices to be made available through the Service Victoria application.

To the extent that clauses 20 and 21 of the Bill engages the right to privacy, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy and reputation will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary, noting that the section 106M is subject to anything to the contrary in *ACLFT Act* or any other Act, including, but not limited to, the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, and is appropriately circumscribed to the functions to be carried out by the Director under Part 5.3. Further section 109(la) is limited to the collection and publishing of information relating to the prices at which fuel is offered for sale to retail customers. The purpose of sections 106M and 109(la) is to facilitate the sharing of real time, non-personal fuel price information with the public via a Service Victoria Application and Website and the sharing of datasets consisting of non-personal information, following a 24-hour delay, with non-government third parties, such as other fuel Application providers or research organisations.

Prescribed minimum standards for rental properties and rooming houses

Clause 14 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting section 65C(1) into the RT Act to create specific requirements for rental providers to keep records and produce those records at the notice of the Director that demonstrate compliance with prescribed minimum rental standards under section 65A of the RT Act or, if relevant, why an exemption from compliance applies. Clause 14 of the Bill also inserts section 65C(2) into the RT Act, which provides the Director with the power to publish a notice of the types of records that would be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with section 65A of the RT Act or, if relevant, why compliance is unreasonable. Clause 14 of the Bill inserts section 65D(1) into the RT Act to create specific requirements for rental providers or the provider's agent who offer premises to let to keep records and produce those records at the notice of the Director that demonstrate compliance with section 65B. Section 65B provides that a residential provider or their agent must not advertise or offer let a rental premise unless they reasonably believe the rental premises comply with rental minimum standards. Clause 14 of the Bill also inserts section 65D(2) into the RT Act, which provides the Director with the power to publish a notice of the types of records that would be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with section 65B of the RT Act. This clause has been developed to address the difficulty in enforcing the prescribed minimal rental standards under section 65A of the RT Act, which currently does not require a rental provider to maintain records that their rental premises meets the prescribed standards of the RT Act.

Further, clause 17 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by inserting section 142BAAA into the RT Act to require a rooming house operator who provides a room in a rooming house to a rooming house residence or provides a residence of a rooming house a facility or service or provides a rooming house resident with access to a common area to keep records that are sufficient to demonstrate compliance with rooming house standards under section 142B of the RT Act and produce relevant records at the request of the Director. The clause inserts section 142BAAA(4) into the RT Act to allow the Director to publish notices of the types of records that are sufficient compliance with section 143B of the RT Act. This clause has been developed to address the difficulty in enforcing compliance with rooming house standards under section 142B of the RT Act, which currently does not require a rental provider to maintain records that their rental premises meets the prescribed standards.

To the extent that clauses 14 and 17 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by requiring the maintenance of records to demonstrate compliance with prescribed minimum rental standards, it is my view that the confidentiality and information sharing clauses in the Bill are appropriately circumscribed so as not to authorise any arbitrary interferences with privacy. Clause 14 of the Bill addresses enforcement issues with the prescribed minimum rental standards and increases the scope of Consumer Affairs Victoria to undertake enforcement activities where rental providers do not meet the standards. These amendments are reasonable as the obligation to keep compliance records is limited to the purposes of demonstrating compliance with rental minimum standards and compliance with minimum rooming house standards. I consider it is reasonable for the information to be retained to support enforcement of safety and compliance with minimum standards.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter.

Freedom of expression (section 15)

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression. This includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds; whether orally, in writing, in print or by way of art or other medium chosen by that person. The right to freedom of expression is generally considered to include the right to not impart information. Section 15(3) of the Charter provides that special duties and responsibilities are attached to the right to freedom of expression and that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons and for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Fuel retailers to provide information to the Director

Clause 20 of the Bill inserts new sections 106B, 106F, 106J and 106K into the ACLFT Act, which compels fuel retailers to provide certain information, namely registration information required to onboard a fuel retailer into the scheme, information regarding the maximum fuel price for the following day, information about the actual fuel price at point of sale, and information regarding fuel types that have become temporarily unavailable. Although fuel retailers are most likely bodies corporate or other bodies carrying on a business, it is possible for them to be natural persons. Section 106M provides the Director with the power to, among other things, collect any information to the extent necessary for the Director to perform a function or exercise a power under Part 5.3 of the ACLFT Act. Similarly, section 109(la), in clause 21 of the Bill, provides the Director with a new function that allows the Director to collect information relating to the prices at which fuel is offered for sale to retail customers. However, to the extent that the Bill may be considered to engage individuals' rights to freedom of expression, I consider that any limitation of this right is balanced by the requirement to protect the rights of the public, specifically those in the market for fuel.

These amendments are required to ensure that consumers can make fully informed decisions to purchase fuel, with transparency of costs. Therefore, to the extent that freedom of expression is engaged by provisions in the Bill that require fuel retailers to provide information to the director, these provisions fall within the exception in section 15(3) of the Charter, as reasonably necessary to respect the rights of another person.

Property rights (section 20)

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

Fees in relation to bonds

Clause 5 may limit the right to property by inserting new section 423E into the RT Act to permit the Authority to recover from a renter any bank fees incurred by the Authority in relation to the transfer of the renter's bond or the repayment of an amount of bond under new sections 423P or 423Q (which concern disputed bond claims). The right to property may be limited as renters participating in the Scheme will be charged debt and credit card transaction fees by the Authority in order to transfer of their bond or repayment of a bond amount. However, to the extent that the right to property is limited, I am of the view that the clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. The bank fees recouped from the renter is to recover the costs of administering the transaction to support the renter in transferring or repaying their bond. It is reasonable to recoup bank fees from a renter incurred by the Authority in carrying out the directions from the Secretary in relation to the administration of the Scheme.

Clause 5 also inserts new section 423F, which may limit the right to property by requiring a renter to pay a prescribed fee to apply to transfer the bond under the new scheme inserted by Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill. Prescribing a fee to access the transfer of bond monies that the renter is entitled to limits the renter's access to their bond money if they seek access to the scheme. However, if a renter seeks to avoid this fee, they can still seek to claim their rental bonds under section 411 of the RT Act, and not avail themselves for the scheme. To the extent that the right to property is limited, I am of the opinion that the clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. The prescribed fee requested from renters is at cost recovery of administering the transfer of a bond which benefits renters. The prescribed fee is returned to the renter where the Secretary refuses the renter's request to transfer their bond or the second rental agreement is invalid or terminated.

Limitations on fuel retailers concerning the sale of fuel

Clause 20 may limit the right to property by inserting new Part 5.3 – Fuel retailers into the ACLFTA, which regulates fuel retailers in how they sell and advertise the price of fuel. The right to property may be limited by prohibiting fuel retailers who do not become 'confirmed fuel retailers' from selling fuel, and limiting 'confirmed fuel retailers' from selling fuel for more than their reported maximum price. This may limit fuel retailers' control over their property by limiting their ability to set the terms for sale of the good. To the extent

that clause 20 may deprive fuel retailers who are not ‘confirmed fuel retailers’ of full use of their property, I consider that the deprivation is in accordance with law as the framework to ensure compliance is accessible to the public and precisely set out. Additionally, the limitations on rights are balanced as fuel retailers are able to set their own maximum price, the restriction on their ability to increase price is lifted every 24-hours (that is, they have discretion to increase prices once every 24-hours), and they retain full control of price decreases. The requirements are non-arbitrary and lawful as they are necessary to implement the Fair Fuel scheme, which will benefit consumers through enhanced price transparency and certainty, and I consider this a reasonable limitation that can be justified in a democratic society.

Extending gas and electrical safety checks to all rental properties

Clause 15 of the Bill may limit the right to property by inserting sections 68A(1A) and 68A(1B) into the RT Act to extend current requirements in the RT Act for residential rental providers to undertake gas and electrical safety checks to apply to all rental properties, ensuring that gas and electrical safety checks are undertaken without exception. The Bill requires residential rental providers to undertake gas and electricity safety checks on the rented premises every 2 years and arrange a safety check to be undertaken as soon as practicable if a check has not been undertaken in the previous 2 years. These amendments may impose a limitation on property rights as a renter will be required to allow a licensed electrician or licensed gasfitter onto their rental property from time to time to undertake safety checks.

To the extent that Clause 15 of the Bill may limit property rights by requiring a renter to allow access to their place of residence for licensed electricians or licensed gasfitters, I am of the view that the clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. The Bill imposes obligations on the residential rental provider to ensure gas and electrical safety checks are undertaken on rental properties at particular points in time by a licensed electrician or licensed gasfitter, as a critical safety measure to ensure the safety of renters in their place of residence. The Bill, therefore, is drafted to ensure that the requirement to organise gas and electrical safety checks is not an open-ended requirement on residential rental providers that may create uncertainty for renters about when checks are required to be undertaken at their place of residence. I consider any limitation to be reasonable and justifiable to ensure that rental properties are safe and comply with minimum standards.

For these reasons I am of the opinion that these provisions are compatible with the right in section 20 of the Charter, and to the extent that they may constitute a deprivation of property, any such deprivation will be in accordance with law and therefore compatible with the right to property.

Fair hearing (section 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or, who is a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

The term ‘civil proceeding’ in section 24(1) has been interpreted as encompassing proceedings that are determinative of private rights and interests in a broad sense, including some administrative proceedings. It is well recognised that judicial determination of a person’s civil rights and liabilities is a crucial element of the fair hearing right. This right will be engaged where a person is prevented from having their civil rights or liabilities in a proceeding considered by a court. However, this right does not prevent the State from amending the substantive law to alter the content of those civil rights.

The Bill engages the right to a fair hearing by operating effectively to allow judicial review of decisions made by the Secretary in administering the transfer of bond scheme in Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill to be made to the Supreme Court and it is not intended for a person to have the right to review a decision of the Secretary through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). This is intended to ensure that any potential or perceived conflicts of interest with VCAT hearing matters on review of decisions of the secretary while having decision making powers under the RT Act are avoided and that the general public can be confident that judicial reviews will be undertaken by the judiciary fairly and impartially.

Clause 19 of the Bill may limit the right to a fair hearing by substituting sections of the RT Act in relation to application times for a person to seek an order under the Act. Clause 19 of the Bill substitutes section 46(2) of the RT Act to require a renter to, upon receiving a report from the Director, apply to VCAT for an order declaring the rent or proposed rent excessive within 30 days of receiving the report. Clause 19 of the Bill also substitutes section 103(2) of the RT Act to require a renter to, upon receiving a report from the Director under section 102 of the Act, apply to VCAT for an order declaring the proposed rent excessive within 30 days of receiving the report. Further, Clause 19 of the Bill also substitutes section 154(2) of the RT Act to require a renter to, upon receiving a report from the Director under section 153 of the Act, apply to VCAT for an order declaring the proposed rent or hiking charge excessive within 30 days of receiving the report.

To the extent that the Bill may limit the right to a fair hearing by restricting application period for renters seeking a relevant order, the limitation is reasonable and justifiable. The timeframe is consistent with 30-day timeframe to make application to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria. The Bill makes technical drafting amendments to current requirements under the RT Act, ensuring that the Bill does not create new application requirements for renters.

Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The High Court has described this right as incorporating the fundamental requirement that ‘the prosecution in a criminal case has the burden of proving guilt’, that is, that a conviction can follow only where every element of an offence has been proved by the prosecution beyond reasonable doubt.

Fuel retailers to provide ‘reasonable excuse’ for failing to report on matters concerning fuel prices

Clause 20 of the Bill engages rights in criminal proceedings by inserting section 106F into the ACLFT Act creating an offence stating that a confirmed fuel retailer must not, without reasonable excuse, fail to provide a maximum fuel price to the Director. Further, clause 20 of the Bill inserts section 106K into the ACLFT Act creating an offence stating that a confirmed fuel retailer must not, without reasonable excuse, fail to notify the Director of a decrease of the normal selling price of fuel or the temporary unavailability of any fuel the retailer offers for sale.

The introduction of offences in clause 20 of the Bill that provides for the defence of reasonable excuse creates an evidentiary burden only on an accused to raise the argument of, and provide evidence for, a reasonable excuse for non-compliance as a defence to the aforementioned offences in clause 20 of the Bill, which the prosecution will then be required to rebut. Additionally, the offences are narrowly tailored to specific conduct, with clear examples of what may constitute reasonable excuse set out in a way that is structured, accessible to the public, and formulated precisely. It is my view that the amendments are reasonable and proportionate. Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with rights in criminal proceedings under section 25 of the Charter.

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because it does not limit any rights under the Charter.

The Hon Nick Staikos MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs

Second reading

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government)
(10:56): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This government believes in a fair go for all Victorians. At the heart of that commitment is tackling the rising cost of living and ensuring the markets that serve Victorians are fair, transparent and work for them. This bill delivers on this commitment by introducing significant and practical reforms on two of the biggest fronts in the battle against cost of living pressures: the price for fuel and the cost of housing.

Amendments to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012

The Victorian Government is committed to addressing cost of living pressures and helping consumers stretch their money further, especially on essential commodities like fuel. That is why, earlier this year, the Victorian Government announced the Fair Fuel Plan.

Phase 1 helps consumers’ money go further through up-to-date price transparency for fuel. The Victorian Government implemented Phase 1 of the Fair Fuel Plan and launched the Servo Saver feature through Service Victoria in October 2025. All fuel retailers in Victoria are required to report their fuel prices, so that Victorians can access comprehensive, accurate and timely fuel price information. Through this feature, the Victorian Government is backing Victorian motorists to give them more power at the bowser by giving them the confidence they are getting the best deal when they fill up. The introduction of this reform aligns Victoria with other states and territories who have had similar schemes in place for many years.

The Bill I am introducing today builds on this reform and takes Victoria one step further.

Phase 2 of Fair fuel Plan will increase certainty by introducing 24-hour price caps

The *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012* establishes a framework of fundamental rights and protections for consumers to ensure they are treated fairly in the marketplace. The Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 will help achieve this by amending that Act to require fuel retailers to report their maximum fuel price in advance, protecting consumers against unexpected price increases. Currently, Victorian motorists only find out that the price of petrol is going up when they pull into a service station and see that it's 10, 20 or 30 cents more a litre than it was when they drove past earlier that day.

This Bill addresses this issue in 2 ways.

First, retailers are required to report, a day in advance, what their maximum fuel price will be. Retailers will have to report the maximum before 2pm, and that price will be published to the public at 4 pm. This means that Victorians will not just see the price of petrol now, but the maximum fuel price for the following day as well. It means that they can decide whether it will be cheaper to fill up when they go to do the groceries that night or if they stop to fill up on their way into work the next morning. The Bill will make sure that the maximum price gets locked in for 24 hours and it will be an offence to sell fuel above that price.

Second, retailers will only be permitted to lower their fuel prices throughout the day. This means that once a day's maximum fuel price comes into force at 6 am, the price of fuel cannot go up for 24 hours. While the price cannot go up, there will be no limitations on a retailer's ability to lower their prices throughout the day – we do not want to lock in higher prices.

This means that Victorian motorists cannot be stung by surprise fuel price rises.

This Bill builds on the first phase of the Fair Fuel Plan that requires retailers to report price changes throughout the day. To ensure retailers are appropriately incentivised to report the information consumers need to make informed purchasing choices. It will be an offence to fail to report price changes within 30 minutes. It will also be an offence for fuel retailers to fail to report if a type of fuel they sell has become temporarily unavailable. This will help prevent situations where consumers drive to a particular fuel station based on a reported price, only to find when they get there that the fuel has sold out.

Overall, the changes implemented in this Bill will help Victorians save money by allowing them to find the cheapest fuel in their area and giving them advance notice of any price increases. It helps level the playing field between Victorians and the fuel industry by equipping motorists with the information they need to make choices that could save them hundreds of dollars a year.

Amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997

This Bill introduces a landmark reform for Victorian renters by delivering a Portable Rental Bond Scheme (Scheme). This reform is a key cost of living initiative in the government's 2023 Housing Statement, which will create a fairer, more accessible, and more modern rental market.

The introduction of the Scheme will ease one of the most significant financial hurdles renters often face when moving between rental properties due to the need to pay a new bond before their old one has been returned. For too long, the 'double bond dilemma' has placed unnecessary and stressful financial burdens on renters.

This Bill provides a clear, sensible, and practical solution to this issue through the establishment of the Scheme, which will be open to all eligible Victorian renters.

The Scheme will ease financial burdens for Victorian renters moving between rental properties

The Bill amends the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RT Act) to establish a voluntary Scheme. The key objective of the Bill is to establish the Scheme that will allow eligible renters to transfer an existing bond lodged with the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (Authority) to another rental property, removing the cash flow crunch that so many Victorians experience. The establishment of the Scheme by the Bill will deliver immediate and significant benefits to the more than 1.5 million renters in Victoria who will be able to secure a new rental home with confidence and less financial stress.

The Bill provides for the Scheme to be administered by the Secretary, Department of Government Services (Secretary), with the Victorian Government acting as a guarantor for transferred bonds and claims made against a bond. The Secretary will oversee eligibility requirements, direct the Authority to transfer bonds, and manage the Scheme's financial aspects.

A renter can apply to transfer their bond once they have secured a new rental agreement and paid the first months' rent. To participate in the Scheme, renters will need to meet eligibility criteria, pay a small prescribed administrative fee, and pay any shortfall if the new bond is higher than their existing one.

For the second rental provider, the process remains familiar. They will be notified of the bond transfer and will lodge a bond lodgement form with the Authority, just as they do now.

Managing claims and protecting rental providers through a streamlined process

A critical feature of this Scheme is that rental providers are not disadvantaged. When a bond is transferred, the first rental provider's right to claim against that bond is protected, with the Victoria Government acting as guarantor.

If the first rental provider makes a claim – whether it is agreed to by the renter or determined by VCAT – the Secretary will direct the Authority to pay the valid claim amount. This process ensures that rental providers are paid promptly, and their financial interests are secure.

Debt recovery and hardship support highlights a compassionate approach

If the Authority pays a bond claim on behalf of a renter, the renter will owe that amount as debt to the State. The Bill provides the Secretary with the necessary powers to manage and recover these debts, which will be owed to the State.

The Secretary will notify the renter in writing of the amount owed, which must be repaid within a period of 8 weeks, where no other arrangement has been entered into.

To provide renters with the time and flexibility they need to pay any debts owed, the Bill also provides multiple repayment pathways, including entering into a payment plan, referral of unpaid debt to a debt collection agency, or offsetting the amount from the renter's bond at the end of their next tenancy.

Crucially, the Bill is designed with a strong safety net, with existing bond-related protections for renters who are victim-survivors of family violence continuing to operate under the Scheme. The Bill also provides the Secretary with powers to develop guidelines for hardship and offer payment plans, or in appropriate circumstances, write off a debt. The government understands that people's circumstances can change, and this framework ensures a compassionate and fair approach to bond debt recovery.

Finally, to ensure the scheme operates as intended, the Bill includes a requirement for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to review its operation within 3 years of its commencement and table a report in the Parliament. This guarantees transparency and accountability for the Scheme and ensures that it is operating as intended.

Additional rental reforms will further strengthen protections for Victorian renters

The RT Act already makes allowances for fair wear and tear in rental properties, but we know there is an emerging practice of some rental providers or their agents misrepresenting or exaggerating bond claims to keep more money in their pockets. The Bill introduces reforms that will require rental providers or their agents to provide supporting evidence to a renter before they can make any claims on the bond. Supporting evidence includes invoices, receipts, quotes or any other prescribed evidence and must be provided to a renter 3 days before a bond claim is made.

To further discourage exaggerated bond claims the Bill introduces an offence with penalties for a rental provider or their agent to make an application to VCAT without supporting documentary evidence, or where the supporting documentary evidence conflicts with a statement in a condition report.

These amendments seek to reset power imbalances between renters and rental providers and will enable renters to better challenge unfair bond claims.

The Bill also addresses an emerging and unfair practice that places yet another financial hurdle in front of Victorian renters. There is anecdotal evidence and media reporting that indicates some agents are upselling background checks to rental applicants who may feel compelled to pay up to \$30 for checks to make their rental application appear more competitive. To address this issue, the Bill amends the RT Act to prohibit rental providers or their agents from charging prospective renters a background check fee as part of the rental application process.

In addition, the Victorian Government continues to build on our 2021 rental reforms, which introduced rental minimum standards to improve the safety, amenity and energy efficiency of rental properties.

To further protect renters, the Bill will deliver on the commitment made by the government to require gas and electrical safety checks every 2 years by qualified tradespersons for all rental properties. This is a significant reform that will ensure that critical safety checks apply to all rental agreements regardless of when an agreement was entered into or whether gas and electrical safety check activities are explicitly set out in an agreement.

The Bill also introduces reforms to mitigate risks to renter living in rental properties with gas appliances that may arise from undertaking activities under the new draughtproofing rental minimum standard. To protect the safety and wellbeing of renters, all rental providers will need to conduct a gas check within 6 months before they undertake draughtproofing work, to ensure there is adequate ventilation for gas appliances to operate safely.

The Bill will also strengthen renter protections by providing the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria (Director), as the regulator for the Victorian rental and rooming house sectors, with the necessary tools to ensure rental providers and rooming house operators comply with prescribed minimum standards.

The Bill does this by providing powers to the Director to publish notices of the types of records that are sufficient for rental providers and rooming house operators to demonstrate compliance with rental minimum standards. In doing so, the Bill ensures investigators from Consumer Affairs Victoria can rely on documentary evidence to quickly and easily identify compliance with minimum standards, and if necessary, take enforcement action for non-compliance.

Amendments to a range of consumer property Acts will ensure effective operation of continuing professional development (CPD) reforms for property professionals

The Victorian Government recognises that poor conduct by property industry professionals can cause financial, health and social harms to Victorian renters and consumers. Renters are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of poor conduct. In the Housing Statement, the government committed to introducing mandatory CPD and licensing for property industry professionals to raise competency and professional standards in the property industry to improve outcomes for Victorian renters and consumers.

The *Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025* (Housing Statement Reform Act) delivers this Housing Statement initiative, which will come into effect in phases following commencement of the Act on 25 November 2025.

The Bill includes amendments to provide the Business Licensing Authority (BLA) with flexibility and powers to regularly update mandatory CPD to ensure that property professionals take ongoing training in topics that reflect current concerns and issues in their industry.

The Bill will also enable better controls over the quality of CPD training providers by enabling regulations to be made authorising the BLA to approve or prohibit CPD providers that do not meet required performance standards from delivering CPD activities.

These reforms are designed to improve the standard of education and CPD training provided to property professionals. Together, these reforms will give renters and property purchasers' peace of mind that property professionals are well-educated and have the necessary competency and professionalism to provide them with services they expect and deserve.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:57): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Tuesday 28 October.

Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:57): I rise to begin the opposition's contributions to the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill that comes to us today is another tranche of bits of legislation that this government has been drip-feeding through the Parliament for quite some time now with a focus on trying to improve the credibility and the management of our very, very important construction and building industry here in Victoria. Within the last few years of course we have had some very notable building company failures that have led to uncertainty and have led to concern, heartache and really dire circumstances for many home owners when the system fails and breaks down. It has an equally devastating impact of course on many, many small builders, subcontractors and others who are the backbone of our very important development, building, construction and housing industry.

The government has a role in this. We do not want a big government that starts telling people how to build houses and how to manage their businesses, but we do need a government that has proper

regulation and oversight of what is essentially for the average home owner one of the biggest investments they will ever make in their life. For others, like small business operators, who are running important businesses that put food on the table for their own families and who also provide jobs, opportunities and careers for many others, it is important that the framework around this works correctly.

Earlier in the year the government put to bed its changes with the reformed Building and Plumbing Commission, and the Building and Plumbing Commission will in large part have oversight of many elements of this piece of legislation as well. The Building and Plumbing Commission are essentially the watchdogs of this important industry. One of the concerns that has been ongoing is that while we are making these changes to help prevent future problems, in many, many cases we have not yet addressed some of the outstanding issues that have come along the way. So unfortunately there are still many who have fallen foul of things that have gone wrong in the building and construction industry, whether they are companies that have failed, builders who have left the industry or surveyors that no longer practice or cannot get future indemnity insurance or for other reasons might not be in existence. The Building and Plumbing Commission have that role, and it is disappointing that again with this latest piece of legislation the government has not really sought to make it clear to the Parliament and to the community the concept of extra resourcing and support for the Building and Plumbing Commission to make sure that they will in fact be able to implement their watchdog status and truly keep a watchful eye on the practices.

This bill does however attend to that ongoing issue of keeping the money flowing. It is an important part of any business ecosystem that the money in and money out all keeps moving in a timely and credible manner. The Building and Plumbing Commission of course will have oversight of ensuring that people within the industry are solvent, are functional and are providing good practice and good industry behaviours. This bill attempts to provide more certainty around payment. It identifies issues such as what good payment times are, and that is identified as essentially 20 business days. Those in the business world say 30 days from end of month is the type of payment cycle that people are used to, and it ensures that is the benchmark. This bill also identifies a quirk of the building industry: the famous Christmas shutdown period. It identifies the fact that in this industry basically it is the time of year when everyone gets caught up on their holidays and very few people in the construction industry are operating their offices or their various departments, and people are often away on holidays. So there is a specific cut-out up until mid-January in order to allow a bit of time out at a time of year when most people would agree it is not reasonable to follow up disputes or payment processes.

There are some practical elements in this bill, but ultimately this legislation exists – as does the Building and Plumbing Commission – to continue developing confidence and security within the industry. This bill is really a response to recommendations from the 2023 parliamentary inquiry into subcontractor protections, and it largely implements many of those recommendations. What some in the industry are curious about is that it identifies the plumbing and surveying professions as two that are specifically singled out for extra regulation and safeguards. The issue has been raised: why is the government acting in a piecemeal manner in just picking two elements out? There are other trades and professions that are equally required to be of good standing and up with their professional standards, so there was a general concern that there are identified shortcomings in those two professions. This bill seeks to create more obligation there, and the feedback from the industry is: why us and not everybody? Why wouldn't the government do like other jurisdictions have done and identify all the elements of the building and construction profession and treat them all equally? A reasonable concern from the industry is: do we have to now wait for another piece of legislation? Then we get the situation potentially down the track where there will be a dispute and someone has got more regulation than someone else, and we are having a dispute over it until it gets caught up.

It makes sense that the government needs to continue to look more holistically at the building and construction industry, and what this legislation still does not bring Victoria up to speed in management of this is – the constant feedback is – we have to have more ongoing coalface monitoring of the

construction industry, not in a way that is bureaucratic and not in a way that interferes with day-to-day operations of legitimate builders and contractors but in a way that identifies where the bulk of the disputes and issues arise and makes sure we have the resources at the Building and Plumbing Commission that will with laser-like focus look at those parts of the industry and monitor it through. With technology today being able to assist the commission in real-time monitoring, there really is a huge opportunity here in the state through the ongoing reforms that the government has brought in to actually focus on what causes the problems, put the resources into solving those problems and let the industry get on with running itself and doing what it does best, which is most of the time building high-quality dwellings and constructions that add to all sorts of benefits and outcomes that are very good for the state of Victoria and the people that live here.

The government has had this focus on the building industry. As I said earlier, we have had some pretty big failures and collapses here in Victoria in recent years. We have still literally thousands of home owners left in limbo. They have disputes that have now gone on for two or three years. As opposition shadow in this area I have met with many of these groups, and there is a frustration that we are talking about solving future problems but we have not really put mechanisms or procedures in place to solve past problems. I think that is a fair criticism of the government's approach and this legislation. It is another opportunity that could have been used to make sure that we have cleared up the heartache and concern from many victims of poor construction practice and poor construction financial management.

Why is that important? It is important because we are in a housing crisis. The housing crisis is now becoming synonymous here in Victoria with this ongoing cost-of-living crisis for so many Victorians. Rentals are more expensive. KPMG tell us that something like 80 per cent of the Victorian population, based on their average incomes, can no longer afford a mortgage for what is now considered the average price of a house in Melbourne. When you have statistics like that, you understand the disadvantage that causes, and the disadvantage is highlighted to us in people's cost of living. We feel that we just do not have money in our pockets, in our bank accounts at the end of the week to buy other essentials, because we have had to spend it on increased housing costs.

But it also plays out in things like the government's housing waiting list. This government seems to keep turning its back on the fact that, every reporting period since it has been in, the waiting list for the homeless continues to grow. What the council for homelessness services, social welfare groups, the public housing tenants association and others all report is that more and more people are being added to the homelessness list not for traditional reasons of being cast adrift or down on their luck or unable to find a home; more and more people now just cannot afford the private sector. They cannot afford housing that they once could afford, and they are desperately reaching out to government for more assistance in housing.

It was of great concern this week that the ABS data came out again, warning the Victorian government and Victorians generally, and some of the statistics I will bring to the house's attention. If we look at private dwelling completions for the last 12 months, they are down 26 per cent. This legislation is about trying to increase confidence in the construction industry. When you hear figures of a 26 per cent drop in private dwelling completions for the last 12 months you go, 'Wow, there's a desperate lack of confidence being experienced here in Victoria about the opportunities there.' The government might want to blame interest rate rises and other things, but historically the more macro-economic conditions are not out of the ordinary. In fact we have had two rate cuts in recent times. The industry is clearly saying the cost of production and extra impediments that this government has crept into the construction industry over time, its failure to restore confidence, led to a figure like that.

It is not only private sector dwellings that have had a crash but non-residential developments. That is people prepared to invest in commercial and industrial applications. We need the business community to be reinvesting in its premises, putting its capital, back into new factories, new warehouses and new manufacturing opportunities. They are going south here in Victoria, and the question is: is this legislation doing what it needs to do to deal with that?

There is this worrying trend that sort of ties all that data together, and that is that this government made it really clear a couple of years ago it had set an ambition of 80,000 homes it wants to build a year and we are consistently averaging a 20,000 to 25,000 homes shortfall on that target. It is a massive, missed opportunity in Victoria. The question that this government should be asking itself, and certainly the opposition is asking, is: does this legislation help restore the confidence into the community to make sure that we can bridge this huge shortfall in homes? Quite frankly, I think the answer is no, it does not. It does not do that, and why doesn't it do that? Because the industry is looking at this and going, 'Well, there are missed opportunities with this legislation.' The other side to this argument of course is that the government will say, 'Oh, but you know, things aren't so bad in Victoria. We are building lots of homes. We are building the most amount of homes of any of the states.' Well, yes, I will concede to the government that that is in fact true, that we have in fact built more homes than other states, but we are not building more homes per capita and we are not building more homes relative to the growth of the state.

Probably one of the few things that we all agree on in this wonderfully historic chamber is that Victoria is a great place to live. People like living in Victoria. We have got a great climate. We have lots to offer as a state. Despite all the woes and the efforts this government puts into messing things up from time to time, it is a great place to live, and the rest of the world recognises that. We have great growth in our state, but unfortunately, for every 10 people that come to Victoria, we are only building 3.9 homes. If you look at the long-term trajectory of that, we know that we are missing the targets the government set. We know that every time 10 people come to Victoria, we are only finding 3.9 homes for them. It is a massive shortfall. That shortfall directly leads to increased rents and increased costs, and this legislation and this government still fail to deliver what Victorians will need, not only what they will need but they must have – an opportunity to get more homes more quickly and more affordably. That is a real concern in terms of where we are heading with the legislation around this very, very important topic.

I had the opportunity yesterday to raise an overriding concern around what is driving this government on its housing policies and its policies around trying to reform the industry. I happened to attend a Property Council of Australia forum last week with the head of the government's thought behind where we house and how we house people. I raised this yesterday in a grievance, and I guess it is important to raise it again here with the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025, because it is the thinking behind the government on the importance of housing. It was discussed last week in this public forum that, yes, the government concedes tax is part of the problem in making homes more affordable and more accessible for people. The government concedes that, and I am glad they do because 43 per cent of the cost of a greenfield site is taxes and charges. It is a pretty significant cost. The government concedes its planning reform. The government has certainly been dishing out plenty of inefficient planning reform, but they are doing something in that space.

But the bit that concerns me and members on this side of the chamber is it is changing cultural attitudes towards housing. What does that mean? From this government's point of view that means, 'I hear that a lot of migrants come to Australia chasing the Australian dream of the quarter-acre block. Well, I'm really sorry, but that dream doesn't really exist anymore. We need to, as a society that includes new Australians, embrace the fact that the way we live has to change and reflect our changing society.' What concerns me about that attitude in government is this is symbolic that this government has given up on being able to provide accessible and affordable homes to Victorians if they want them and can afford them.

We know that they have given up on a desire to provide more social homes, because despite this government's constant rhetoric that they are building more social homes, they are renewing social homes – they are not building more social homes. We have seen dramatic drops, despite all the money being spent. We have a net decrease in the amount of available public bedrooms in the state of Victoria, which highlights the fact that this government has not got its eye on the ball. It is looking for lots of

photo opportunities with fluoro vests and hard hats. They have got those – ‘Look at us. Look at me. We’ve got a new housing estate open.’ But they do not tell us that they demolished a whole bunch of them to do it and they have not actually got net increases.

In a state that is bringing 10 people in and only housing 3.9 of them, it is glaringly obvious that we have to have a relentless focus on new net increases in housing. That is the challenge that this government has and is failing abysmally at. We have got skyrocketing waiting lists. We have some of the most vulnerable in the state, whether it is families escaping domestic violence or people with acute mental health needs, that really need specialist housing. It does not matter what metric you use. For our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – this government spends a lot of time talking about opportunities to do better by those communities – on whatever level you look we are them failing abysmally in the housing part of it.

The opportunity that this government has to sit with industry, to work with industry and to work with people that have access to the capacity to provide more homes – they simply do not do that. In fact this government has been on at least a five- to eight-year campaign against property ownership. We heard it back in 2022 when the then Premier Daniel Andrews made his famous claim that people no longer wanted to aspire to have a home, they were happy to rent – that was his assessment of it. We heard last week, and I have referenced it already today, how the department has given up on that aspiration. They think it is a culturally irrelevant point of view to have in this day and age, yet they still have not got the elements together to make housing more affordable.

If you look at where this government sits now with its housing policy, it is all about fine-tuning the big end of town. It is about saying that people want to live in apartments. It is really important for those opposite to understand the basic economics of housing. For example, on a greenfield site in rural, regional, outer Melbourne, you are building and providing a home for someone at around \$3000 to \$5000 a square metre. You can get people into their own home, into a quality home, with that sort of money. The government’s current strategy says we can put 70 per cent of the population into apartments near train stations at a cost of \$15,000 a square metre. It is an enormous difference. What they have failed to translate is that \$15,000 a square metre – plus, mind you, as \$15,000 is very modest – is well in excess of a million dollars for the cost for that accommodation. The government has missed the bit of common sense that says people can afford a property at up to \$800,000, and in rural and regional Victoria you can certainly buy a house and land package for sub \$600,000. That is affordable for people. Saying to people that the only solution this government is going to offer you into the future is an entry-level property with two bedrooms at \$1.2 million, \$1.3 million, \$1.5 million, depending on the suburb, is just unattainable. It is not a solution for the housing crisis here in Victoria.

The opposition this week will not be opposing this legislation, which is relatively benign. I guess the point we are making is that with so many shortcomings in the construction and housing industry at the moment, to bring this forward, as identified in the minister’s second-reading speech as one of many bits of legislation, my message to the government is: okay, we will let this one pass. It is generally agreed upon by the industry that tightening up payment times and making some changes around the edges in how businesses govern and operate with each other has some merit. But the plea to the government is: what are you going to do to work on that affordability component of housing? This helps restore a bit of confidence to the industry. It does not address the outstanding lack of confidence and the outstanding disasters that have happened because we have not had the resources to manage the governance and oversight of the construction industry. There are still real concerns in here about whether those resources are going to be with the Building and Plumbing Commission to make sure that ongoing loopholes are not taken advantage of.

There is still much as a community and as an industry that the government still has to bring to this Parliament. There is still more to see and there is more the industry and the community expects of this government if it is going to work on helping to put a building ecosystem in place that can produce homes at the rate we need to fill that big gap between the 10 people a day coming in and the 3.9 that were able to match up to a home. We need to match that gap. We have got to provide something that

will see us heading in a trajectory to get to the 80,000 homes. We need to see something that says we are producing more homes. We are seeing an active decline in the 66,000 families and that list that is growing month after month after month. My colleague the Shadow Minister for Women and I have been working together on the ongoing struggle of that often very desperate cohort of people seeking refuge and housing and others who are waiting so long for their housing. Not only are they waiting a long, long time, but as we unfortunately experienced in recent times, they can often get the housing and then this government does not have the mechanisms in place to keep people safe in that housing. There are so many elements to what we have to do to fix housing. It is just disappointing that this piece of legislation has come to us this week. It is a lot of paper without a lot of difference that is going to be made in the state.

I will draw to a conclusion my contribution on this bill and invite other of my colleagues to take the opportunity to have their say. But just for the record, the opposition supports anything that is going to actually make a real difference in bringing credibility and economic safety back to the construction industry. We want to see better outcomes for consumers, we want to see better relationships across the spectrum of the construction and development industry, and we need an environment where not only do local companies feel comfortable to continue to invest here but, when people and companies and individuals and investors are looking to come to Australia, they see Victoria as a first choice, not a last choice. The constant feedback to me is, 'Victoria's a place we want to do business because people want to live here, but we don't feel confident that we can make that investment, because there's been a consistent track record of poor performance and there's been a continual lack of good oversight over the industry.' Yes, the government has made some changes with the BPC, but we definitely want to see more resources to that agency to make sure that the oversight is genuine, ongoing and long term and leads to the restoration of confidence.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:25): It was pleasing to hear the opposition say that Victoria is a great place to live. It would have to be a first, I have to say. I have not heard that. They seem to always trash and talk down our state, so it was a bit refreshing. Maybe we have shamed them into it, I do not know, but it was certainly a nice change of pace, at least for a few minutes.

I do want to just pick up on one point before I get to the heart of this issue, because we have been making incremental and significant reforms when it comes to backing in the building and construction industry. I note that it is the cornerstone of Victoria's economy and community, employing over 325,000 Victorians and supporting key industries every day. I do just want to pick up on a point about how, when we rebuild the 44 towers, there will be no increase in housing. That is simply not true: there has to be a minimum of 10 per cent uplift. I know with Barak Beacon in my electorate there is a 43 per cent uplift, so it is going from 89 homes to 408 homes. It is a mixture of social and affordable and market rental. It is providing a contemporary standard of housing that Victorians deserve, with better passive surveillance, better landscaping and also better heating and cooling in terms of being more climate resilient. There are so many pluses with these rebuilds, so I think that was just an inaccurate statement, respectfully, by the previous member.

Looking at the imperative for these reforms, beyond what I have to say is a very pragmatic element – and that is being paid appropriately for work completed, which is at the heart of this, because cash flow is essential, we know, for any business to survive – we know that certainly the goal here is obviously to keep firms solvent and help them attract and retain skilled tradies, so this bill contains strong new rules for Victoria's booming construction industry. I will say that, yes, the building and construction industry has had some really significant challenges – there is no question. There have been global pressures, I should add to this discussion, in terms of the cost of getting certain supplies and this, I have to say, is not isolated to Victoria. I am not going to resile from the responsibility that we bear in this state, and that is why we are bringing forward these important reforms. But I note that housing shortages are being felt around the world, whether it is in the UK or whether it is across Europe. To suggest that it is only Victoria and not other states experiencing these challenges is simply untrue.

Coming back to the bill, we know that builders, plumbers, electricians and their subcontractors are the key to achieving the Victorian government's ambitious housing goals because we know that the answer is to actually increase housing supply, and they need protection to ensure they get paid fairly and promptly for their hard work or the goods and services they provide to a project.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Okay, we agree. This is lovely. Yes. Good. Thinking back to the very important 2023 parliamentary inquiry, which highlighted the financial risks facing subcontractors, it showed the harm caused when employers and contractors fail to pay on time, or at all, for completed work. This behaviour has left businesses and families carrying unacceptable burdens, and we do not need to imagine the terrible consequences that can flow from that: mortgages do not get paid, bills do not get paid and then people can be in all sorts of strife. It is devastating for the builders themselves, their families and then of course the other businesses, the subcontractors, that flow on from them as well.

In any case, with that inquiry, the government supported all 28 recommendations, and 15 of them are being implemented through this bill. I think it is important not to understate the significance of the reforms being brought about today. I get that creating and posing conjecture is part of the rough and tumble of Parliament, but fundamentally I think it is important that we reinvigorate confidence in our building and construction sector and show them that we really are here to support them in building Victoria's future.

The bill strengthens the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002, making it easier for subcontractors to recover what they are owed. It scraps the unfair rules introduced in 2006 that blocked claims, created confusion around timing and allowed last-minute excuses for non-payment. These rules were unique to Victoria and have rightly been criticised as unfair. Other key improvements in the bill will allow more time for disputes to be resolved, because we know, and without casting aspersions – or maybe I will cast some aspersions – if time is the enemy and can be a lever to get out of or avoid an obligation, then that is something that the bill is seeking to overcome, quite rightly. It removes strict deadlines that have unfairly prevented some claims, further to my point. It gives decision-makers the power to invalidate unfair contract terms. It is very pleasing to see this method of rectification, because that is inherently unfair and unreasonable in any scenario, I must say.

The bill will enable contractors to claim withheld security money once their work is complete. I think we can see, again, that that is a very pragmatic and positive reform. It will give the new regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC), a role in educating industry about their rights and obligations. On the one hand it will empower those who might not have known how to seek redress in unfair circumstances and on the other hand it will remind those who may have taken advantage unfairly of loopholes or otherwise – things that we are seeking to overcome today – to behave in a manner that is appropriate. Ultimately this will boost confidence among Victorian consumers in the building industry as well.

The bill will make electronic service of documents possible – yes, a big tick to technology when it certainly can assist the efficiency of business. It will also clarify that business days exclude the annual shutdown from 22 December to 10 January. Again, we can see a very pragmatic element to this bill. The opposite of that would be that there could be unfair consequences for those directly involved in the building industry were these nuanced but important changes – these fairness elements – not being implemented through this bill. Make no mistake: these reforms will be a game changer for builders, subcontractors, tradies and consumers, boosting financial security and confidence across the industry.

The bill also strengthens the Building Act 1993 to improve the BPC's role as regulator. A new code of conduct for plumbers will be introduced, developed with industry. Developed with industry – I just want to emphasise that point. There is a collaborative element to that, from those who know best how the industry works, to lift standards and align with the existing code for building surveyors. The registration system for building surveyors and inspectors will be modernised to both lift standards and

grow workforce numbers. Obviously, with a lift in building in our state and with the ambitious but necessary housing targets, we need to boost the workforce numbers. It is pleasing to see that there are levers within this bill to help facilitate that process. This will be achieved through clear competency benchmarks linking education, training and registration and through faster and more flexible registration processes. That has got to be a good thing, because sometimes there is commentary about red tape and other things. It is nice, I think, always to unpack what that looks like, because there are kind of throwaway lines that are very easy to say, but it is much better to actually spell things out, and it is good that that is being done through this bill.

The bill also provides for faster and more flexible registration processes, consistent with national standards under the Australian Building Code Board's national registration framework. More pathways into registration for skilled professionals and the use of trusted third parties to help with assessments will improve efficiency without lowering standards. In addition, building surveyors will now be required to provide information statements to consumers up-front, ensuring home owners understand the surveyor's role and their responsibilities from the outset. Again, we can see this as a fairness element, but it ultimately will help to deliver, I would hope, a better product at the end, greater accountability and really back in our building sector.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:36): I am happy to rise today on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. The first thing I will say about the building industry is that the subbies are the lifeline of it. It does not matter whether you are a plumber or a chippie, brickie, plasterer, tiler, painter or all the other trades, concreters, et cetera. They are the lifeline of the industry and deserve to be protected. When we are talking about this bill today and we are talking about fairer payments and the security of subcontractors, we have to remember that this industry is a pyramid industry. If people read the committee report that was tabled in this Parliament last year, it goes into that quite in detail. It is a pyramid industry where the money starts at the top and filters its way down. A lot of people misconstrue that the builder is at the top of the food chain – he is not. The person that holds the money is at the top of the food chain when it comes to construction, because the builder is always contracted to someone. Except when they are a speculative builder – when they are doing a spec home or a spec unit development, then they are at the top of the food chain.

I have been on both sides of this – probably everyone gets sick of me saying this – but I have been the subbie and I have been the builder, so I understand both sides of this industry. I understand this industry very well. You have to bear in mind that it is a pyramid industry. There are a few concerns around this area. Sometimes when a builder fails to pay, it is not necessarily his fault. I will give a couple of examples just to go into this. We are introducing a bill today for the security of subcontractors, which is a good thing. But one of the biggest builders in the state is the state government. I was waiting for the cheers – none occurred. One of the biggest builders in the state is the state government.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: There we go. I was waiting for it. If we are going to have security for subcontractors, the state government needs to get their act together. I am going to reference the Victorian School Building Authority and the Victorian Health Building Authority. These are two authorities within this government that fail to pay builders on time. I know builders that have been pushed out to 60, 90, 120 days with the VSBA, and I know builders that have been pushed out to 60, 90 days with the VHBA. The government needs to get its house in order when we talk about security of payments, because if I am building a school – it might be a \$20 million contract – and I put in a claim for the month of \$2 million, under this legislation I have got 30 days, or 20 business days, to pay that contractor, or generally a month. If the VSBA hold that \$2 million payment on me for 60 or 90 days and there is nothing wrong with the subcontractor's work, there is no valid reason for me to deny his payment. He has done everything right. All the electrical is signed off or all the plumbing is signed off or there is no defect work, but if the VSBA or the VHBA are dragging those payments out, the builder then is breaking the law – but not through his fault, and that is what we have to remember.

When we talk about the pyramid of construction, it is the person who is actually writing the cheque that is at the top of that pyramid, so the government really need to look at this in the way they are processing things when it comes to the construction of projects in Victoria, because to set a builder up to fail is not fair. To set a contractor up to fail or to struggle for 60 or 90 days is not fair to the contractor. Builders rely on subcontractors as a credit line in construction. We put them essentially on like a 30-day account, and a lot of builders will not have a spare \$2 million of cash in their back pocket. If I am doing a job, if it is a month-by-month claim, I say to the contractor, 'I need your claim in on the 25th of the month so I can submit my claim to government on the 28th of the month so I can get paid by the end of the next month.' So if we go by the claims system, I have actually already stretched the contractor out, because it is longer than the 20 business days. When the government fails to pay contractors or when the government fails to pay the builder and the builder fails to pay the contractor, then this bill actually comes into question. So I would actually like to see the government put in some mechanisms where the builders get paid on time. I think that is very, very important, because I am hearing it from builders – not just in my local area; I am hearing it from builders all around the state – that the government is failing.

The government changed the system, and the VSBA – I am going to point to them again, because they are one of the serial offenders in this. We used to have a system that was very simplified where the architect was the superintendent on the project, I would give the claim to the architect, the architect would verify the claim and it would go to the education department, and the education department would pay. It was very simple and actually very streamlined. But now the VSBA have decided that the architect's word is not good enough, so they get in an independent quantity surveyor to knock that claim down, which then puts that claim into dispute, which then extends the period of payment. That is wrong.

Builders are not out there trying to rip the government off. They are out there to deliver a product, whether that be a school, a hospital or whatever. They are there to deliver a product, and they deserve to be paid on time so they can pay the subcontractors on time, because the building industry at the moment is doing it very tough. I am sure every member of this chamber has heard from builders who say we are not doing that well at the moment. When the biggest building company in the state, being the state government, are not honouring their contracts, that will filter down the line to the subcontractors, and the subcontractors, as I said earlier, are the backbone of the industry. Without your plumbers, without your chippies and without your painters, your tilers, your concreters and your brickies, you cannot build. If they end up going into liquidation because of the government's failure to pay on time, we are losing trades, we are losing builders, we are losing our skilled workforce through non-payment.

There is nothing worse as a subcontractor when you do not get paid. I remember doing a job up in Albury–Wodonga. I was owed \$120,000 for four months. I had to use the money I had set aside for my GST to pay the subcontractors so they would pay the little guys. I had to get all of them paid first. The bigger guys – Reece, timber suppliers, Dahlsens – I had to let wait. I thought, 'They can survive; I'll let 'em wait.' All of a sudden, because of a developer who would not pay me for no good reason – I was on stock credit with Reece and stock credit with Dahlsens – I could not get any raw materials for the next job, because I could not pay the last job's bills. That is the flow-on effect. That is what the government really has to realise when we are introducing legislation – we have to go to the very top of the pyramid to fix the problem. The builder is not always the top of the pyramid. There is nothing worse than when you come into Christmas and you have got no money in your bank account and you cannot pay your bills – you cannot even buy your kids a Christmas present. People get angry, and I got angry. I did get my payment. I am not going to say how I got my payment, but let us just say there was some very colourful language along the way to the person that owed me the money. I know members on that side who have probably been in a similar position to me. When contractors get put under stress, they will snap, and rightly so. A fair day's work for a fair day's pay is what we believe in Australia – always have. I love security for subcontractors, but what the government needs to do is lead by example.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (11:46): I also rise to make a contribution on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Before I get into the substance of the bill, I want to reflect on the contribution made by the member for Polwarth. He was reflecting on the government's housing strategy and housing targets, particularly the cost of, say, a house and land package in regional Victoria or on the outskirts of Melbourne compared to the cost of an apartment. One thing that was probably missed from that contribution was that not everybody wants a house and land package that is on the outskirts of Melbourne, particularly at different stages of your life.

Melbourne's demography is changing. Many people are staying as singles or couples for longer periods of time, and they want to stay close to family, friends, where they grew up and the services that they know. They do not currently own a dwelling, and they are looking to move to a dwelling that has that access to services. The cost of buying a home on, say, a larger piece of land further out from Melbourne does come with other costs. It does come with the impact of further travel to jobs, further travel to services and less availability of infrastructure compared to places such as Box Hill and your seat, Deputy Speaker. The approach that the government has been taking in terms of promoting development in the outer-suburban growth areas, regional Victoria and within the existing suburbs is one that it has to take in order to meet the population growth and population demand that we are seeing. This is directly relevant to the bill that we are debating today, because it is about the building industry, the housing construction industry in particular.

I want to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Narracan. I know the member for Morwell will follow my contribution, and I am looking forward to that as well, because as members who worked in that industry before coming into this place, they have intimate knowledge of how that construction system works. As the member for Narracan alluded to, that pyramid structure, that trickle-down payment system, is not just from the principal to the head contractor and head contractor onto the subcontractor, but often the subcontractor themselves have their own subcontractors. A subcontractor may not have all of his or her workers as their own staff, depending on the job. A subcontractor may hire other subcontractors, and then each time that you move down that pyramid, you are getting smaller and smaller businesses and individuals who have a greater reliance on that cash flow to be able to not only sustain their own business but also obviously feed their family, buy presents at Christmas and all of the other things that we would expect them to do.

Most of the legislation changes that are being proposed in this bill come out of recommendations from a parliamentary inquiry. I want to thank the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, the member for Wendouree, and the co-chair, the member for Morwell, for putting together this inquiry, which really delved into the details of the impact of the fairer payment system and the delay to the payment system, particularly in the construction industry, and how that impacts on those small businesses that are trying to provide a service and help build our state.

This bill makes 15 amendments to the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. It is designed to improve subcontractors' ability to recover payments for completed construction works and goods and services supplied to a construction project. The policy intent of the original act has always been to ensure that subcontractors get paid in a fair and timely manner for their work. However, the inquiry found that the act has not been keeping up with industry expectations. There were in total 28 recommendations made by the inquiry. In response to the inquiry the government accepted 16 of these recommendations in full, with a further 12 recommendations accepted in part or in principle. One of the recommendations which was accepted in full can be enacted without legislative change. The remaining 15 require legislative change, and this bill makes changes to implement all of those 15 recommendations. Of the remaining 12 recommendations that have been accepted in part or in principle, there does need to be more work, particularly around consultation with consumer groups, unions and industry, as to how those changes will come about. But the message is clear coming out of the inquiry, and I was pleased to see that there was no minority report. It was supported by all members

of the committee that there are poor practices in the industry which financially impact directly small businesses and subcontractors, and it is important that we as a government address those issues.

To go through a number of the details of some of the recommendations in particular – I am not going to have time and do not want to detail all of the 15 – one of the major recommendations, being recommendation 2 of the inquiry, was to enable contractors to claim a progress payment calculated in accordance with the contract or, if the contract does not provide for the matter, calculated on the basis of the value of construction work carried out. The current act stops subcontractors from claiming payment for a range of contractual items; this is a unique clause to Victoria, and it is excessively complex for the construction industry to navigate. We want to try and simplify the construction contracts as much as possible to allow, particularly in the domestic building industry, building to continue. We do not want to put these types of barriers in place that will just make it more difficult for builders to continue actually building the dwellings. As I mentioned at the outset, cash flow can be a real challenge for contractors. We cannot just keep on expecting them to work if they do not have that cash flow backup. So removing that excluded amount scheme to allow more items to be included in payment claims will be an important change.

I also want to note that one of the recommendations, recommendation 4, proposed to amend the definition of ‘business day’ to also exclude the period between 22 December and 10 January. As we all know, everyone is celebrating Christmas and new year at that time of year; the construction sector in particular will often have a shutdown in that period, so that recommendation makes sense. I support the 15 recommendations that are being implemented in the bill, and I support the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:55): I rise today to talk on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025, and from the outset obviously this is a bill that I have taken great interest in. Obviously number one is being in the trade, but number two is the work that we actually did as a committee to get this here and into the chamber so it can be discussed. I do note there are some other committee members on the other side that are in here today, and it was interesting as we sat down and worked our way through talking with trades and talking with actual builders about the concerns and the hardships with the non-payment of our tradies and, at the end of the day, how much grief it causes.

When you do win a contract to work either building houses or on a job site and in particular other pieces – you may win a contract to build a new school, for argument’s sake – there is the thrill of winning those contracts and then getting your workforce together and starting the build. Tradies from every persuasion – they do not have to be builders, plumbers or electricians; it can be the tiler that goes in and tiles a particular dwelling – take great pride in their workmanship and, at the end of the day, want to present a product to people that are paying their hard-earned money for us to build a house and to complete that. But on the flip side we need to make sure that when the time comes to be paid – and the payments do come in stages – they are paid promptly, because as the member for Narracan, now the Acting Speaker sitting in the chair, alluded to before, if you are, for argument’s sake, a builder and you are subcontracting out your work, you have got that responsibility. If there are five people or 10 people that are working for you, you have that responsibility, and it does weigh on you heavily to be able to pay them a wage at the end of each week. You are relying on payments from above to be coming constantly, and it does cause a little bit of grief.

The member for Narracan articulated well how when you are not getting paid for the work that you have done, the grief and frustration that it causes. In my time working as a plumber, it was more the norm that you were always chasing money rather than someone saying, ‘Hey, thanks very much for the work you’ve done, here’s an early payment.’ That very rarely happened, so the pressure is on the tradies; the tradies are the ones that carry the weight of the builders. As you know, Acting Speaker, we are the ones that at the end of the day, once the construction, no matter what it is, is finished say it is our product. Many a time when I was driving past with my kids when they were younger in the car I would say, ‘I built that, and I built that.’ Well, I might have put in some toilets and run some water

in it, but I took credit for the whole build; that is how passionate we are in the trade business and the building business.

Something that we are hoping to fix with this bill coming through is to have those regular payments. But one of the things which were highlighted was that one of the main people slow on the payments, unfortunately, which is an embarrassment probably for everyone sitting in this chamber, was the government itself. We had a lot of government builds, schools and so forth, where the contractors were constantly saying that we as the government sitting here in the chamber were slow in making the payments. If you are building a school, as you know, there is a lot of money that goes into that that is tied up. To refresh ourselves here in the chamber, to make sure that we are being very diligent and forthright and make sure that these payments do go out, it is not only the head contractor that is waiting for the money; it might be 100, 150 or 200 individuals underneath that head contractor who are waiting for their weekly wage to come through.

I know the member for Box Hill said before that you are waiting so you can keep a roof over your family's head or so you can buy presents for Christmas. It does not stop. You are doing the work and you are always chasing money. If you are only 30 days behind from when you finish your work to when you get paid, it is happy days. But as it goes out at 60 days, 90 days or 120 days, you do not actually stop doing the work. If you are not being paid at the end of 30 days, you do not stop doing the work. You are committed to the next month and committed to the next month. All of a sudden another project starts, and you are told by the builder or the head contractor, 'If you start this contract here, we'll make sure you get paid for the one that's just finished. We'll make sure that we quicken up that payment to keep you enticed to get going.' It might not be the whole payment, it might be three-quarters of it, but you are already started on the next project.

We need to make sure through this bill that we are giving certainty to our trades. With some of the changes with the Building and Plumbing Commission, a new area that is going to come in there, we need to make sure that they are fair dinkum and are doing their job, because unfortunately, as you know, there are some rogues out there that do the wrong things in the building industry, which falls back on all of us. Most people do the right thing, so we need to make sure, if there are rules and regulations about what we are building and where we are going, that they are enforced.

I know one of the big issues, Acting Speaker Farnham, that you and I do talk about quite often is waterproofing in houses and in high-rise buildings, because if it is not done properly our insurance companies take us for a bit of a ride and our premiums all go up. We need to make sure definitely in that area that there are some levers that can be pulled to ensure that waterproofing in our bathrooms and wet areas is done properly so that after two or three years they do not start to leak, which causes grief on the build, especially if it is a high-rise building. The troubles there flow on, and they can be from an outdoor balcony which is in the weather so when it rains it is going to get wet. We need to make sure that is all done perfectly.

But it all comes back to the tradesperson and his family. You put yourself on the line. As I said before, you always seem to be owed money or owing money. With some of the bigger firms – in my area, being a plumber, Reece and Tradelink – and people that were supplying my company with materials, constantly it was a juggling act as to which one you were going to pay. You did always go out to the level before they would cut you off from giving you any more product, and you would pay a little bit off here and a little bit more off there to make sure you could still buy your materials. But that was the consequence from the primary person at the top. We talk about the set-up as being a pyramid, as all the money flows down. That was the offset of waiting for that payment to come. It sort of takes your own business – the way it runs and what happens – out of your own hands, because you are hoping tomorrow might be the day that the payment goes into your bank so you can pay your own people that work for you, and they are relying on you to pay them so they can pay off their home loans and put their kids through school. So it is not just you as the individual; you have other people who are relying on you, and that is one of the big stresses of running and owning your own business – the stress of trying to keep everyone else employed that falls underneath your banner. Of course there is more work

to be done, but I think this is a good start to be able to have a committee hearing, come through with recommendations and then see it up here in the chamber, and we need to support our trades as we move forward.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (12:05): I have got to say I completely concur with some of the lines that the member for Morwell said about formerly being a tradie and driving past and adding a little bit of mayonnaise onto what he has and has not built. I have got many friends who are builders and tradies, and very proudly so. I think one of my friends has actually single-handedly built the Footscray Hospital. So it is very interesting, and it is great to see so much passion and pride in many of our tradies and the jobs that they do, and they do keep our state moving and they genuinely do a great job for our state. So a big shout-out to all of our tradies, and thank you.

As we know, more homes mean more opportunities, and that is why the Allan Labor government is setting clear targets to deliver more homes in Victoria over the next 30 years, and that is something that we on this side are incredibly proud of. Victoria is the fastest growing state in the country, and the member for Melton and I hold the fastest growing LGA in the country, being Melton LGA, which –

A member interjected.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: Yes, it is. It has passed Wyndham. We are having 78 babies per week, and I am told that the Melton local government –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: Oh, here we go. I am told that the Melton LGA is the fastest growing LGA in the country, something that we are very proud of, but we know how many resources we need there. To add to this, we are delivering 800,000 new homes as a government over the next decade as part of our landmark housing statement – again, something that we on this side of the house are incredibly proud of. Building more homes starts with building well, and that is very important, because we know how much of a stressful period it can be for anybody embarking on such an exciting chapter. If homebuyers are more confident in the lasting quality of a new home, especially an off-the-plan apartment, then they are more likely to buy. There are so many tragic stories of people who bought apartments and found that they are smaller or bought houses and found that their water does not work or their electricity is wired improperly or whatever it might be. So it is so important that from the get-go we get it right.

Building or buying a new home, for many people, is the biggest investment that most of us will ever make in our entire lifetime, and Victorians rightly expect to get exactly what they pay for. Victorians deserve a building regulatory system which gives them the confidence that they need to build, to buy and to rent in their home state. The Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025 builds on the Allan Labor government's strong track record of nation-leading building reforms to increase confidence in the building industry. Victoria's hardworking tradies keep our state building industry growing, and the government is fighting to ensure that they get paid both fairly and promptly for their hard work and for the goods and services that they provide to varied construction projects all around the state.

The fairer payments on job sites bill delivers on commitments the government made in its response to the inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works. This bill makes amendments to the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 to implement 15 reforms recommended by the inquiry. On that, I want to thank the committee for all of the hard work that went into this inquiry. It will improve subbies' ability to recover payments for completed construction work and goods and services supplied to a construction project. Not only do these changes ensure that subbies are paid on time and to the full amount which they are owed, but they also make processes clearer for builders and head contractors, the overwhelming majority of whom want to see their tradespeople paid both efficiently and on time, like they rightly should be.

Builders and head contractors will benefit from these changes, which will weed out any dodgy operators.

The bill will also amend the Building Act 1993 to authorise development of a plumbing code of conduct to be enforced by Victoria's new one-stop shop building regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC), which was established after the Parliament passed the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 in May. This bill also reforms building surveyor and inspector registration schemes to boost workforce supply and maintain Victoria's high standards for building surveyor works. Several other laws will also be modernised and improved, including via clarifying amendments to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Environment Effects Act 1978 and the Heritage Act 2017.

This bill is a game changer for Victorian builders, subcontractors, tradies and consumers and will help to increase financial security and confidence in the building industry. For those watching at home, I am going to talk about the 15 inquiry recommendations because I am sure that you would want the detail. Firstly, they will enable contractors to claim a progress payment calculated in accordance with a contract, or if the contractor does not provide for the matter, calculated on the basis of the value of construction work carried out. Secondly, they will remove the concept of reference dates and insert a statutory entitlement to claim the payment, amend the definition of 'business day' to exclude the period between 22 December and 10 January and amend a provision stating that notice-based time bar clauses can be declared unfair by an adjudicator if compliance with the clause is not reasonably possible or would be unreasonably onerous.

The bill will also insert a head of power allowing the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Regulations 2023 to prohibit unfair construction contractual clauses. It will also extend the time limit for subbies to claim payment from three to six months, giving our hardworking tradies more breathing space to get on top of business administration. It will impose maximum time limits on payment terms of 25 business days after the payment claim has been made. It will also expressly provide for an entitlement to claim retention money and empower an adjudicator to decide whether or how much and when retained money is to be returned. This will obviously keep cases out of court, saving subbies time and money if there is a dispute or some bad faith behaviour.

It will task the BPC, which, as we know, the Liberals tried to block even being established, with ongoing responsibility for promoting and educating the construction sector in relation to Victorian security of payment law. It will prohibit respondents – that is, the employers or the contractors – from moving the goalposts and including reasons in their response to an adjudicator that were not previously included in the payment schedule. It will provide respondents with five business days to provide a payment schedule in response to an adjudication notice. And last, but certainly not least, it provides that an adjudication determination must be made within 10 business days of receipt of a respondent's adjudication response and permits parties to extend the determination deadline for up to 20 business days by agreement. It will enable electronic service of notices and other papers and provide that an adjudication certificate may be filed as a judgement for a debt in any court of competent jurisdiction and be enforceable accordingly.

All of these changes amend the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 to better serve its original purpose, and that is to make payments both fairer and more efficient on job sites and to make sure that we keep growing the Victorian construction industry for both the workers and the employers. It is important to remember that these changes are to protect subbies from bad faith processes. Honest builders and head contractors who do the right thing will benefit from these changes, which will weed out any dodgy operators.

Those opposite have a long track record on this issue, a track record of leaving Victorians on their own when it comes to building reform. When Labor introduced our buyer protections bill, the Liberals even tried to stop it being debated. The Shadow Minister for Housing, the member for Polwarth, who has just walked through the chamber but I think has left, went so far as to claim that dodgy practices on

job sites are not really that much of a problem. He claimed that the industry was doing a good job of weeding out these dodgy operators by itself. He said:

... the industry also needs to have protection from malicious or vexatious customers who at times might play the system in order to get their own way.

Those opposite need to make up their minds and show their true colours. Which is it? Should we be protecting consumers and workers in this state or are they still standing on the side of dodgy operators? Do they actually believe that the problem with the building industry is consumers who are overstating their pain and suffering?

Labor is getting on with building more homes for Victorians who need them. Reforms like those in the proposed bill will make sure that we keep delivering the high-quality homes that Victorians deserve and need, and that is why the Allan Labor government will continue on with this bill. I hope that we have the support of the entire house, and I am very pleased to commend this bill.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:15): It is a pleasure to rise on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Don't you love the government in the way they get themselves a headline? Everything is about 'fairer' and 'better' and doing wonderful things until you actually get into the detail, because we do know the devil is in the detail. What we do know is, particularly when it comes to builders and small builders and small business, nothing is fairer. That is my concern, because this government came out with another headline saying they were going to build 80,000 homes a year, and everybody said, 'Wow, we're going to get 80,000 homes a year.' Many of my constituents in Caulfield are saying, 'We're desperate for a home. We're desperate to finally be able to save up money to own a home one day' – even though the former Premier said we have given up on home ownership and no-one wants to own a home. We know that is wrong. We know that is categorically wrong. If you give a young person a chance to own their own home, of course they are going to own their own home.

What happened to the 80,000 homes a year? The government then had a look at the detail, at the headline, and they realised, 'We've mucked this one up. No way are we going to get 80,000 homes a year.' So they went to 800,000 homes over 10 years. And why did they do that? Because they know – thankfully, and most Victorians would say thank God – that this mob will not be around for another 10 years, so no-one is going to hold them to account. 'We'll just blow a number out there: 800,000 homes over 10 years. No-one will ever know.' Well, we know, because how many are they at now after two years? They are 46,000 homes short because the devil, my friends, is in the detail. This government lacks detail – all they thirst for is a headline. They cut a ribbon, say how wonderful they are or put on a hard hat. The thing about this is nothing is fairer when small businesses are going under because they cannot actually run their businesses and they get no support from this government.

We know in building a house that 43 per cent of it is taxation, so no wonder it is more expensive to build a home. We know with this government that whatever permits are being granted are just permits. They are not houses, they are just permits. We have heard other members make that contribution as well, saying, 'You can't live in a permit.' Absolutely you cannot live in a permit, you need to build a house. And who builds a house? It is a bit like farmers. You do not get the milk out of the supermarket; it has got to come from somewhere. You know that, Acting Speaker Farnham, because you have been a builder. You know what it is like for people that are skilled tradespeople. I am not talking about the big companies, I am talking about the small businesses: the chippie, the tradie, the electrician, the plumber. They all work, many of them as contractors, and hopefully they get a government contract and hopefully when they get the government contract they actually get paid. The hardest thing about small business – and I do not expect the Labor government to know any of this – is actually managing the books and getting paid. You are busy doing the work and you are also busy trying to get the next job, and in the meantime you have got to get paid. A builder would know that quite often they cannot buy the materials for the next job until they have been paid for the last job.

Quiz: who are the worst payers in the world? The government are the worst in the world to get paid by. They string you along. I know we are broke – I know we are paying over \$20 million a day just in interest to meet the debt, which has almost blown out to \$200 billion – so is it any wonder we have got a government that puts small business on the drip-feed? They put them on the drip-feed and they say, ‘Don’t worry about yourself. Even though you’re feeding families that are working for you, don’t worry about yourself. You can just take care of yourself.’ Well, that is not fair. That is not fairer payments on job sites, like what this bill is called. There is nothing fair about that. So we do need to make sure the first people paid are actually small businesses, so they can pay their employees and so they can buy more materials and hopefully contribute, as great Victorians have in the past, to making our state great again – because we are not in that spot right now. We are the worst at everything.

One of the things I would love to be able to see is more keys in doors. I would love to be able to see more homes built. Wouldn’t we? We have got backbenchers who would love to see it as well. But we all know that you just cannot do it in a headline; it has got to be in the detail. I remind the government that when I looked at some of the figures for small businesses and the high insolvency rates of small builders in Victoria, we have seen a 75 per cent increase in construction company failures, which have surged over a year. We have seen many of the bigger home builders like Montego Homes and like Porter Davis go broke under this government. They are big brands, but who works for those big brands? It is small businesses that contract, that will not get paid or do not get paid. We must never forget that when a government mismanages the system it flows on to those right on the front line. We are seeing shortages of skilled trade materials. We know that from the Big Build, because all the materials have been zapped out for the government’s major contracts into the Big Build, and you cannot get materials for homes. If you do get them, you are paying twice the price.

The final bit that I want to talk about – and I know the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also said this – is that we have seen 32,000 businesses close or shift interstate in one quarter, from September 2024. A quarter of businesses either closed or moved interstate in the September 2024 quarter. Does that say that business is thriving in Victoria? I would not think so.

The last thing I want to talk about in this contribution today is the CFMEU, because this government has allowed the CFMEU to breed on construction sites. We know that there are many small businesses that would like to contract into the government’s projects but who will not get a look in. And why won’t they get a look in? Because they are not part of the CFMEU outfit. They have been locked out – including even Indigenous labour hire firms, believe it or not. We have been talking about treaty, but we cannot get Indigenous labour hire firms employed on government worksites. That is what I mean about the devil in the detail, because the government is all about the headline, not about the detail. If this government was fair dinkum about treaty, what about getting Indigenous labour hire firms on the Big Build? What about that? Do you think that would make a difference to Indigenous communities that are struggling for trades? If the government were serious, they would ensure that Indigenous labour hire firms were employed on Big Build sites. *60 Minutes* has exposed that those Indigenous labour hire firms have been booted from government worksites because they are not part of the CFMEU. That is why this government is not fair dinkum.

We can stand here all we like talking about fairer payments on job sites, but how about making the job sites fair? How about taking out the corruption? How about showing some transparency? Because that is the only time you will build homes more affordably and give small businesses a look-in and ultimately change the game from being the highest taxing state – the state where we are seeing people leaving because they do not have confidence in it. We have got to get it back. We need the confidence for people to come out and we need to roll out the red carpet to small business and say, ‘Come here, invest here, work here and contribute to making Victoria the place it used to be.’ And we need to change the tax system – whether it is land tax or whether it is stamp duty – to ensure that rather than 43 per cent of the cost of building a home going to tax, we actually reduce that so it is more affordable for all Victorians to buy a home.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (12:25): It is an honour to rise in support of the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill is about one thing above all else, and that is fairness – fairness for every bricklayer, carpenter, concreter, sparkie, plumber and plasterer who gets up before dawn and drives to site and does the work that quite literally builds Victoria. This bill is about stopping a disgrace that has gone on for far too long: the deliberate refusal by some contractors and companies to pay subcontractors for the work that they have already done. I know, Acting Speaker Farnham, that we have had many conversations about these exact experiences, and I would like to acknowledge your contribution earlier and also the member for Morwell. I will take the contributions of people who have actually lifted a tool in their life as opposed to others.

Non-payment is theft, and that is plain and simple. It is not a cash flow issue, it is not a commercial dispute; it is stealing. It is taking the sweat of the worker or the small family business and converting it into profit for someone else. For too long these practices have been written off as just part of the game. But when the game is rigged, when the rules allow bullies to squeeze the life out of small businesses, then the Parliament has a duty to step in, and this bill does just that – it rewrites the rules of the game.

I know this issue not as a politician but as someone who grew up in it. My parents migrated from Ireland for a better life and started a small family construction business in Geelong. As a young man for 10 years I worked on sites as a chippie, building formwork, pouring concrete and building structural steel, roads, bridges, schools and commercial apartments, and I watched how easily honest families can be ripped off by operators who make fortunes off the backs of others. One of them is Frank Nadinic, a con man who left devastation across Victoria. He would pay the first invoice when you had done about 20 per cent of the contract, and then he would hold back the rest of the moneys – he would get up to 80 per cent. He had clauses in his contract that if you stopped working, you basically broke the contract, and he would never pay you. He destroyed hundreds of small businesses and families across this state. He is a disgrace not only to the construction industry but to humanity.

That experience and many others, including the experience of thousands of others like it, is why this bill is so important. Victoria's construction industry contributes 12 per cent of gross state product and employs one in 10 Victorians, but it has also been plagued by decades of deeply unfair payment culture, a system where financial risk is shoved down the contracting chain until it lands on the smallest players, the people who are least able to absorb it – as the member for Narracan so eloquently put it, the pyramid nature of this industry. Inquiries have shown that subcontractors complete more than 80 per cent of all construction work, the highest proportion in the world, yet they carry all the financial risk. That is obscene. These are the people mortgaging their homes to pay wages while multimillion-dollar developers delay invoices to pad their cash flow. This bill finally says 'enough'.

The Environment and Planning Committee found what so many already knew: that non-payment is systematic and devastating. It is not just a few bad apples, it is a culture of corporate bullying, of bosses and head contractors who exploit every loophole. The committee heard stories of small family firms going bankrupt waiting for payments that never came, tradies losing their homes, marriages collapsing and children seeing their parents' pride broken because someone higher up the chain decided not to pay. I thank the committee for their important work hearing that evidence of the pain and devastation experienced by Victorians working on building sites in this state, and I thank the Minister for Housing and Building for acting so quickly to ensure this problem is snuffed out.

This bill is the government's answer to that report. It delivers a tranche of reforms, the fairer payment reforms, to make sure that every person who does work gets paid for it. This bill reforms the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 to make it faster, fairer and tougher on those who exploit others, including these changes. Contractors and subcontractors will now have a clear right to claim progress payments at least once a month. No company can hide behind reference dates or confusing legalese. Strict payment deadlines: payment terms will be capped at 20 business days with a default of 10 days, so if you do not pay on time, you are in breach – no excuse.

Performance securities: the bill creates a right to claim the release of performance securities, retentions, bonds and guarantees so companies cannot sit on subcontractors' money indefinitely. Fair adjudication: adjudicators will have more time and clearer powers to make fair decisions. Dodgy builders will no longer be able to raise new excuses after the fact to avoid paying. Unfair contract terms outlawed: adjudicators can now declare notice-based time bar clauses unfair that make compliance impossible. And simpler enforcement: unpaid determinations can be enforced directly as judgement debts – fast, streamlined and effective. These are not technical tweaks. They are a fundamental shift in power back to the people who do the work and build our state.

The worst offenders are not mum-and-dad builders. They are the large developers, the multinationals and the tier 1 contractors who use their scale to suffocate small business. They hide behind subsidiaries, change company names and move assets offshore while small operators are left holding the bag. These are companies that roll out slick advertising campaigns about partnership and community while destroying communities through unpaid bills and bankruptcy. It is hypocrisy of the highest order, and it all stops here.

Behind every unpaid invoice is a story – a plumber who cannot pay apprentices before Christmas, a concreter who sells his ute to cover wages, a small business owner who shuts down after 30 years because someone has starved them of cash – and we cannot allow that to continue. We talk about mental health in the construction industry, and rightly so, but financial abuse is mental abuse. It crushes people. It robs them of dignity, stability and hope. This bill will not just change contracts, it will change lives.

Laws mean nothing if they are not enforced. That is why this bill strengthens the power of the Building and Plumbing Commission, formerly the Victorian Building Authority, to educate, regulate and hold offenders to account. The commission will now be required to take on an educational role, publishing guidance and training manuals and promoting the law across the industry. But more than education, this bill gives teeth to the regulator. Dodgy operators will be investigated, sanctioned and, where necessary, stripped of the right to operate. Those who systematically fail to pay their subcontractors should never again be entrusted with public moneys. If you want a government contract in Victoria, pay your people first.

This bill is part of a broader cultural shift, a statement that Victoria will not tolerate wage theft or payment theft in any form. We have already led the nation in criminalising wage theft. Now we are leading again in protecting subcontractors and small business owners. Let me be clear, fair payment is not anti business; it is pro integrity, pro productivity and pro justice. A construction industry built on honesty is good for everyone – for workers, for consumers and for the economy. Where subcontractors are paid on time, projects run smoother, families thrive and local economies grow.

The Allan Labor government committed to this reform after the 2023 parliamentary inquiry, which found chronic, persistent abuse of subcontractors across the sector. We promised to act, and we are acting. The fairer payments on jobsites bill is more than a technical reform, it is a moral stand that tells every worker, every subcontractor and every family business, 'We see you, we value you and we have your back.' And to the cowboys who refuse to pay, the free ride is over. To the companies that think they are too big to be held accountable: think again. And to the hardworking Victorians who have been ripped off, cheated and left behind, help is finally here. When the history books look back on this Parliament, let them say that we stood with people who build Victoria, that we ended an injustice generations old and that we made the industry fairer, safer and stronger for all.

Now, on indulgence, I would like to just take a moment to thank my father, a man of integrity, a man who would never take a step backwards when someone tried to rip him off. He is a man of principle who believed that if he and his workers had done the job, they deserved to be paid for it, and he made sure he had the receipts to prove it. Time and again when one of the unscrupulous operators tried to take advantage, he did everything he could to protect our family and the people who worked alongside him. It did not mean that we were immune to it, but I am proud of the fight that he always showed in

an unfair system. And I am proud today that we are taking action to fix these issues. But I know, as every honest builder and subcontractor knows, that we will have to remain steadfast as a Parliament, because as we change the rules, the dodgy operators will look for new ways to dodge them. So as a government we must keep our eyes open and our resolve strong. We will continue to protect the working men and women of Victoria, to stand up for them, to back them in and to ensure that they do not again bear the pain and cost inflicted by these crooks who call themselves businessmen. I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:35): I rise to make my contribution on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As everyone has already said, this is about strengthening the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 to make sure that people get paid. I suppose, Acting Speaker Farnham, it needs to be done, no argument, but it is sad that it has to be done – that people's word is not their bond. I am sure you found in your life in business before you came into Parliament that tragically a lot of people do not mean what they say, and they think they can take people down. Once a handshake meant something, but again, it does not seem to mean what it used to so much in business now. So there is a need for legislative rules that make sure that people are paid and people are treated fairly.

I think this bill is the government's response to some recommendations from the 2023 parliamentary inquiry into subcontractors' protection, so for those cynics out there in voter land that say the Parliament does not achieve anything, that parliamentary committees do not do anything and why would you bother putting submissions in, I think this bill here and the fact that you have got agreement from both sides of the house is a very clear demonstration that the parliamentary process does work well when the right issues are brought forward to be dealt with by the Parliament. We have had people that would have given evidence to that inquiry, because as we all know, a parliamentary committee cannot make recommendations to government unless it comes out of the evidence that goes before that committee. So people would have made submissions to that committee that led to those nine recommendations and 28 findings that were presented to government, and government is now starting to respond to those. And in the slow inertia of governments and bureaucracy, this is a fairly quick turnaround to make some changes, which is good to see. So all strength to those people that made the effort to submit to that inquiry and to the members of the inquiry actually making the recommendations that are now here before us in legislation, because it is so important that people do get paid. It is those that are at the lowest part of the food chain or in this case the building chain that suffer the most, and it is the ones with the sharpest lawyers and the smartest crooks at the top of the food chain that take advantage of those people, and they see themselves being left out. We have heard personal examples from people who understand this a lot more than I do, but it is devastating for someone just to have one contractor or one builder that defaults on a payment, as it can actually bring down a business and destroy a family's future. So it is important in that particular sense.

I suppose no discussion about the building industry would be complete in this place without raising the issue of housing and the fact that one of the biggest impediments to all those in the building system is government red tape, green tape and black tape. Even the subcontractors having to do paperwork, having to wait for their contractor to get the permissions through to do work, is a cost to that particular business. The cost of holding land, of holding materials and of not being able to go onto that job because you have got to go somewhere else because the paperwork has not been done is a cost that is built into the whole system as well.

One of the things I would like to see is that we could actually reignite the great Australian dream of home ownership. There are so many younger people now who are literally despairing that they do not ever believe they will be able to get onto that ladder of home ownership, and they are going to be stuck as renters for the rest of their life. As research shows, if you go into retirement as a renter compared to going into retirement as owning your own home it has a major impact on the quality of your retirement and the financial situation you have as you get older. So yes, this is great; this helps those contractors get paid. But let us actually think a bit bigger and think about how we reignite that dream of home

ownership in this state. Because as others have already said, the Housing Industry Association has said that more than 40 per cent of the cost of a house and land package now is government charges and taxes. I do not think people realise that when they are saving up for a deposit, which is a challenge for them in today's climate, 40 per cent of that money they are going to pay for what they buy is actually state government taxes and charges. That, to me, is just wrong. We should not be effectively taxing our younger generation out of the property market in this state, which is what is happening at this time.

If we talk about some of the worst payers and some of the recidivists when it comes to not paying people, it is government. The government is one of the worst at not paying people. We have had legislation before this place that says the government will guarantee they will pay their bills within X number of days. I would be interested to read the statistics as to what percentage of that target is met by government, because you will find that people on projects in regional Victoria have real battles to get the money to trickle down from government through the head contractor to them as the subbies doing that work in our country towns.

The other thing that would assist in this whole program would be if the rules of tendering for government projects, particularly in the regions, could be changed, where the qualifying level to become registered to tender for government projects was made simpler. A lot of country builders, as you probably know personally, Acting Speaker Farnham, are excluded from bidding for projects in their towns – whether it be a school upgrade, a hospital upgrade or other government work – because they do not meet the threshold of having enough turnover in their business to qualify to do that, so someone in Melbourne tenders for the business. They are never going to go there with their workers. You are not going to see them all that often. They are going to use the local builders as subbies, who could have been the builder and kept all that work and all that money in the town rather than being subbies for those projects.

I often hear builders in the communities that I represent who are very frustrated with the fact that when there is a great announcement about an upgrade to the hospital or a school project, they are excluded from bidding for that work because they do not meet the qualifications and the threshold of having enough turnover in their business or having done enough projects of a certain size to qualify to do that work. They potentially end up as subbies, so they do not make as much money out of it, the community does not benefit as much as it could and some of the work is let to businesses outside the town.

It is different standing here talking about a bill that we are all in agreement with. Having been here for quite a few years, I am a great believer in the Westminster system of government and the fact that some collegiality across the chamber can achieve good things for people. This bill will make sure that people do get paid better. As I understand it, there is still some more legislation to come for some of those recommendations and findings out of that parliamentary inquiry, but I would hope it would come sooner rather than later, because if you think about what drives our economy, whether it is the Big Build projects here in Melbourne or whether it is building a house in country Victoria, the building sector is a major driver of our economy. We need to make sure it is working as efficiently as possible because dollars are scarce. Whether it be government – some contributors already talked about government debt – or whether it be private enterprise, we all have to be very, very careful and get the best value out of our dollars. If this helps that happen, that can only be better for Victoria.

John LISTER (Werribee) (12:43): Before I begin talking about the details of the bill, I would like to echo the sentiment of the member for Murray Plains on the nature of this debate being quite collegial. It is good to see that there is that support for this legislation, something that is part of a whole series of reforms that we have seen to building and construction that have been brought through by the government. There have been a lot of really positive contributions from the parliamentary committee inquiry and those members as well.

Our construction industry here is booming from our transformative infrastructure projects – which I know in my community we are definitely the beneficiaries of – and the building of homes for Victorians who are choosing to move particularly to growth suburbs like that I represent. This sector

is the cornerstone of our economy and community. Over 325,000 Victorians are employed through this construction industry, whether as builders, plumbers, electricians or subcontractors of all sorts of other trades. A substantial chunk of this cohort live in my electorate of Werribee and the wider western suburbs. In fact I think after health care and child care it is one of the biggest employers of people in the Wyndham area according to ABS statistics.

Tradies are not only building Victoria, they are also keeping our state running. But for far too long the building industry has been subject to poor payment practices and unfair contracting behaviours. It has left subbies, small businesses and workers exposed to unacceptable financial risk. As someone who has many friends in the industry – although it has been a while since I was on the tools; I was just a labourer when I was 16 or 17, but it has been quite a while since – I have heard too many stories about tradespeople working on a job, waiting months to get paid for their work. And it is not just these personal anecdotes that I have heard that back this up. The inquiry that was referenced by the member for Murray Plains and other people in this house highlighted those financial risks subcontractors face by examining that impact of builders and contractors refusing to promptly or fully pay their subcontractors for that completed work.

It is important to remember that these practices affect real people and real families, something that my colleagues on this side have also raised in their quite impassioned contributions. With that inquiry, I went through it, and I quite like talking about committee reports in this place; it is one of my favourite times of the week. I had a bit of a read-through, and while I will not break any kind of procedure here, I do want to reflect on the committee report just a little bit, if I may, particularly some of the quotes from those people who contributed to that report. We have heard a lot about small business from those opposite – it is good to see that there is still a bit of a champion of the small-l liberalism in that side; it is still there, it still exists. It is 81 years of the Liberal Party coming up, or something like that, and I am sure there will be someone in that past who is a little bit happier that they still care about this same aspect of liberalism. But Bruce Code, who was a contributor to that inquiry, said that as a small business owner who has missed payments, he supports mandating and enforcing the payment of fees to subcontractors for completed works. An older resident told someone who contributed to the inquiry of how they had lost their business due to delayed payment. What made this story all the more disturbing was that, like many tradies running their own businesses, the business was financially secured against the person's property, which they also lost. So it is clear to see that this, as my learned colleague mentioned earlier, not only affects the people who are doing the job and are on the tools, it affects the people around them, and it could affect, ultimately, their own shelter. I think it is pretty despicable that anyone who is doing this work to build homes for people should have to risk their own home.

Also in the inquiry, the Master Plumbers' and Mechanical Services Association of Australia noted that the plumbers and gasfitters who generally work as subcontractors in the construction industry are down that project chain, which is something I think the member of Murray Plains also reflected on. Yet like any other Australian business, they need a cash flow to maintain those operations and are entitled to get paid appropriately in a timely fashion for the work they do. This is something that this legislation goes to, around not only tightening up those provisions to make sure that subcontractors are paid but also the work that we are doing to bring the plumbing industry into the regulation environment that we have.

The sort of behaviour that we have seen in the past is unacceptable in every other workplace in Victoria. There are countless articles about it happening in retail, happening in health care and, in some cases, happening in some of our private education settings, and it should be unacceptable in the building and construction field as well. That is why our government has introduced this legislation. The bill delivers on our government's commitments made in response to this inquiry that I was just referring to. It makes 15 amendments to the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 – that is a long one – to improve subcontractors' ability to recover payments for completed construction work. It removes rules introduced in 2006 that made it harder for subcontractors to resolve

payment disputes. The rules blocked certain costs from being claimed, made it difficult to know when to make a claim and allowed new excuses for non-payment to be raised at the last minute. I like to think that there are a lot of good things that are uniquely Victorian, but these rules in particular were uniquely to our context. If it is not consistent with the rest of the country, and we have seen a lot of work come out of the recent Productivity Commission review and the round table around productivity, we need to make sure that we do have that consistency between jurisdictions. It is important that we scrap these rules.

Victorians are overwhelmingly good and fair people, and they want to do the right thing by their fellow workers. The changes made in this bill will make processes clearer for builders and head contractors, the majority of whom want to see their tradies paid as efficiently as possible. The bill will also amend the Building Act 1993 to authorise the development of a plumbing code of conduct – this is where the plumbers come in – to be enforced by the new one-stop shop building regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission, which we spoke about in this house earlier in the year as we set that up. It also reforms building surveyor and inspector registration schemes to boost workforce supply and maintain high standards for building surveyor work – I have seen this firsthand recently, having put on a building surveyor. It is important for building surveyors to have that ability to pick up a job if it has been dropped by someone else. It is really important to have that mechanism and tighten that up as much as we can, because it means that people who are trying to get into their homes and make sure that they are livable and meet standards will not have any kind of troubles down the road. It is really important to have that consistency.

There will be other laws through this bill that will be modernised and improved, with clarifying amendments to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Environment Effects Act 1978 and the Heritage Act 2017. The construction sector is the backbone of our economy and of many communities, including mine. There have been concerns raised by those opposite around the state of home construction. We have heard from some people on this side and seen some data showing that in the year to date to June 2025 – this comes from the Master Builders Association – one-third of all homes built in Australia were built by Victorian builders. Unit approvals are the highest they have been per capita, as per the ABS. But we know more needs to be done.

Those opposite have also raised issues about the proportion of taxes and charges that come into housing and the development of homes. There may be some space to look at this, but I do want to point out that some of those taxes and charges that are coming out of these processes go towards building the services that we need in our new communities – things like the growth areas infrastructure contributions and the development contributions. The revenue goes back into the essential services that we need in our growing communities. These contributions are not just floating into the ether. They are being paid back into communities like mine and have a direct consequence for people who are moving into these homes. They are important. It means that we can run that bus, and it means that we can build that school.

The government is taking action. It is not just about fairness, it is about doing what is right. I want to echo the sentiment of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, who in their recent media release stated:

This Bill sends a clear message to anyone in the building industry who refuses to pay subcontracted tradies ... workers must be paid for their work on time and to the full agreed amount. Workers in the building industry will be protected by the reforms ...

To those unionists and activists who have championed these reforms, thank you. On this side of the chamber we are on the side of working Victorians, and I appreciate that there is bipartisanship when it comes to this particular issue. We will keep fighting for everyday working Victorians, particularly those people who work in the construction industry in my electorate. I commend this bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (12:53): I rise to speak on the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Following on from the member for Werribee in terms of the bipartisanship of which he speaks, I think we have to be realistic about what

that relates to. The technical changes in the bill, maybe, but the remark that the Allan Labor government is on the side of working people is utter nonsense. Let me start with two words you might remember: Marda Dandhi. Do you remember Marda Dandhi? Look at all the quizzical faces over there. Marda Dandhi – in all of the weeks to raise this – was the Indigenous firm that was working on one of Victoria’s major projects. And do you know what happened? Your government enabled it to be booted off. That is just a small part of a much bigger tragedy that happened with that case, because as we know, there was a tragic loss of life as a result of intimidation and bullying.

When you say you are on the side of working people, let all Victorians know and hear that clearly you are not. When it really counts, you are not. There are many subbies, many contractors and many small businesses who do the right thing, who want to contribute to major projects in this state, but you, the Allan Labor government, will not let them. You will not let them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Hawthorn, I ask you to refrain from using ‘you’. It is a reflection on the Chair.

John PESUTTO: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I am always indebted to you for your interventions from the chair. If this government wanted to live up to its claim that it supports working Victorians, it should make sure it cleans up the rot, the intimidation and the blackmail that occurs on Victoria’s major projects. Remember, at this point in time we have got close to \$250 billion worth of major projects underway, at different stages, in this state. That is a lot of jobs, that is a lot of investment and that is a lot of apprentices and trainees, but many of them cannot get a look in. I have friends who run small businesses as subcontractors. They cannot get a look in, and they are victims of the intimidation and bullying that, frankly, the CFMEU is continuing to get away with because this government does not protect subcontractors and contractors in building and construction. That is the first thing.

The member for Werribee on behalf of his colleagues says this government supports working people. Well, how can that stand up to scrutiny when we know that this government delays paying businesses that do work for it, whether it is construction, whether it is IT or whether it is in any other sector of the Victorian economy in which this government is active – they delay. In fact earlier this year this government was so incompetent, so utterly hopeless and chaotic, they actually asked builders to delay submitting invoices because they could not pay them. Or if they can pay them, they cannot pay them on time. So on the second basis this government fails its own test of not standing up for working Victorians.

We know also that this government has failed its basic duty of oversight. We know that from about 2023 Porter Davis and many other residential building firms went under. Now, we know why they went under, in large part. We do not know all the details, but we know generally it is a very vulnerable position for many building firms to be able to manage the cash flow. You know that better than ever, Acting Speaker Farnham. You and the member for Morwell are very experienced in this field, and you know how hard it is to be able to manage staff, to be able to manage cash flow, your suppliers and your creditors. It is an exceptionally difficult task, a highwire act.

This government was so oblivious to that, whether it was the then Victorian Building Authority or the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, each of which has a statutory charter to oversee the market, to actually identify risks, address risks and manage them down so that ultimately builders do not suffer, or their employees, but also consumers do not suffer either. Yet this government, despite being warned by its own Department of Treasury and Finance more than a year earlier, did nothing about it. And what happened? Builders went under and subbies did not get paid. They went under as well. They were not the only victims. We know that many homebuyers, many who came in here, suffered as well and lost their deposits and lost their dreams. So when this government says it stands up for working Victorians, on a third basis it has failed. It has not done its job as a government overseeing the sector to minimise and manage risk.

That is the broad backdrop. That does not mean that as an opposition we will be opposing this bill. And of course, as has been said by my colleagues, we will not be opposing this bill. Anything that we can do in relation to the regime that governs security of payments, that can ensure that subcontractors and contractors can submit their invoices and get paid in a timely way so they can manage their legal obligations to their staff and their suppliers and their creditors, that too is an important thing.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Bail laws

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:02): My question is to the Attorney-General. Yesterday the Attorney claimed that young offenders who pose:

... an unacceptable risk to community safety or to the safety of any person must be remanded. It is clear in the ... bench book.

However, the bench book states the mandatory requirement that youth offenders:

... should be released on bail, with conditions, whenever possible.

Why is the Attorney gaslighting Victorians about her weak bail laws?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I want to draw your attention to standing order 57(1)(a) and the point that the Manager of Opposition Business in his question is offering an opinion on the matter rather than just asking a question.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister has every right to, in the answer, go to her opinion or otherwise of the question, but it is a very simple question that the Attorney has every right to answer in her response.

The SPEAKER: The question did ask for an opinion. However, it had a long preamble. I will allow the question.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:04): I thank the member for Brighton for his question. I think the conversation needs to come back to victims and the voice of the victims and ensuring that our communities feel safe and that offenders are held to account. The member may not have been listening and may not have been paying attention, but this year we have brought in some significant reforms to our bail laws – reforms that ensure in every bail decision community safety must be given overarching importance. Can I take the member for Brighton to the bail bench book.

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

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Sonya KILKENNY: I think our bail laws are clear. They are unequivocal. We made reforms to show that in all bail decisions community safety is of overarching importance. It is backed up –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question went to the bail book and its interpretation of the government's catch-and-release bail laws, which are in the bail book.

The SPEAKER: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. On relevance, the Attorney was being relevant. I cannot tell the Attorney how to answer the question.

Sonya KILKENNY: We passed reforms this year that were very clear and unequivocal that in all bail decisions community safety must be given overarching importance – in all bail decisions. We know that is happening, because the numbers are telling us – a 46 per cent increase in the number of young people on remand.

Members interjecting.

Sonya KILKENNY: I was not going to go here, but I will take the member for Brighton to the bail bench book. I made the point yesterday that if he is going to raise matters in here (1) it is important that he gets his facts right and (2) if he is going to refer to the bail bench book he should at least read it. Can I take the member for Brighton to the bail bench book, page 4 –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, here it is. I am happy to read it out for the Attorney again.

The SPEAKER: The Attorney was being relevant.

Sonya KILKENNY: As I said, I was not going to go to the bail bench book, but I will for the benefit of the member. I quote from page 4 of the bail bench book:

... the amendments placing the safety of the community and persons affected by crime at the head of the guiding principles and making them of overarching importance is a significant change to the law which the courts must now consider.

I also take the member for Brighton to our bail laws. They set out guiding principles that must be taken into account in all bail decisions. Do you know what is at the top of those guiding principles? Community safety. In every bail decision community safety is of overarching importance. Do you know what else the Bail Act says? Anyone who poses an unreasonable risk to the community must be remanded.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, by leave, I am happy to provide the Attorney with the section of the bail book that was referred to.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:09): On Tuesday a man was arrested just metres from this place, having allegedly committed aggravated burglary and aggravated carjackings with a suspected firearm whilst on bail. This is despite this bailed man threatening to kill hospital staff two days earlier. Is this what the Attorney-General means when she says, ‘The courts are applying our new bail laws as intended’?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:09): Again, whenever we see these incidents and these crimes we do have to acknowledge the victims and our community – those who are distraught and were caught up in this matter earlier this week, and our thoughts go out to them with every support that is needed. It is important that the voices of victims are heard and are listened to and are acted upon, that victims should feel safe in their communities and also that offenders are held to account. That is why we continue to listen to the voices of victims. It is why we brought in significant changes, significant reforms, to our bail laws this year. It is why –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Attorney is responding generally rather than going to the fact that this man was bailed after threats to kill.

The SPEAKER: The Attorney was being relevant, but I do remind the Attorney of the question.

Sonya KILKENNY: In this case, as I have acknowledged the victims and those who felt the impacts of this matter, I also acknowledge that the courts have not provided bail and this man has been remanded.

Ministers statements: education policy

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:11): The education revolution continues under the Allan Labor government, with today’s massive announcement that will make a big difference in the Education State. It was wonderful to join the member for Footscray out at Footscray City Primary School today to make a really important announcement that will save parents money but also improve and support children in the classroom.

No longer, from 2027, will parents need to purchase for between \$500 and \$800 a digital device for their children. That will save parents money in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. More than that, we will be a state that will introduce time limits on screen time in the classroom: from zero to 2, minimal screen time, and from 3 to 6, no more than 90 minutes. This will be a circuit breaker for students, teachers and families, because the evidence is clear that excessive screen time impacts academic growth, attention span, social skills and wellbeing. We know we want optimal learning in the classroom. That is why we are the state that banned mobile phones, why we lead from the front with the Commonwealth on their social media ban and why today we are announcing the reduction of screen time in the classroom. This is about getting students off their phones and focused on their work. And look at those opposite on their phones, on their digital devices, looking at their spreadsheets, moving one member from one pile to the other.

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, I ask you to apologise.

James Newbury: I apologise. On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to sledge the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I do ask the Deputy Premier to come back to his ministers statement.

Ben CARROLL: Ninety minutes is all you need. That is all the Leader of the Opposition gave the member for Brighton as the Shadow Treasurer before he shafted him to put the member for Kew into the shadow portfolio. We know that while we are giving students and teachers time back for learning it looks like the opposition leader, looking at the backbench, has well and truly today run out of time.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham can leave the chamber for half an hour. That is a bad spot to be sitting, member for Sandringham. Member for Croydon, you will be next.

Member for Sandringham withdrew from chamber.

Health workforce

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): My question is to the Premier. In 2022 the government spent \$270 million encouraging years 11 and 12 students to study nursing and midwifery by making it free of charge for 10,000 students. However, next year more than 2000 graduate nurses and midwives will be left without a position in the acute health system. To add insult to injury, this means they will also miss out on the \$7500 promised by the government. How does the Premier explain to 2000 graduate nurses and midwives why her government's promise is not worth the paper it is written on?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I would not have expected a question from the Leader of the Opposition talking about nurses in a week when we have had the Shadow Treasurer out there being critical of our investment through public sector funding of frontline workers. But here we are, a question from those opposite about our election commitment in 2022 to provide university support for young people to get in and study nursing. And why did we do this? Because we value our nurses and midwives. We respect our nurses and midwives. Some of us have been around long enough to remember the Liberal Party – we are in polite company, Speaker, but we all remember – and literally the middle finger that was shown to nurses when those opposite were in government. We back our nurses and midwives, and the way you back your nurses and midwives is by doing the following: you fund our hospitals, you build new hospitals. You not only do that; when the times are toughest for our nurses, like they were during that period of the pandemic, we back our healthcare workers. We recognised that during that period of time so much was being asked of our nurses. And who was undermining that public health effort? The Liberal Party, who time and again wanted to see that pandemic – ‘Let it rip’ was their mantra during that period of time –

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to that period of the pandemic, and it is an important point in time in terms of the investments that we have made in our healthcare system. Since 2021 not only have we grown the healthcare workforce by more than 50 per cent, we have funded and supported the recruitment of an additional 7000 nurses. And what are those nurses doing? They are caring for us. They are working in hospitals and community health settings right across our state. That is why we made that commitment to bring in more graduate nurses. We are working with the nurses union. The Minister for Health is working with those proud, strong union members at the ANMF, and I would like to acknowledge Maddy Harradence for her work and the leadership that she provides, because it is by working with your representatives in the union that you can work through how we can support these graduate nurses to find their future in our great hospital system.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): Daniel cannot secure a graduate nursing position despite completing his nursing degree and extensive clinical placements across multiple hospital wards. How many Victorian nurse graduates like Daniel are being forced to move interstate because your government has failed to employ the very people our health system needs?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I say this to the Leader of the Opposition because he may not be aware of the fact that the graduate process – matching those graduates who have gone through that program that we have funded for their university support – is not yet concluded, and the reason why it is not yet concluded is because we have a big and busy hospital system where we are supporting those graduate nurses to find their place and their future in that hospital system. I point out to the Leader of the Opposition that you could never ask this question of a Liberal government, who would not have funded university degrees, who would not have backed the nurses with a 28 per cent EBA outcome, who would not have –

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I will turn the answer around the other way. Only Labor has nurse-to-patient ratios, only Labor backs nurses through an EBA, only Labor has supported nurse graduates with the support for them to study at university and only Labor will continue to back our healthcare workforce day after day.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:20): I rise to update the house on the incredible Metro Tunnel and what it means for jobs and businesses here in Victoria. When the Metro Tunnel opens in December, businesses on St Kilda Road will have customers and workers delivered straight to their front door, and for the very first time nurses, doctors and researchers will be able to get off the train at the beautiful and dare I say exquisite Parkville station – this canopy of light – and head to work at our world-class hospitals and medical research facilities, supporting a sector which employs 30,000 people. The Melbourne CBD would simply be unimaginable without the city loop. Those stations completely transformed our city and created a legacy of thousands upon thousands of jobs, and they provide a huge economic benefit to businesses that surround them. The reality is that, whenever government invests in infrastructure, property values increase in the surrounding areas. Flagstaff station opened in 1985. It is pretty clear which property is worth more: one next door or one a block away.

Unlike Sir Rupert Hamer, those opposite have no vision for Victoria. They abandoned this project, and their mates in Canberra did too, so we decided to go it alone. And thank goodness we did, because come early December, Victorians will harvest the benefits, boosting the productivity of our city, connecting more Victorians to jobs, education and housing. Those opposite wasted four years on this

project. They said it was a hoax. They described it as being a Berlin Wall. They said it was an absolute disaster. But thanks to the Allan Labor government, the Metro Tunnel will be opened in early December. This project is more than just a transport link. It proves that Victoria builds, grows and leads. We are getting on with it, we are creating jobs, we are building for the future and we are keeping our great state moving forward.

Employment

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:22): My question is to the Premier. Why does Victoria once again have the highest unemployment rate in the nation?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): In data that has also been released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more people found a job here in Victoria than in any other state, and we also have the highest workforce participation rate. And I say this to the Shadow Treasurer: we will always back Victorians in to support them to find a job and to get a job. Whether they are a public sector worker, who those opposite do not seem to support time and again, whether it is construction workers on one of our big projects –

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

The SPEAKER: The Premier is being relevant to the question. She is not debating.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked a question about jobs, and we are committed to supporting more Victorians to find a job. You do not help Victorians get a job by cutting our pipeline of major projects, which those opposite are committed to. You do not support frontline services by cutting those workers who work in those frontline services, like Liberals always do, time and again. And you do not support jobs in our emergency services by cutting the emergency services levy. It is –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The question went to unemployment. The Premier was referring to jobs. The Premier is being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I make these points because we want to support more Victorians to get into work, and the way you do that is by investing in those frontline services, because behind those frontline services are workers. By investing in a pipeline of construction projects, in schools and hospitals, in transport projects, you are backing not just construction workers, but for every job on a construction site, for every worker in a high-vis vest, there are another 200 in the supply chain. And that reflects our great, strong manufacturing sector that also benefits from that government investment that goes into our construction program. That is how you back Victorian workers, by continuing to understand that it is government investment that can drive jobs and drive the economic conditions in our state. And I say this because I remember sitting here for the member for Kew's inaugural speech when she said it is not government that creates jobs. That is the policy of the member for Kew. She does not believe in the value of public sector. She does not believe –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is just sledging. The Premier has not yet gone to the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked a question about jobs, and I was reminding –

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, this is your last warning.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate the member for Kew might now be a little embarrassed about what she said in that inaugural speech, because what that said in her inaugural speech tells you everything

you need to know about the Liberal Party and the philosophy of the member for Kew. They do not believe in public sector workers. They do not believe in public sector investment to drive the economy.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning. Member for Frankston, this is your last warning – and the member for Mordialloc.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is just an abuse of the chamber.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: We will continue to back Victorian workers with our investments in frontline services and in construction, and also we will back those workers to have the right to work from home at least two days a week.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:26): Premier, you have been Premier for 25 months now. Can the Premier explain to Victorians why Victoria's unemployment rate has been above the national average for the last 20 consecutive months?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): Let me share another figure with the house: 6.7 per cent was the unemployment rate when those opposite were last on the government benches.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can I seek your guidance on relevance. There is no link between the Premier's answers and the questions. I am seeking your guidance on relevance. This is an abuse of the chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not the correct way to raise a point of order. I do ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: If I can say to the Manager of Opposition Business, in answering the question, it is entirely relevant because what we have done during that investment I spoke of – investing in frontline workers through public service investment, investing in construction workers and the supply chain through our investment in major projects that are opposed constantly by those opposite – is driven down that unemployment rate, and we know across the nation it is now at historic lows.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. She has driven it to the highest in the nation.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is what you can achieve through investing in frontline services, investing in construction projects and understanding the role government has in supporting working people and families to have the dignity of a job. That is what we believe on this side of the house. Labor governments invest to support people to have a job.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:29): This week we have been talking about the Metro Tunnel, an absolute game changer not only for our city but for our entire state. It is important to talk about what it means for our regions, because we are not just a government that delivers for the city, we are a government that delivers for every single Victorian. The Metro Tunnel means that for, say, a St Kilda Road worker living in Drouin, they can change once at, say, Dandenong or Caulfield, jump on a turn-up-and-go service and get to work on a train. For a young person in Ballan or Lara, it means changing once at, say, Sunshine or Footscray to get on a high-capacity metro train straight into Melbourne Uni. Victorians living on the Bendigo line can now change just once and get to, say, the Parkville medical precinct for work, to get world-class treatment or to visit a loved one. Again with just one change they

can get onto one of the more than 1000 additional services we will be adding to that Cranbourne–Pakenham to Sunbury corridor from 1 February next year.

This is real change and better connections for all Victorians. It builds on our upgrades to every single regional passenger line in Victoria, with more than a thousand weekly services added to the V/Line network since 2014. And because 89 per cent of our regional services connect with that Metro Tunnel corridor, from 1 February there will be new regional train and coach timetables coming to make sure that regional Victorians can better access the new turn-up-and-go services that we will be delivering on that Cranbourne–Pakenham to Sunbury corridor.

When those opposite called this project a hoax, they were not just denying new connections to city dwellers but making life harder for regional Victorians too. It has been some time since Jeff Kennett sat at this table, but his spirit and his attitude towards regional Victoria lives on in those opposite.

Fire services

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:31): My question is to the Minister for Environment. All forest fire management G-Wagon vehicles and a number of Unimog firefighting appliances have been taken offline due to faults, just weeks ahead of what the Premier has said will be a high-risk fire season. CFA and SES appliances have been called upon to back up the missing vehicles. How many communities have had their local firefighting capacity reduced to cover this failure?

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:32): I want to start by saying I have profound respect for the work of Forest Fire Management Victoria. They keep us safe. It is interesting how the other side just become interested in this extraordinary work at bushfire time. We do not just operate at bushfire time; we operate the whole year. This incredible organisation –

Danny O'Brien: A point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister on his feet was being entirely relevant to the question. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order. It is simply an opportunity to interrupt the minister on his feet.

The SPEAKER: The minister has only been on his feet for a short time.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I think that the member on the other side needs to understand that the work of Forest Fire Management Victoria, including the fleet they use, is not work that is only undertaken at bushfire season time. It is undertaken –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Well, you mentioned that when you said about the Premier mentioning –

The SPEAKER: Minister, through the Chair.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Apologies, Speaker. The member referenced the bushfire season, which we all know from the advice we all get from the chief fire officer is going to be very difficult. In relation to that, FFMVic have all the resources they need to fight those fires – all the resources they need – because this government has backed them and continues to back them. That is where my comments are relevant about the backing. The backing does not just apply when everybody wakes up and says, 'Oh, it's bushfire season.' It applies all year round, including the fact that this year alone they have maintained over a thousand kilometres of strategic fuel breaks. They have done a power of work to keep us safe.

Danny O'Brien: I renew the point of order on relevance, Speaker. The question actually goes to the CFA and SES vehicles being used to back up these ones and the communities who have less firefighting appliances.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I will get straight to that aspect of the question. That shows such ignorance in how firefighting works in Victoria. We have learned from really difficult fires in the past, including Black Saturday and every other fire since then, that we do not work based on what colour your uniform is. We do not work based on the tenure of the land. It could be private land.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: No, we do not. It could be land managed by councils, managed by the state government, state forest, national parks. We work across land. Fires know no boundary, and therefore our bushfire management strategy knows no boundary, so we all collaborate. The fact that the member thinks it is newsworthy that agencies share resources – it is not newsworthy. Can I tell the member what else is not newsworthy? That we share resources across the country. In fact we share resources internationally. Our good people at FFMVic came back from Canada recently. We share resources. In terms of our investments, we back our FFMVic staff, and by backing them we invest in their fleet, because we know the fleet keeps them safe but also keeps the Victorian community safe. I will not have this fearmongering.

Members interjecting.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: No, it is fearmongering. FFMVic have all the resources they need to fight fires right now. The acting chief fire officer has assured the government of that. We continue to back them, and that applies today.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:36): Concerns about these vehicles were first raised in 2017. Why is it only being addressed eight years later?

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:36): This is what I mean about the fearmongering. Under this government we have invested more in our firefighting services across all disciplines and across all uniforms. It is reckless to suggest otherwise. I have respect for the Leader of the Nationals, but he lacks understanding of how we operationalise firefighting, including fleet maintenance. Fleet maintenance is not a once-in-five-years experience. We maintain our fleet throughout the year, and that includes significant investments every single day.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, I am trying really hard, Speaker, but I do not understand how this answer is relevant at all to the question I asked.

The SPEAKER: The question was about the fleet. The minister was being relevant.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Just to help the member who asked the question, the question was: are some communities left without their fleet – CFA and others – because they have had to loan them out to FFMVic? That is not true.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Narre Warren North is warned.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I actually think the minister on his feet does not understand the question. He was referring to the substantive question.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: The fundamental point here is that no government has invested more in our firefighting services, including FFMVic, than this Allan Labor government.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:38): In early December Victorians will start using the Metro Tunnel with access to some of the great cultural institutions of Melbourne. The timing could not be better, with our beautiful Regent Theatre just a few metres from the new Town Hall station hosting Opera Australia’s new production of *Orpheus & Eurydice* in early December. In fact our whole theatre district – one of the best in the world – will be easily accessible from the new Metro Tunnel stations. I cannot wait to see people emerging from the Town Hall station portal in Fed Square to catch a performance or a cultural event, to visit ACMI or to wander across the bridge to the Australian Performing Arts Museum, Hamer Hall, the Arts Centre Melbourne, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Recital Centre, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and the list goes on. I cannot wait to see people moving from the Metro Tunnel State Library station and to wander into what is already the third-most visited library in the world – one of the most beautiful libraries in the world – or around the corner into Australia’s home of literature and ideas, the Wheeler Centre. Victorians and others flocked to our cultural agencies in record numbers last year – 11.6 million people – and the Metro Tunnel will make it easier, particularly for people on the Sunbury, Cranbourne and Pakenham lines.

And of course the Metro stations themselves will feature significant work by incredible Victorian and Australian artists. First Peoples artist Maree Clarke has developed a work spanning all five stations, and there are works by Raafat Ishaq, Fiona Hall, Abdul Abdullah and Patricia Piccinini. And how stunning are the portraits of Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung women on the huge glass facades at the State Library station by Danie Mellor. It is so fitting that in the cultural capital of the country we have built art and culture into this city-shaping transport project.

Syrian repatriations

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:40): My question is to the Premier. In 2023 the then Department of Home Affairs secretary told a Senate committee that the repatriation of women and children detained in Syria would need to be consented to by state governments. Did the Premier consent to ISIS brides being repatriated to Melbourne?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:41): Matters regarding the return of Australian citizens from places around the globe are matters that are dealt with on a regular basis, and there are a range of protocols that are in place between the relevant federal agencies and the state-based jurisdictions that they may be returning to, and there are well-established arrangements between those agencies that operate across jurisdictions. I am not going to comment on individual circumstances about Australian or indeed Victorian citizens who are returning home, and I would hope that most reasonable people in this house would understand that those citizens deserve respect and to have their privacy also respected.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:42): The Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac, Druze and Alawite, as well as the Shia Muslim and other communities, have suffered tremendously at the hands of the Islamic State death cult. Has the government explained to these communities why it has not spoken out against the return of ISIS brides to Melbourne?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:43): Earlier today a number of us sat in this house to mark the ceasefire and the pathway to peace in the Middle East. I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition was not present in the house for that, and I acknowledge the contributions from the member for Caulfield, the member for Brighton and the member for Box Hill. I apologise if others spoke; I was not present. We were unified in our commitment during our contributions that we understood that the social fabric has been frayed as a result of groups in our community being used as a political weapon to cause division. We must reject and I reject this approach, and we work respectfully with all

groups and all faiths, because our social cohesion is too precious to be weaponised in the way the Leader of the Opposition has.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, this is your last warning.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): I know there is a lot of excitement out there in most of the community about the Metro Tunnel. I know there are a few grumpy ones across the table, but we know, whether it is this side of the house or the passengers who will save time on their journey travelling through five new world-class stations, that we are all so looking forward to the opening of the Metro Tunnel. Last week I met with a group in our community who probably know more about the Metro Tunnel than most in our state. They can tell you the difference between traction motors just by the sound. They know the engineering behind the steel beams and the new signalling systems and even the story behind the artwork on the trains. They are the ones out there sharing photos, timing test runs and debating moquette patterns.

To all of those gunzels on Reddit who came to see the State Library station last week, I want to say thank you. I say this because you get it. You understand what the Metro Tunnel means in the transformation of our public transport system. Your enthusiasm reminds us all that this project is bigger than the concrete and tracks. It is about the connections that this project delivers, with a thousand extra services taking people to where they want to go. This is not just stations, this is not just tunnels; it is connecting communities. Those communities, those passengers, will be riding on one of our brand new high-capacity metro trains, the biggest, smartest, most advanced trains that Victoria has ever seen, and of course they are made right here in Victoria. They are not just trains, they are a showcase of Victoria's strong manufacturing capacity and a showcase of the workers' skills and talent, pride and commitment.

To everyone who has been waiting patiently, get your cameras ready and leave the Myki at home on weekends, and soon you will be catching one of those great new trains through our Metro Tunnel when it opens in early December.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:47): (1329) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the question I have is from the Probus clubs of Colac, who are seeking to have their Consumer Affairs Victoria fee of some \$424.60 waived because of its unnecessary impact on their clubs. The question to the minister is: why does Victoria have such an exorbitant fee where other states charge as little as \$23 for this changing of the rules that govern Probus clubs? This exorbitant extra fee of \$424 – compared to, say, Queensland, where it is only \$23 – across all the Probus clubs in Victoria that will have to pay this fee is a tax grab of some \$254,760 across Victoria.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:48): (1330) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How does our multicultural festivals and events fund help promote diversity and inclusion in Victoria? The multicultural festivals and events program is currently open for applications. The fund plays a vital role in helping our diverse communities celebrate together, with grants ranging from \$5000 to \$50,000. Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and nowhere is that more evident than in our western suburbs, where people from all backgrounds come together to share their celebrations, food, language and traditions. Next weekend I will be attending Diwali celebrations in Tarneit, one of many local events that show how multiculturalism enriches our community and brings people together in a spirit of pride and inclusion. Our Indian community in particular plays a vital role in shaping Victoria.

Almost 260,000 Victorians were born in India, the largest Indian diaspora in Australia, and India remains one of Victoria's top trading partners, student markets and tourism sources.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:49): (1331) My question is to the Minister for Police. How do police officers maintain their station gardens and lawns if they have been banned from hiring garden and maintenance staff? Across my electorate, at Kilmore, Seymour, Nagambie and Benalla stations, police are frustrated and embarrassed by the state of their workplaces. Grass is sky-high, weeds are overgrown and once-proud stations now look completely neglected. Victoria Police has confirmed that due to budget cuts all ground maintenance has been stopped. That means no mowing, no garden upkeep and no regular vehicle washing. Some officers have even reported snake sightings because of the long grass. Others have said they have to bring in their own mowers from home just to keep their stations presentable, only to be told they cannot do this for OH&S reasons. They deserve safe, clean and respectable workplaces, not to be left embarrassed by overgrown weeds and unkempt grounds. Even more concerning is that I have been told highway patrol units are now restricted from starting early shifts to avoid paying penalty rates. This is happening while Victoria's road toll is at the highest it has been.

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:50): (1332) My question is to the Minister for Victims. How is the Victorian government assisting victims of crime to recover financially from offences committed against them? A constituent wrote to me after a series of awful incidents, including car and bike theft, home invasion and burglary. Beyond the emotional toll, she is also having to cope with being significantly out of pocket through insurance excesses, premium increases and uncompensated losses. As she puts it, victims can feel punished twice. The Allan Labor government has strengthened support and prevention with simpler online reporting for non-urgent property crime, advice and referrals via the Victims of Crime Helpline and community initiatives with councils on lighting, CCTV and safer spaces. We have also acted decisively on youth crime, trialling electronic monitoring for high-risk offenders, expanding search powers for dangerous weapons, toughening bail and creating new post-and-boast offences so those glorifying crimes online face tough consequences. My constituent would also like to see the Commonwealth and the insurance industry expand options for victims to recover financially. We look forward to the minister's response.

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:51): (1333) Seville Primary School is a fantastic school in my local community, yet sadly in the Labor government's budget earlier this year Seville Primary School again missed out on vital funding needed to rebuild classrooms and facilities that are no longer fit for purpose. My question is to the Minister for Education on behalf of Seville Primary School students, families and teachers: when will you provide funding for major upgrades to rebuild classrooms and facilities at Seville Primary School? This would ensure modern and safe new classrooms; a new library, kitchen and canteen; and new toilets, which can double as a bushfire refuge in times of emergency. It would fix current issues, including leaking roofs, holes in the floors, asbestos and other things that will never be able to be fixed by patch jobs under the Department of Education's unsatisfactory maintenance plan. I take the opportunity to congratulate Leigh Hallett as the new principal of Seville Primary School, and I will work with him, school council president Courtney O'Keefe and the entire Seville Primary School community.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:52): (1334) My question is for the Minister for Education, and I ask how the animal-assisted wellbeing and engagement program is helping children in the Broadmeadows electorate. I recently had the privilege of visiting the wonderful Jacana School for Autism alongside the Deputy Premier to announce a \$1.7 million increase in

funding for the Canine Comprehension program. We had the great pleasure of meeting Victor, the school's therapy dog, and his dedicated handler Mini. Seeing firsthand the joy on students' faces as they interacted with Victor was incredibly moving. It was clear just how much this program is helping children build confidence, try new things and regulate emotions. Programs like this make a real difference. They are based on research and help students feel calm, safe and able to engage in learning. I understand Victor also helps improve attendance. Having a therapy animal at school helps kids feel like they belong, which improves how they learn and connect with others. I would like to thank principal Corinne Pupillo, assistant principal Daniel Moloney and all the dedicated staff for their commitment to this program.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:53): (1335) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The state Labor government's West Gate toll road is about to open and funnel thousands more cars onto the local streets of north and west Melbourne. When the toll road was originally approved the state Labor government promised \$100 million for traffic-calming measures and public space upgrades before the road opened, given the huge impact that thousands more cars would likely have on our local streets. Yet now it has been revealed that seven years later only a tiny fraction of that has been spent. To make matters worse, residents recently woke up to learn that the state government is now making a bunch of road changes that are mostly designed to speed up traffic in the area, not make our streets safer, with very little community consultation. Community members feel betrayed by the state Labor government over this issue – the secrecy, the lack of traffic calming and the promised linear park that never happened. Residents are calling for transparency, and my question is: will the minister direct the Department of Transport and Planning to hold a public community meeting with local residents to deal with this issue?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:54): (1336) My question is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and my question is: who is responsible for addressing off-lead dogs, abandoned vehicles and unauthorised parking in the common spaces of public housing properties in Preston and Reservoir? I would like to thank the East Preston and East Reservoir Community Action Group for Public Housing Residents, led by Lee Neil and Aleta Kilner, for facilitating a discussion at Reservoir Neighbourhood House during the parliamentary break with the Minister for Housing and Building. Our office has the opportunity to work closely with a lot of public housing and social housing tenants on their individual issues, but we are very pleased and supportive of this collective organising effort by Lee and Aleta, which brings tenants together to determine their own shared priorities. Some of those priorities are things we have followed up directly with the department, but others are policy questions about the responsible authority, and any information that the minister could provide to Lee, Aleta and their members would be greatly appreciated.

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:55): (1337) My question is to the Minister for Education. I ask: when will the state Labor government provide much-needed funding to Elwood Primary School, where the heritage-listed buildings are being held up by steel and concrete supports? Every school and every child deserves our best. With limited resources, our best also means we treat schools fairly and provide funding based on need. Under this government, school funding is political: schools in Labor communities get funding; schools in Liberal communities are neglected. Elwood Primary School was opened in 1917 and has been the beating heart of Elwood since then. Only recently the incredible principal Nicole Richards was announced as an Outstanding Primary Principal Award finalist for the 2025 Victorian Education Excellence Awards. In testimonials her peers describe Nicole as 'inspirational', 'excelling' and 'courageous' – go Nic! Despite school excellence, their heritage-listed buildings are being held up by steel and concrete supports. Two classrooms have been abandoned,

cracks are widening and children are learning under scaffolds. Minister, do the right thing and provide funding to this incredible school.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:56): (1338) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport: how will people in my community of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West who utilise the Upfield and Craigieburn lines benefit from the opening of the brand new Metro rail tunnel? The new Metro Tunnel provides the biggest transformation in Melbourne's public transport system for a generation. Officially opening from December 2025, one year ahead of schedule, the Metro Tunnel will deliver faster journeys, better connections and hundreds of new services for passengers. Just like the city loop reshaped Melbourne's travel patterns in the 1980s, the Metro Tunnel will redefine how people move across our city and is the first essential step to unlocking new capacity for people utilising the Upfield and Craigieburn line through the city loop. From December, passengers can start travelling through the new tunnel, with services stopping at the five brand new stations – Arden station; Parkville station; State Library station, where Merri-bek residents can transition over to Melbourne Central station; the new Town Hall station, where you can transition on from Flinders station; and of course, Anzac station. These new world-class stations will provide locals with even better access to key CBD employment, university, hospital, cultural and social precincts.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to some overdue questions on notice. And with the racing minister sitting across from me, I will do my best race caller speed through these: 2914, 2913, 2912, 2911, 2910, 2882, 2881, 2880, 2879, 2878, 2877, 2876, 2875, 2874, 2850, 2849, 2741, 2576, 2575, 2574, 2573, 2572, 2571, 2538, 2387, 2335, 2175, 2160, 1264. I will pass that to the Clerk.

Bills

Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:58): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:59): I am here to kick off the debate on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I note that I have half an hour, but when I look at the depth of this bill, I could easily fill an hour. There is so much in this bill and there is so much to talk about, and I am a little bit worried that I am not going to get everything said that I need to say with regard to this. But I do want to start and to thank the minister's office, in particular Claire, for organising a briefing for me. I think this was over and above because I was unable to get to the first one and I had also just changed portfolios. I do note that Doug Hooley did most of the heavy lifting in that briefing, and I thank him for that too.

What is this bill about? It is about parks and public lands, and it has got a bit of everything in it. There are some parts the opposition likes, some parts we do not like and a lot in between that we can live with. In summary, there are changes to national parks, increasing the land mass. There are changes to conservation areas and regional parks. There is some tinkering around existing parks, and there are some changes to recreational deer hunting by stalking. Each of these I will talk about in a little more detail.

Primarily the bill amends the National Parks Act 1975, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958 – that is a pretty old one – and the Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020, a relatively new one. As always, there are a number of consequential amendments that happen on the way and these are to the Carlton (Recreation Ground) Land Act 1966 about Princes Park – one that I did not know existed – the Heritage Rivers Act 1992, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and the St Kilda Land Act 1965. The bill repeals the National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989.

This bill pretty well came into being because of a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council assessment in 2019 with regard to the central west investigation final report. Some people will be well versed in the different reports that VEAC have done over time. This particular one and its consequences involve the transferring of large areas of multiple-use forest to national park or conservation park status. This was around a commitment the government made in 2021 in response to the report. There are three new national parks, two new conservation parks and seven new or expanded regional parks.

I am going to speak first of all about national parks. National parks are something I know quite a lot about, having visited national parks extensively in Victoria, Australia and internationally. At one point I had a think about the number of family holidays that I have had in national parks, as I said not just in Victoria but in Australia and overseas. I have been to many of the really big national parks to see the way they operate both here and overseas. In my electorate I have the Kinglake National Park, the Lake Eildon National Park, the Yarra Ranges and the Dandenong Ranges, and I have loads and loads of forested areas. The bill before us adds another 44,000 hectares to land managed as national park. We have new park areas in central-west Victoria: Mount Buangor, the Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg. All of this land is currently state forest. National parks have a focus on conservation ahead of recreation, so there are a whole lot of restrictions in national parks.

I want to start by talking about some of the differences between state parks and national parks, because they are very different in their purpose, access and management. State forests, under the Forests Act 1958, are managed by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and operate as multi-use public land. They balance conservation with community access, recreation and local economic activity. In a state forest, hunting, dispersed camping, firewood collection, bushwalking, hiking, horse riding, dog walking, prospecting, forestry, fishing, drone use, four-wheel driving, trail-bike riding and off-road driving are all permitted. These activities support regional livelihoods. I look in and around the area in my electorate between my home and my office in Yarra Glen and you see constantly people coming out of the forests with dirt bikes covered in mud. You see four-wheel drives, because people get out there and use these forests quite differently.

National parks, on the other hand, are governed by the National Parks Act 1975. They are managed by Parks Victoria, and they prioritise environmental preservation and restrict public use. In a national park, activities prohibited are firewood collection; four-wheel driving and trail bikes – only on designated roads; off-road driving; prospecting; fossicking; horseriding; fishing – allowed in designated areas only; dog walking; camping – in designated areas only; drone use; and resource extraction.

The coalition have had long-held views about the creation of additional national parks, and it is something that we have not supported, because the government cannot manage what they have already. I will point to many, many instances where the government has failed in this area, and I cannot

see that altering, let alone how they are going to adequately manage an additional 44,000 hectares. What we have seen in the annual reports over the last 10 years is a sharp decline in Parks Victoria's capacity to manage the expanding park estate. Despite a 20 per cent increase in land, operational funding fell by 35 per cent – more land, less money. The rangers have also decreased, with ranger numbers dropping by 28 per cent in the last year alone. We see Parks Victoria has become increasingly top-heavy, and there are some changes I understand being made to Parks Victoria. But the decline in the on-ground capacity has led to worsening conditions across the parks. We have multiple parks and campgrounds that are closed for extended periods. We have multiple campgrounds and parks that have broken facilities, things that have not been restored after bushfires. The list is endless, and I will go over some of those in a moment.

But what we have also seen is the decline in the on-ground capacity has meant worsening conditions across the park network. We have fuel load management issues, invasive weeds and pest animals. With regard to the fuel load, there is a reduced capacity for planned burns, and mechanical reduction increases the risk of catastrophic bushfires. If you are not doing the work, it increases the risk. I know that there is a current court case, which bothers me greatly, about firebreaks and the challenges to the government's firebreak program, which is only going to exacerbate issues with increasing fuel management. Many of the areas proposed for park status are already fire prone and require active management to protect nearby communities, so this worries me greatly.

Invasive weeds are also a huge issue. Blackberries, serrated tussocks and other noxious weeds are spreading rapidly in undermanaged parks, and I see this all of the time. I have people ring my office, and I have even been out with people who wanted to show me that in particular areas where you may not think there are blackberries in fact there are. These species – and this bothers me greatly – outcompete native flora and degrade the habitat, and you do not have to go far from the city and deep into the bush to actually see where this has happened. They overtake, and we end up with a very flammable understorey. If you have a flammable understorey, the flames can move up trees and into the crowns of trees very quickly, and we can have what happened on Black Saturday – enormous, devastating fires – because the understorey is thick. The fire can move up the trunks of trees and get into that top canopy of trees and create some of the worst conditions and fires that we have seen.

Pest animals – foxes, wild dogs, pigs and rabbits – cause widespread environmental damage. Without adequate controls these pests destroy native vegetation, they threaten biodiversity and they are the worst invaders – 'invader' is probably not the right word – taking out some of our native animals. Some of the smaller native animals are really devastated by these. These are not managed. These are things that are not managed now. In the way the current funding is and the way the current operations of DEECA and Parks are, we are not on top of this now, and it worries me greatly that we are not going to be on top of another 44,000 hectares. The bushfires, invasive weeds, pest animals and even the deer – which I did not mention, which cause all sorts of havoc – do not recognise a change in land tenure. They do not recognise a change from forest to national park, and this is a big concern.

Also we have the integrity of the Premier at stake here, because at the Bendigo Bush Summit in March 2024 the Premier said:

As Premier, and as a proud country Victorian, I will never put a padlock on our public forest.

She is doing just that through this legislation. She is doing just that. I want to go through a list that I have, which is publicly available and is quite extensive, of all of the issues and the closures in the forests and national parks that we have at the moment. In the Alpine National Park there are problems where tracks were severely damaged during a series of fire, flood and storm events from 2019 to 2023 – still not open. In Baw Baw National Park the Walhalla tramway bridge closed in 2022. Repairs are pending. 2022 was not the other day, it was a while ago. The Beech Gully Track has been closed since 2023.

Regarding Cape Conran national park, all members in this chamber should be aware of the constant advocacy of the member for Gippsland East in this area. He speaks constantly about things that have

not been repaired – campgrounds, the cabins that have been waiting since that 2019–20 bushfire. They are still awaiting project completion. There is no money to do these things, so how on earth does the government think it is going to be able to manage an increased footprint on national parks? The jetties at the Mallacoota Inlet have not yet been repaired. The Thurra River Campground, the same period of time, they thought was going to be open at the same time the bridge was repaired. Now they are being told it is not going to be open until 2026, so there will be another summer with the second-biggest campground in that area still not open. This matters. It matters to local communities, and it matters to people who use these campgrounds. It disturbs me greatly.

I have a list of pages: Lake Tyers State Park, Mitchell River, Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park. Closer to the Melbourne region is the Bunyip State Park, and the William Ricketts Sanctuary has been closed since 2021. The Yarra Ranges National Park in my own backyard, in my own electorate, has had issues. How long it takes to get things repaired has been staggering. The Badger Weir, which was storm damaged in 2016, took two years to be resolved, and then the state of the road leading into that was raised in Parliament in 2020 and again in 2022.

The Dee Slip Bridge on the O'Shannassy Aqueduct Trail was closed in 2021, and it has taken until 2025 for works to begin to repair it. I want to say what that means. The O'Shannassy Aqueduct Trail spans a considerable distance. It is a great trail. A lot of hikers and cyclists will use that, and a kilometre in, maybe only 800 metres in, the bridge is out, so it is not a continual trail. People with bikes would have to hike down a particularly steep little area and then go under the bridge and get back up. That was not safe, and it has been years and years that it has taken to fix these things.

The toilet block at the redwood forest was raised in 2018 and again in 2021, and finally work started in 2025. These are things that the government have committed to doing. The Maroondah Dam has been a real problem area because there is so much work that needs to be done to fix that, and it just has not happened. In the north-east at the Beechworth Historic Park the Spring Creek bridge closed in 2022. In the Lake Eildon National Park the Gap Track has been partially closed. We have people that say Candlebark Park is closed for various reasons, and you find out that the toilets have not been fixed adequately. The drains do not work or the barbecues. They close these things, and it causes a huge amount of negativity within the community about certain areas and whether they want to come back there or not. We have got the same issues in the Grampians National Park.

As I said, I could talk about these till the cows come home and, looking at the clock, I have probably almost started to do that. For this reason I am now putting forward and moving a reasoned amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted as two separate bills to:

- (a) take into account stakeholder consultation on the impact of the establishment of the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks on traditional recreational activities, invasive species management, fire management and the rural economy; and
- (b) retain the remaining provisions of the bill.'

I have multiple copies here for those who might want to sneak over and grab one as well.

I think so many of the members opposite do not understand the issues that I outlined, with fuel loads and with invasive species, whether that is pests or whether that is plants, and the issues that they cause. This is essentially splitting the bill into two, because, as I said, there are some parts of this bill that we are okay with, and there are others that we are not.

I want to mention firewood collection briefly as well, because firewood collection is something that can happen in forests but not in national parks. With this greater area moving from forest, it will reduce the availability of and the access to firewood collection. I know for a lot of people this is a very big deal. If you live in country Victoria, in a lot of small communities you rely on firewood. You might have a wood fire to keep the house warm and/or backed up by gas bottles, which are fairly pricey, but people are not on the mains for gas. We do not have that; we are relying on bottles. Particularly living

on land, on a farm, that is what we rely on. Luckily where I live we plant lots of trees and lots of them come down in various storms, and trees do die. I think that might be a bit of a surprise to the Greens, but trees actually do die after a particular time period. Wattle dies a little bit quicker than many of the others. But in the information that has been provided to us just very recently, and I do thank Claire from the minister's office for doing that, with regard to firewood access, one of the things that did disturb me was saying firewood can also be sourced from firewood retailers.

Having access means for those who cannot afford it, those from the lower socio-economic areas who want to go and collect their own firewood, firewood retailers are not perhaps the way to go. It is certainly acknowledged in the information provided that sometimes this is a limited resource and, it says, of 'unpredictable availability'. I can tell you I think that it is available pretty well all of the time. It does refer to what you can get in state forests. It does not help when this area has been reduced.

I also want to mention just very quickly some information we received from the Victorian Apiarists Association about the beekeepers' concerns. VAA represents 10,000 beekeepers, and they raise concerns in a letter that says the bill fails to mention apiculture or the use of public land for bee sites and makes no reference to the existing apiculture on public lands policy. They have warned that without access to public lands this sector cannot function. Pollination cycles break down and crop yields fail, the food supply becomes unstable, prices rise, inflation follows and interest rates are affected.

As I have said, I live on a property, and we have grevillea and around the house a grevillea hedge, which flowers beautifully and has always been a major attractor of bees. I have noticed this year that there are very, very few bees. That concerns me, because worldwide there seems to be a problem with bees, and they are vital for our food sources. I would like to think that the government will look seriously about what they can do to support this sector. There are additional conservation parks being installed in Hepburn and Cobaw, and both of these are currently state forests. Regional parks are closer to major populations and tourism centres. For me in my electorate, right at the bottom is Kurth Kiln, the focus here is flipped from what the focus is in a national park. As I said earlier, national parks prioritise conservation over recreation.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Cindy McLEISH: The poor bees. It really bothers me about the bees. The focus here in the regional parks is on recreation rather than conservation. There is land being added to the Bendigo Regional Park and there is the creation of the Wandong Regional Park, and I would like to see how much is being invested in this area. There are so many areas in this bill to talk about. There are amendments to the Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020. The coalition is fine with these key amendments that expand the definition of the scenic landscape area, with the strategic framework plan improvements, with the land management strategy requirements, with the corporate planning and oversight and with the ministerial powers and centralisation. I know there have been ongoing issues around here with the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, and I see that there have been multiple CEOs and temporary CEOs that have moved on. That is what has happened at the moment – I think there has just been a new CEO appointed. That may be Christine Ferguson, if I remember, who I know from years gone by. I think it is important that, when we have an area like that, it does function well. While there have been some queries about how that works and some difficulties, I am pleased to see that some of this has changed now.

The Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area is being renamed Liwik Barring. The Yellingbo conservation area is primarily in my area. There are some new packages of land being added into this area. Some are connected to existing packages of land and some are not. When I heard Menzies Creek was part of this I thought that was quite a way from some of the other areas – the Woori Yallock Creek, the Britannia Creek, the Little Yarra River and the McCrae Creek. Some of these areas are very close to what was the original Woori Yallock conservation zone. As I understand it, the government would like to continue to build on this. I am aware that some land was donated by a landowner to Trust for

Nature and that very, very disappointingly that land was let go to rack and ruin. I went out there to look at some of this land. It has now been handed over to the state. I do not know if that landowner made that move to Trust for Nature with the intent that he was donating land straight back to the state. I must follow up and check on that.

I do have reservations electorally about this. People are worried that there is a wick up the middle of these communities and this is going to increase the fire risk. This was a very big issue when the Yellingbo conservation area was first instituted. I know the minister at the time came out and listened to some of these concerns and that the amount of planting beside the river was brought in from being as wide as maybe 70 metres to 30 metres, if I remember.

There is some tinkering at the edges of the boundaries of the Brisbane Ranges, adding an extra 14 hectares. The Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park is adding an extra 12 hectares, and the Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park is adding another 80 hectares. Earlier I mentioned Princes Park, Carlton, and St Kilda Marina. There is just some tinkering that needs doing around there.

One of the things that the coalition likes here is the additional opening up of land for deer hunting with stalking. Deer hunting is a very popular activity and pastime for many people, and in my area, in parts of the High Country, I know how much of a difference it makes to the local economy, particularly around Mansfield, Jamieson and Eildon. Even people in the area who do not like hunting can see how important it is locally. They are opening up the northern part of the Wombat. I think this is only for, if I remember correctly, a certain period of the year, I think around the wintertime. I do not imagine that the numbers are very huge up there, not like the million deer that are roaming around in the High Country and are now all over my electorate on the edges of towns. That area was not initially opened up to hunting, but there is that deer presence now. There is an expansion in the national parks in East Gippsland and in the Snowy River and Errinundra national parks, which the coalition welcomes. Two thirds of the Lake Eildon National Park is already available for hunting. Perhaps it might not have been a bad thing to extend that a little further.

I want to demonstrate how important hunting is in my area and generally. It was in 2024, in March last year, that Mandy Kirley from the Mansfield Hunting & Fishing shop put on an expo, and they had a record number of exhibitors and probably around 10,000 visitors. Just this one woman in this one business off her own bat held this expo in Mansfield. It was incredibly successful, and all power to her for what she did. I know that there is going to be another one next year. It was extraordinary the amount of support from exhibitors and visitors alike. The trade stalls had record sales, the shop in Mansfield had record sales, and it was all credit to Mandy.

The last area that I do want to mention is that this bill facilitates the transfer of title to traditional owners in a number of areas. The traditional owner groups are the Gunaikurnai and the Taungurung, and the Taungurung are one of the two traditional owner groups that I have in my electorate. The Baw Baw National Park and Avon Wilderness Park are going to have their titles transferred to the traditional owners, and in my area the Cathedral Range State Park and the Kinglake National Park will be moving down this path, as well as the Wandong Regional Park, which is going to be newly established. As I understand and as I was briefed, they will continue to be managed as they are currently legislated under the National Parks Act 1975. The intent is for joint management, with the end game being moving to the full management of national parks under the traditional owners. I am not sure exactly what that is going to look like in terms of funding and how that is going to work – it is not happening tomorrow – but this bill is facilitating the first step to that.

I want to finish where I began, that there are a lot of things in this bill, and I could have talked about additional areas. There were some things that the coalition did not support: the changes to the national parks, increasing the sizes there. Tinkering around the edges of existing parks and changes with the regional parks and conservation is not so bad. Changes in regional deer hunting is something that we do support. Some of those areas are why we do want to split the bill, because I am sure that other

parties within this Parliament may want to carve out areas because they have different oppositions than we do.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:29): It is a real pleasure to rise today to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Before I go on, can I just put on the record that we reject the reasoned amendment proposed by those on the other side of the house. We will not be separating this bill. We will not be deferring this important legislation to create new national parks here in the state of Victoria.

There are a few other things that I would like to take the opportunity to address arising from the member for Eildon's contribution. I assure the member for Eildon, one, that Parks Victoria, now under the distinguished leadership of Daniel Miller as chair and Lee Mieziš as CEO, is on a trajectory that will see more and more boots on the ground out in our parks. The minister briefed us the other day that an additional 84 rangers have been appointed since Lee was appointed as the CEO. I can put to bed some of the concerns that the member for Eildon raised in her contribution.

With regard to bees, let me assure you the bees are going to be okay. In fact let me be quite clear: beekeeping will continue to be permitted in the new national and conservation parks and the addition to Bendigo Regional Park and will continue to be administered under the Land Act 1958. Existing licences are not affected, and applications for new sites will be considered on their merits, as they are currently. That is that done as well.

Back in 2014 it was my pleasure as the Labor candidate for Macedon to invite the then Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change Lisa Neville to meet me in Trentham to catch up with Gayle Osborne of Forestcare, and the ask of Gayle to both Lisa and me at that time was for a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation into the Wombat–Lerderderg forest park. Could we have this investigation with the intention, should that investigation demonstrate it was needed and should be prioritised, of establishing a national park? I am really proud to be standing here 11 years later to speak on a bill that will create the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park, and I want to extend my congratulations to Gayle Osborne. Whilst we have had differences of opinion over the years around the margins, I want to congratulate her on all of her hard work.

On that day we went into the forest, and Gayle showed us the unique environmental features of the forest – a forest that is home to powerful owls and phascogales. It was a really beautiful opportunity. I was able to then take that commitment to the people of Macedon at the 2014 election. We got the report back in 2019, and it affirmed what Forestcare had long known: that despite being comprehensively logged in the past, the forest fought back and it had many conservation values that needed to be protected. The land is home to 380 rare or threatened species which rely on the people of Victoria – on us, through our Parliament and our government – to ensure their protection.

My view always has been that in order to protect the unique values of our environment we need to get more people into the environment so that they can grow their understanding and appreciation of all that is precious. More people in more parks more often means greater protection for our environment. Those on the other side continue to run these scare campaigns. In fact I was subjected to a scare campaign by the Liberal Party, in cahoots with the DLP and the Shooters and Fishers, at the 2018 election – a sustained campaign.

Pauline Richards interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: What happened? I received a more than 9 per cent swing to me, thank you. That is what happened, despite the scare campaign being run by the Liberals and their conservative mates.

Our government is absolutely committed to creating more opportunities for Victorians in the great outdoors. Let me talk you through the activities that will be permitted in national parks, to put to bed

once again the fear campaign, which I am afraid the member for Eildon has sought to continue to inflame: bushwalking, picnics and nature observation, obviously; camping, obviously; fishing; car touring, including four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking and cycling; horse riding in specified areas; dog walking in areas that are specified. Recreational prospecting? No, there will not be recreational prospecting. But, you know what, there is no recreational prospecting in our regional parks right now, but there is in places that are adjacent to many of our parks. There is seasonal deer hunting, as we have discussed. Let us just stop with the fearmongering. Let us get on with creating these parks, which, as I said, are about ensuring that more people can spend more time in nature more often.

It is fitting, obviously, that I talk about our First Nations people and their unique relationship with these beautiful regions. For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have had enduring and profound connections to country in the part of the state that I have the good fortune to represent. I have had the opportunity to spend time on Dja Dja Wurrung country with Rodney Carter and other traditional owners to learn about their aspirations for these unceded lands. Forestry, as I have said, has undoubtedly damaged the Wombat. However, care for country, reforestation and rehabilitation of forests must include traditional owner knowledge, and that is absolutely central to our government's commitments.

I have got to say, I have seen the paternalism at play, including from those who call themselves progressives, so much so that the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation had to release the following statement in relation to their work to restore storm damage in the Wombat. The Dja Dja Wurrung people said:

... we are deeply concerned at the entrenched racism that we are experiencing and noticing in the reporting around the Wombat State Forest. It is clear that many in the community believe that Dja Dja Wurrung people can be manipulated and do not have the capacity to realise their follies; it is also believed that we are unable to make thoughtful, collective decisions and cannot be trusted to be self-determining. That these beliefs, so entrenched in the world of missions and colonisation, are so prevalent today brings down all in our community. It is perhaps however the unacknowledged paternalism of our friends that is most difficult to experience.

So I say to many of the campaigners: work with traditional owners and listen with respect, and we will move forward in a way that will be to the benefit of all and to our beautiful natural assets.

In case you did not already know this exciting news, Trentham, in my electorate, won the gold award for Australia's top tiny tourism town last month. Of course Trentham is right in the middle of the Wombat forest. Having led the tourism review for our government back in 2019, I can say nature-based tourism is huge and will only continue to grow. This bill seeks to support our aspirations to grow nature-based tourism. In fact national parks and other parks and reserves in Victoria welcomed, in one year, more than 90 million visitors, contributing significantly to local and regional economies. That is just extraordinary. With the creation of these new parks, we can expect to see even more.

As the Minister for Health, let me say this: time in nature is good for you in so many ways. It is good for your mental and your physical health. It is well documented that the experience of awe – having that incredible experience of seeing something in the natural environment that makes the hairs on your skin stand on end – is good for your health. That is well documented. I want more people to have that experience of awe, and Victorians will be able to have that in the new parks that our government is creating.

This is a fantastic bill. The largest of the parks we are creating is in my electorate, the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park – more than 44,000 hectares. The bill will also create, once again in my electorate, the Cobaw conservation park and the Hepburn conservation park. In conclusion, can I call out Gayle Osborne again; she truly is a remarkable woman. But I also, as I said earlier, pay my respects to the traditional owners of the lands. We must work hand in hand with traditional owners. Joint management is the way in which all of our parks must be managed. Indeed, when we legislate treaty

later this afternoon in this place, we look to a future where First Nations people will be able to continue to realise their aspirations for their lands.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:39): I rise to make a contribution on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I want to take up some comments from the previous speaker, the member for Macedon. If jobs are being added to Parks Victoria, why have I had staff in my office who have had their jobs removed? Why, when questioned, was there a concession that there are 33 jobs from the conservation regulator going? We are seeing cuts to frontline staff everywhere. I had until recently eight fisheries officers in my region; I have now got four. To say that there are not cuts to those who are looking after public land management is ridiculous. I have spoken to these people. I have had them in my office. So regardless of what we hear about additional staff being added, there has been a net loss in my region, and I would argue that I have probably got – I would have to check this – probably more national parks in my electorate of Gippsland East than any other in this state.

But here we are. We are now increasing our national park network. Let us have a look at how things are going at the current time. Blackberries are out of control. English broom, African lovegrass, serrated tussock and other noxious weeds are running rampant through our national parks. When we raise this with the parkies on the ground, who are all good workers – I know quite a few of them; they are very good people doing their best – ‘We don’t have the resources, we don’t have the money to manage it’ is what we are told. Pest plants and animals – sambar deer are out of control. There are foxes, wild dogs and rabbits, and feral pigs are a massively increasing problem in my electorate of Gippsland East. What are we doing about those things? It is a very, very limited effort while we are spending tens of thousands of dollars shooting horses. The priorities make no sense whatsoever. Pigs are a huge risk to our agricultural sector in East Gippsland. They are coming over the border from New South Wales across the Black–Allan Line and starting to impact on agricultural land north of Cann River, north of Orbost and up around the communities of Bendoc, Bonang and the like, and without adequate controls – I have got photos of the degradation and the damage that they have caused – that problem is exacerbated. Their breeding rates are absolutely astronomical. When we raise with our public land managers, ‘What are we doing?’, we hear, ‘Yes, we’ve got some controls in place, but we don’t have funds to do any more.’ But we listen to those over here and we think the world is rosy and everything is going to be fantastic. Well, I can tell you that it is not.

Over the past 10 years we have had a 20 per cent increase in Parks land, but operational funding has reduced – the government’s own budget papers say that – and ranger numbers have decreased. How does that ever turn out? When you are not managing our national parks at the moment, when the situation of pest plants and animals is massively getting out of control and when you add to the footprint on the ground of our national parks network while not managing the ones properly that we have now, how is that ever going to turn out? Worse than that – and the minister touched on this – we have now got some user groups that are excluded from these new national park areas. The member for Eildon would be well aware of this because it is applicable to her area as well. Four-wheel drive groups probably do more work in keeping open our bushfire access tracks than staff do at the moment. There is a panel of contractors that are employed by the government to maintain fire access tracks. I have had that panel of worker representatives in my office. I have had four in the last couple of months saying, ‘We were getting contracts of over \$100,000, in some cases up to \$250,000, to maintain the bush tracks. We bought the machinery. This year we’ve had none – no money forthcoming. The work’s not being done.’ And now we are cutting out four-wheel drive groups from the area, who were doing a lot of work maintaining those tracks.

I want to talk about fuel loads for a couple of moments in relation to managing the bush. In the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission – our highest form of inquiry that we have available to us in this country – pre-eminent bushfire experts from all around the world recommended a 5 per cent annual burn rate as a minimum to give us some level of safety. That is in the bushfires royal commission recommendations. This government came into power and set up its own inquiry that came

up with the result that it wished for, and we are now doing less than a quarter of the fuel reduction burning that the bushfires royal commission recommended. How is that ever going to end? I will take any one of those members on a drive through East Gippsland and show them that the fuel loads in the bush are back to 2019–20 levels and in some cases worse because of the regrowth – and we have got staff on the ground who are not doing the burns that the royal commission recommended. Someone on the royal commission panel recommended it should be 8 per cent, but they settled on 5. We are not doing a quarter of that and have not done a quarter of that burning since the bushfires in 2019–20 and even before that – that was why they were caused. We heard in question time today a minister saying we are in for a tough fire season. Of course we are. When you let fuel loads get out of control it cannot end any other way. There is no other way it can end. When the bushfires hit, we will hear – well, not everyone – people saying, ‘It’s climate change.’ When you have fuel loads allowed to get to the level they are, there is no other outcome that can possibly be produced than another mega-fire. I am not a climate change sceptic, but fuel loads will be the major driver in the mega-fires that we will have. If it is not this summer – if we dodge a bullet – it will be the one after. Until we control fuel loads we are going to have mega-fires in various periods as we move forward. It is just ridiculous. The government needs to manage these fuel loads better to keep our community safer.

Before I finish, I want to have a chat about firewood supplies. When this government ended the timber industry it also wound up our major supplier of firewood in the state. It seemed to be something that the government had not considered. I have got a very ageing population in my area that relies on firewood providers to deliver wood to their homes. They do not have the capacity to go and get it themselves. But the government has firewood collection areas. It opened them up. People were coming to my office less than a week after the firewood collection season opened, saying, ‘We’ve been to the coupes and there’s no wood.’ So what we have got now as a result of government policy is people illegally collecting firewood. They are cutting down trees and they are going into the bush because they do not want to freeze next winter. You have stopped the timber industry that supplied the firewood, and the firewood collection areas that you have put on a map do not have any firewood in them. Because you are not allowed to go off the track, you go into a collection area and you have got to get it from the side of the track. You cannot go into the bush. There is none there now, so people are faced, because of government policy, with the options of cutting firewood illegally or going cold next winter – they will not be able to warm themselves. And what are we doing now? We are moving more areas into national park, where firewood collection is restricted. We are making it worse. I noted there is one exemption for three years that the minister spoke about. What happens after three years? We will keep you warm for three years and then nothing? It is just a joke.

Until we get serious about managing our bush properly and doing the fuel reduction burns that the bushfires royal commission recommends, we are going to keep burning every few years because of government policy. If you want to close down the timber industry and not let people collect firewood in the bush, you are going to promote illegal activity within our bush. The one thing in Victoria we should never, ever run out of is firewood. We have got record fuel loads in the bush, and people cannot get firewood. Did we ever think about making the link to give them access to the firewood and lower the fuel loads? One problem can solve the other, but no, ridiculous government policy prevents us from doing that. Think about that: we have got a firewood shortage problem and record fuel loads in the bush. What a ridiculous scenario. The government should split this bill. We support the element of it that extends deer hunting grounds. We would support that if it was not wound up in this bill, but based on the fact it extends our national park network we cannot.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:49): I would also like to make a contribution on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and oppose the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Eildon. Before we get to that, I might just begin as the Minister for Health began by touching on the parts of this bill that relate to granting Aboriginal title and joint management arrangements. That feels particularly appropriate on a day when we will hopefully pass the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 that is before the house.

Locally, in our part of the world, we have certainly seen the benefit of those sorts of joint arrangements. We have seen the involvement of the Narrap rangers and Uncle Dave Wandin and the Wurundjeri in some of our local projects, so we are very supportive of the larger scale arrangements that we see in the recognition and settlement agreements. The Dja Dja Wurrung, as the Minister for Health touched on, have been very actively involved, and we had Rodney Carter here earlier this week. This bill that we have in front of us also implements parts of those agreements with the Gunaikurnai and the Taungurung, and I am sure that as treaty progresses and we continue the work that is here in this bill we will see more of those arrangements, and we welcome that in the future.

I would like to take up the comments made by the member for Eildon and the member for Gippsland East about firewood. I was surprised that they did not touch on commercial timber harvesting. Those of us who have been involved in the forestry debate over recent years – I think anyone involved – would be amazed that we have had two opposition speakers on a bill that deals with the Wombat State Forest, which famously did supply salvage logging timber to commercial sawmills, and the members for Gippsland East and Eildon did not mention the timber industry. If the Minister for Health were still here, as a former Minister for Agriculture, I think she would agree it is surprising. But given they have not mentioned it, I would love at some point to speak a little further about that issue. But I will jump to firewood, which they did touch upon.

I am sure we all appreciate that personal firewood collection is very different to commercial operations. I think we can all put ourselves in the shoes of someone who may have limited financial resources. They may live, as the member for Eildon suggested, in a smaller country town and rely on that firewood for heat and collect it themselves. It has been tried before, and it is very difficult to have a permit system. In fact it slightly defeats the purpose if those people have to go through a lot of hoops to get a permit, but if there is no permit system, it is true that we do not have a lot of oversight over that activity. Whilst we can put ourselves in the shoes of one person who might be in that situation, if we are talking about hundreds of people and if we are talking about potentially 10 or 15 cubic metres of firewood that they are each taking, we are then talking about thousands – possibly 10,000 – of cubic metres of firewood coming out of an area, and that is back on the scale of commercial timber harvesting, let alone commercial firewood collection. The bill we have in front of us strikes the right balance between recognising that we do allow people to do that but having to put some limits on it. I am sure we all agree that if we lived in an absolutely perfect world in which those on low incomes in particular could somehow be means exempted from this, we would probably do it. But I think in the practical world that we live in, that is not possible and the measures in the bill are the closest that we can do.

Having touched on firewood, I do want to come back to the bigger picture of what we are doing with the bill that is in front of us, and that is fundamentally protecting the important biodiversity and the important cultural values of forests in our state. One very important way that we do that is through active management of our reserves and our parks. We live in a post-colonisation world. There are introduced species, invasive species. There are a whole lot of issues in which we have to actively manage parks to get the best possible biodiversity outcomes. As the Minister for Health said, I very much welcome the arrival of Lee Miezis at Parks Victoria. We are sad locally to lose him from the EPA, because naturally in Preston we have more EPA issues than we do Parks Victoria issues, but Lee does great work, and he is very strongly supported by this government in terms of resourcing and giving Parks Victoria the powers they need. The bill before us expands the area that Parks Victoria will have responsibility for. It is not an appropriation bill, so I am sure there will be changes to the funding arrangements made accordingly. But I just want to recognise that when we talk about protecting biodiversity, dealing with pests, dealing with weeds, dealing with the reality of modern fire suppression, dealing with the fact that some endangered species require active management, they are all things that this government has invested strongly in.

The other thing we do in terms of protecting biodiversity is that we prevent some human activities that could threaten species and damage biodiversity. Most importantly, we prevent large-scale land

clearing. If you look at the history of extinctions in this state, it was the large-scale land clearing that occurred in the 19th century and the early 20th century that really caused all of those extinctions. We cleared somewhere between 10 million and 20 million hectares of land. We left ourselves with only about 8 million hectares of forest, and we lost a lot of species as a result of that. Having said that, as far as I am aware – and this is actually a question for those involved in sustainability that is not entirely known – I am fairly confident there has not been an extinction of any species in this state in the last 50 years. I think there was some grey fireweed or a spider orchid that may have been thought to be extinct and then they might have found one species and then they have not found another, but even that dates back to the 1970s, and I think it is a credit to the work of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and its predecessors, but it is also a credit to what our system of parks and reserves has done that we have not seen an extinction in the last 50 years. Of course we continue the important work that the Minister for Health and others have talked about in order to ensure that we do not see one in the future either. This bill that we have before us is exactly that work.

As all of us know, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Central West reports are quite well known. A report that the minister referred to looked at about 150,000 hectares of public land, and it goes without saying that the most important thing we are doing with that public land is maintaining the forest on it – we are not selling it, we are not clearing it, and we are also of course preventing large-scale commercial extraction from those public lands. Of course we know that if we just let mining or timber harvesting happen in a completely unregulated way that would do very significant damage to our environment, but of course that will not happen, because we are creating national parks and state parks in which those activities cannot be done.

Once we move beyond land clearing and those really big commercial activities, then of course there is a long list of other human activities that I suppose are smaller in scale in their impact. I have not got time today to get right into the debates about beekeeping or prospecting or other activities, but suffice to say I think it is very important to keep in mind the big picture, that those activities are often a question more of our human preferences for the forest. Most of them have a much, much smaller impact, but not zero impact, on biodiversity than land clearing and large commercial resource extraction.

Coming back in the time I have left to the big environmental questions, I just want to thank some people who I have met with, along with the member for Northcote and the member for Pascoe Vale, discussing some of the key parts of this bill. Recently we met with Matt Ruchel from the Victorian National Parks Association and Jo Hopkins from the Wilderness Society. The member for Northcote and I also met with Darebin Climate Action Now with Professor Ann Sanson there, Suzie Hoban, Karen Large and Graham Jameson. And then locally, I should note the advocacy of Newlands Friends of the Forest group, including Pauline Galvin, Julie Mason, Marion Cincotta, led of course by the inimitable Cath Rouse, who actually worked at the Maryvale pulp and paper mill that has been so central to our forestry debates back when it was under Amcor in the 1990s. Some of the key issues we have discussed with those people include forest produce licences, whether they should be removed from the Forests Act 1958 – certainly not something that is in the bill before us. I think the act actually touches fairly lightly on those licensing arrangements, but I do understand that the minister is considering how they do continue to work in what is obviously a post-commercial timber harvesting world.

We have also discussed with them logging on private land. They describe logging on private land as a loophole, but I think in fairness that is a different policy area to our decision to end commercial timber harvesting in state forests. Obviously, as this bill sets out, there are important decisions we make about how we manage the government's own land, but then questions of logging on private land are a planning matter that really are separate but nonetheless important. If we go back to what I was saying about the damage that land clearing in particular does, I do think there is some value, particularly when we do now have native vegetation protections in our planning scheme, in further considering that particular proposal, but we will take that up with the Minister for Planning.

Strategic fuel breaks are something we discussed with them. We certainly have a large strategic fuel break operation happening at the moment. I think as the member for Gippsland East touched on, it is a complex relationship with biodiversity. Deer hunting – I think the question of whether deer come out of the Wildlife Act 1975 is one that is part of the review that is going on currently, so I will not touch on that.

Then finally, the Great Forest National Park – that was never a commitment of this government, but I think I will end by saying that when we talk about large-scale conservation decisions, there is nothing that matches the scale of this government protecting literally millions of hectares with our decision to end commercial timber harvesting. I commend that decision and the further measures that are in front of us in the bill today to the house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:59): I rise this afternoon to talk on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I felt it important to speak on this matter today because in my constituency, the good seat of Polwarth, where there are significant levels of state park, national park, marine park and other protected areas, this of course will always be a big issue. Some of the issues that will arise in the seat of Polwarth, for example, will be the long-term consequences of more national parks. As one of the areas that former Labor governments were very proud to trumpet as national parks, the Great Otway National Park, we know full well that a government that is unable to properly fund, maintain and look after wild areas actually, over time, do more damage to the environment than if they were to fully fund and maintain them and/or allow some sort of commercial enterprise to help in the management and rejuvenation and care of these places.

What do we mean by that? For example, it does not take long for land that is locked up and no longer accessible for people to maintain with equipment and other things to be taken over by blackberries, ragworts and other feral plants. We have got all the feral animals in the Otways now – wild pigs, wild deer, dogs, cats, all sorts of vermin – that get into these areas and do a lot of damage to our native flora and fauna. The humble pig may seem, ‘Oh, well, does that really matter?’ but pigs are one of the worst offenders when it comes to destroying native habitat, river flats and other areas.

This bill, like so many bills that this government brings forward, does not tell the public how it plans to maintain the extra nearly 70,000 hectares they plan to make national park in the Central Highlands. For the people of Polwarth, me included, who have taken advantage of some of these areas in the Central Highlands that they are talking about, they are talking about changes to various parks in the Central Highlands where people regularly go camping and where in the past they gathered firewood. Beekeepers have used them, prospectors – prospecting is a very popular pastime in rural and regional Victoria, particularly in the Central Highlands area. These are all activities that will not continue with the passing of this bill.

Why is that sad? It is sad because when communities use and activate public spaces, they tend to create a demand to make sure that they are better looked after and better cared for. Taking beekeepers out, taking prospectors out, not allowing sensible firewood management – somehow the government has allowed the concept that firewood collection is the work of the devil, bearing in mind that firewood reserves and areas that have been used for low-scale firewood production across Victoria have existed for well over 100 years in areas, providing what is one of nature’s great gifts of a renewable energy source, being firewood, and allowing it to regenerate and be well managed. The government has failed in its duty of practical, sensible management of a forest resource. When I go around my electorate and see now closed up firewood reserves, without some sort of management they become huge bushfire risks.

The irony is we have spent time this week talking about the gift that our First Peoples gave to the state of Victoria in woodland management, and if anyone here has attended cultural burning exercises or cultural land management exercises, which I have on many occasions, they would understand that avoiding mass, big, high-temperature fires by keeping the ground clear and free is a natural part of managing our landscape. On one hand we talk about the benefits of it, but on the other hand we bring

in pieces of legislation like this that do not allow us to continue to manage land area in a way that is better for the long-term benefit of the land but also delivers a benefit to the community.

Another issue that the people of Polwarth will be very interested in is the mention of GORCAPA, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, in this piece of legislation. In the briefings and so on that the government has provided on this, this provides for handing over more assets to an already cash-strapped, cash-poor agency. We have Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action parks facilities in Barwon Downs, we have them in Apollo Bay, we have them in Port Campbell and in other communities – what level of these are being handed over? We were not able to get an answer on that, so that is an outstanding question that still exists. Will these assets transfer from the broader state budget and the broader control of the state, or are they all going to be handballed to this cash-strapped entity that is being handballed all the responsibility of a very diverse and complex environmental scenario to manage? That is something we do not know.

I have raised many times in this house the absolute dire state of national and state assets along the Great Ocean Road and in the Otways. At the moment in the tally of popular visitor spots there are more closed than there are open. Cape Otway lighthouse is closed indefinitely. Gibson Steps is closed, the Arch is closed and Loch Ard Gorge is closed – all indefinitely closed. We will never know when they are going to open, there are no funds available to open them and now the state is putting upon this authority even more assets to manage, more costs and no understanding of who is going to pick up the bill. Will there be money in this legislation transferred across for the local management and organisation of these authorities? That is of huge concern to my local community, because we have seen in recent times huge culling of staff in fisheries, culling of staff in forest fire management and a lot of pressure put on the local workforce. The assets are still there. Are we going to have assets that need to be maintained that will not be generating revenue?

In this legislation I have highlighted today an area that I know my own community will be very disappointed in, and that is the concept that this government continues its narrative that we cannot as regional and rural communities live harmoniously with our natural environment. That is the lie in this. We want and expect a good government to put guardrails around how we behave and interact in these places, but it does not make sense to exclude human interactions from these spaces. Often there can be a mutual benefit for both the local communities and the environment when they work well together. My plea to the government is that before adding even more land to the national park estate, which is what this legislation does, we really have to have a good hard look at the land that we are managing now, what the economic model is for it and how we plan to manage it. After locking a forest or a state park up and turning it into a national park 200 years after we have introduced no end of vermin, weeds and other pests and interferences into that environment, it has to be actively managed. Locking up a forest, putting a ring fence around it and saying ‘We will no longer do these things’ does not stop the spread of diseases and plants and animals that cause damage to that environment. We know the state does not have the resources to manage it.

We also know with literally millions more people in the environment today than there were 200 years ago that the chance for fire is much greater. Just the mere existence of humanity in a landscape means the risk of fire is higher. The locked-up protected estate in our state of Victoria now is around 18 to 20 per cent of the landscape. That is a big percentage, and that big percentage of landscape is where a lot of people live and a lot of communities exist. We all know only too well how dangerous fire in the landscape can be, and it is a lot more dangerous when we do not have the equipment, we do not have the skills and we do not have the expertise. Worst of all, what we are increasingly doing is increasing the fire load in those communities. It is a huge responsibility. It is disappointing that the government has again focused on a very shrill, amateurish approach to how we need to continue to look after and maintain our landscape into the future. We will be opposing this bill, and we are opposing it because it is just setting the wrong tone for how we can best manage our natural estate into the future.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (16:09): When I was first elected to this Parliament I came with some priorities, and one of those priorities was to be a voice for real action on climate change and

to work within a government to advance our efforts towards clean energy, a circular economy and, critically, strong environmental protections. It is something felt deeply within my community in the inner north and an ethos I have grown up with as a lifetime local. We are a community with a long history of environmental activism, whether that is the likes of Sue Course and other residents who in the 1970s lobbied to protect and renew the Darebin Parklands, saving it from becoming a freeway and factories, or the fierce resolve of Darebin Climate Action Now, who have engaged with me over the years on projects such as all-electric homes and the push to end native forest logging. It is also in the quiet diligence of our many stationeers along the rail lines, our Merri and Darebin friends that volunteer to protect our waterways, and in the small but mighty resident groups that have achieved everything from establishing CERES environmental park in the 1980s to saving two huge sugar gum trees on Ballantyne Street just a few weeks back. Importantly, it is also deeply enmeshed in the custodianship of First Peoples, whose care for the lands and waters for tens of thousands of years is seen in the scar trees and sacred sites along the small creeks and mighty Birrarung and echoed in storylines that tell of creation and seasonal cycles, sharing the resources of the land and giving back. Ours is a community that knows and understands the moral obligation and the existential imperative to safeguard our natural environment for the future.

In Victoria I am proud to be part of a Labor government that is at the forefront of that work. I will never forget the day we ended all native forest logging in this state, the biggest environmental protection policy in Victoria's history, a landmark decision to protect over 1.8 million hectares of forest into the future to restore critical habitat for native plants and animals, to keep our air clean and lock away millions of tonnes of carbon in healthy forests – the kind of deeply meaningful, tangible, progressive change that makes me proud to be a Labor member of Parliament.

Ending native forest logging – our Labor government achieved that despite huge resistance from those opposite. The bill before us today builds on that legacy and that determination to make real and lasting changes to the way we nurture our environment and the future. I say nurture because at the heart of this bill is care – care for country, care for climate, care for communities. Victoria is blessed with natural beauty, rugged coasts, deep forests, wild mountain ranges and native grasslands. They are important to us for so many reasons and in so many different ways. Protecting them is vital, and it is why we already have a world-class system of national, state and other parks, which covers a vast 3.5 million hectares of our state. Together they allow for conservation and recreation in the understanding that caring for nature also means having the opportunity to connect with it, relish it, feel its magic.

The bill will create three new national parks at Wombat–Lerderderg, Pyrenees and Mount Buangor. It will establish new conservation parks at Cobaw and Hepburn. It will permanently protect Mirboo North as a conservation park, add Wellsford forest to Bendigo Regional Park, expand the Wimmera heritage river and create Wandong Regional Park. Importantly, it will modernise public land legislation and support the granting of Aboriginal title pathways, recognising the close connection with traditional owners, and in a week in which we are passing treaty legislation in this house, that is particularly significant. Together, the new central west parks will permanently protect habitats, animals, plants and fungi. They will protect the headwaters where six major rivers begin their journey and let forests and wildlife heal after years of damage. There will be safe opportunities for respite and recreation for both locals and visitors. People will enjoy bushwalking, picnicking, camping, birding, fishing, mountain biking, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding and so much more in these new parks.

This is a lasting legacy for future generations. Local communities and nature conservationists have spent decades advocating for better protection of these landscapes, and rightly so. These landscapes are habitat to more than 380 rare and threatened species, from the powerful owl and the southern greater glider to the Mount Cole grevillea and the Pyrenees gum. They are the kinds of places that also restore people, close enough for inner-city families like those in Northcote to reach on a weekend, rich enough for a lifetime of visits. Our parks welcome around 90 million visitors each year, contributing

significantly to local and regional economies and showing that protection and public enjoyment belong together not at odds.

This bill will add ecosystems that have been missing, making the network of parks more representative, more connected and more resilient in a warming climate. We are plain about our purpose: protect what is irreplaceable, invite people in and provide ongoing care for those precious landscapes. That ongoing care is important – it means we will keep investing in things like track fixing, signage, weed control, revegetation and improving the ecological condition of parks.

My community is one of the most environmentally conscious in the state. We may be a far way from Wombat forest, but on any given weekend you will find Northcote people there walking, camping, birding and teaching their kids what an old tree looks like and how a creek sounds after rain. They expect their government to protect these places and to keep them welcoming for walkers, families, schools and citizen scientists. And at home we practise what we preach. Last Thursday I joined the Merri Creek Management Committee and Friends of Bracken Creek for one of their regular community clean-ups – 14 volunteers, 40 kilograms of litter and 1874 pieces of rubbish removed from a single stretch of urban waterway in a couple of hours. Stewardship is not a slogan; it is done with gloves on and results measured.

We have been listening too. Recently I had the opportunity, along with the member for Preston and the member for Pascoe Vale, to sit down with Jo Hopkins from the Wilderness Society and Matt Ruchel from the Victorian National Parks Association. Earlier in the year I met with Luke Chamberlain from Environmental Justice Australia and touched in again with Professor Ann Sanson, Karen Large and Suzie Hoban at Darebin Climate Action Now. These organisations have been in the conservation space for decades and bring a wealth of experience and expertise to conversations about how we can further embed our commitments to protect Victoria's environmental assets. It has been incredibly valuable to have that sounding-board with them and to elevate their voices within government. To see the VNPA call this legislation 'a historic win for nature, climate, and community' after years of advocacy is really moving. Our conversations have been wideranging, but there are a couple of things that they have put on our radar, including a desire to see stronger controls around private land logging, more independent oversight and regulation of fire management operations in forests, more explicit emphasis in legislation about the intended uses of public land and movement towards more forest protection in parts of the east. I hope to have more conversations with the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Planning on those matters in the future.

Fundamentally what we are doing here today is acting decisively to leave a healthy, thriving world as a gift for our children, our grandchildren and the planet. It is something I am immensely proud to champion. I know that there will be those in the chamber who resist that kind of reform, standing up that false dichotomy between conservation and recreation. It is a weak and lazy argument. National parks create custodians, because when you let people love a place, they look after the place that they love.

I know that the Greens will also have something to say today – probably one of those deriding-Labor speeches saying we are not going far enough. It is a tired trope from a decaying party that has never had to do the hard incremental work that real progress demands. It is a cynical campaign tool with a set formula: grandstand your aspiration, then oppose or deride each practical step that enables the next to get there. But progress is not posture; it is a sequence, navigated at every point through listening, learning and making choices that bring more people with us along the way. Only Labor does that real reform, embedding lasting energy and environmental policy in a way that does not leave people behind or alienate communities. I commend the bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:19): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Northcote, who has gone back to her old habits of using her time in this chamber to attack the Greens, a party that a lot of people in her electorate actually vote for. I think they expect her to bring some kind of semblance

of dignity to this chamber rather than attacking the party that is standing up for the environment. Let us move on.

I rise to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. The Greens will be supporting this bill, which will at long last create the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks. Communities have been waiting for these parks for years, and really this is a victory for them, for everyone who was involved in the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council’s (VEAC) central west investigation and for all the community members, environmentalists, traditional owners and others who have campaigned for these national parks for years and years. The bill also fulfils several other outstanding commitments from the government’s response to the inquiry in 2021 – it has been a few years coming – including but not limited to creating the Cobaw, Hepburn and Mirboo North conservation parks, adding land to the Bendigo Regional Park, extending the Wimmera River Heritage Area Park and revoking several native game sanctuaries in central west Victoria. We also support the other changes in the bill, like changing the name of the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area to Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area and updating plans to support the granting of Aboriginal title over several parks – particularly important in a week like this week, when we are voting on treaty.

The Greens absolutely, as I have said, support these new national parks. They are very important parts of our state and parts of our state that deserve to be protected. As I mentioned, the disappointing thing is that these parks were promised years and years ago, and the government has dragged its feet to get to this point. I have had so many emails, phone calls and meetings from environmental groups and community members just despairing and saying, ‘When are these coming? Are they coming? Is this going to be a broken promise? When will we see these new national parks?’ And they are very pleased to see this legislation come, if a little bit despairing at how late it has come.

There is an element of this bill that does cause concern. Not many people probably canvassed this too much in their speeches – a few did – but in this bill Labor has given a small but vocal and influential group of hunters and shooters the permission to expand recreational deer hunting in our national parks, and it has tacked this onto the bill really at the 11th hour. Under this bill our national parks, the three that are being created in this bill as well as the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks in East Gippsland will be opened up to recreational deer hunting for fun. I want to take some time in this chamber to explain why it is a bad idea and why the Greens do not support it.

Feral deer are a huge problem. Their numbers since the end of deer farming in the 1980s have been increasing rapidly in Victoria, and they are now one of our biggest environmental threats. The Invasive Species Council estimates that the current population is over 1 million and rising. A few years ago, when this was becoming a real and present danger, environment groups, local people and the Greens raised concerns with the state Labor government and with the minister. We asked and we begged them to do more to control feral deer while the numbers were still low enough that we could make a significant difference. But they acted far too late, and now really the problem is almost out of control and very, very difficult to rein in. Once an invasive species gets to a certain threshold it is very, very difficult to reverse the damage, and that is a tragedy in our state of huge, huge scale.

I am sure that so many people in this chamber right across the political spectrum have seen the damage that deer are doing to our state. Environmentally, the deer are trampling native vegetation, reducing food sources for native animals, eroding bushland through trampling and destruction of delicate ecological communities, wallowing in wetlands and waterways and creating a huge environmental disaster. Feral deer are also a safety problem, with more deer on our roads causing more traffic accidents. And deer are even turning up on primary school playgrounds and even on the streets of the inner city – running into people’s homes just a couple of kilometres down from Parliament House. So they are a huge public safety and environmental risk.

The thing is that Labor will try and convince people that recreational deer hunting helps to do something about this problem, but the research that we have read and the evidence show that actually

that is not the case; in fact it can lead to a worsening of the problem, the opposite of fixing the problem. So rather than this tacking on of recreational deer hunting to this bill being something to help the environment, it is actually a plan for Labor to appease their friends in the hunting and shooting lobby. That is a small group of people, but they are vocal and they are powerful within the Labor Party. And it is bad news for the environment, bad news for animal welfare and bad news for public safety.

Research across Australia has shown that recreational hunting does not help to curtail deer numbers. Recreational deer hunters also typically do not remove enough deer. It is an argument that perhaps on its surface takes a little bit to understand. But what we need to do when we are talking about the environment is look at evidence. I think the most important thing that we should be doing in this place is genuinely looking at evidence, not just what might make intuitive sense. The thing is that recreational deer hunters typically do not remove enough deer to have a meaningful impact on deer numbers and lead to a shrinking of the population. You need to remove over 35 per cent of a population every year to actually lead to an ongoing decrease in that population. With recreational deer hunting they do not remove enough deer, and that means that the number of deer born each year far outweighs the number removed by recreational hunting. That is for a few reasons. Hunting occurs generally during the day, when deer are less active, because people are doing it for fun, and so they are out with their friends during the day. Recreational hunters usually stick to areas that are easily accessed, so areas near roads or near tracks. Deer learn to avoid those areas. Recreational deer hunters have also been shown to be much less accurate than professional animal controllers, which means they often miss their target, leaving deer to run off into the forest wounded but not dead, which is also very cruel and an animal welfare concern.

The other issue is that recreational deer hunters actually have a very different objective and incentive to those who might want to reduce deer populations. Recreational hunters are doing this for fun, and that means that their incentive is more along the lines of maintaining deer numbers so that they can come back tomorrow, the next day and the next year and keep enjoying their deer hunting sport. In fact research shows that recreational deer hunters will often selectively hunt deer, keeping breeding females – the does – alive and only targeting the stags. That actually helps populations increase so that they have a continuous population of deer to hunt in the future. Research has also shown that hunters have been known to move feral species like deer – and we have also seen this with pigs – into new areas where they are not currently, to give them more areas to hunt in. If it is a national park that they particularly like, there might be an incentive to move feral species into that area. This makes the problem a lot worse by increasing the distribution of feral animals across the state.

And this is just talking about the environmental impact. What about the public safety impact? For all the safety mechanisms that are put in place during recreational deer hunting, bullet holes have been found lodged in trees close to people's homes. Bullets have also been found in people's bedroom walls. When I had a briefing on this legislation by the minister's office and the department, I was interested in the evidence. I said in my maiden speech that I would be guided by the evidence. If there is evidence, change my mind. I am happy to read it. I asked the department and the minister's office for any evidence they had that recreational deer hunting helps to bring down deer numbers and, if they sent it to me, I would have a read. Nothing was ever sent through. Not surprisingly, that email never arrived in my inbox, and we did not receive that evidence, because I do not believe this decision by the state Labor government is based on evidence. I believe it is based on politics. It is based on what will keep people in the hunting and shooting lobby happy. Screw the evidence. Screw the environment.

In the same briefing I also raised the question of public safety. When you go into a national park in Victoria, you expect that you will be able to enjoy nature. Because firearms are usually banned in national parks, you expect that when you are bushwalking, birding or doing any of the other activities that Labor members talked about people enjoying in our national parks you will not be shot at. I asked the government how they will ensure people are safe while they are camping, hiking, enjoying nature or riding their bikes with deer hunters in those exact same areas. We know that deer hunters are usually going to stick to areas that they can also access with tracks and roads. For example, will there be extra

signage or alerts? No, we did not hear any of that. All they could say was, 'We think deer hunters will stay away from busy hiking trails.' I have to say that is pretty cold comfort, especially for the people who found bullets lodged in their bedroom walls in the Yarra Ranges. The thing is that our national parks are supposed to be enjoyed by everybody. Parks Victoria used to have the slogan 'Healthy parks, healthy people'. They are places that, as the member for Northcote said, people go into. If you let people go and love a place, then they will protect that place. They are public land, and public land belongs to all of us. But by allowing recreational hunters with not a huge amount of training but with high-powered firearms into our national parks you are preventing other people from going into that same area and enjoying it, because guns and hunting make the park unsafe for other people to enjoy. The two uses are not necessarily compatible, and I just do not think it is fair for a large group of people to essentially be prevented from safely enjoying nature to appease a small group of hunters and shooters who are influential within the Labor Party for political reasons.

It might be possible, if you put aside animal welfare and safety issues – and I do not think we should – for a very targeted recreational amateur deer hunting program to support a broad deer control program in very specific areas. But that is not what is happening here. Instead Labor is making a political decision that a small group of influential people want to hunt so let us open our national parks regardless of the evidence. The reason that we are quite animated about this is because it is not the first time that Jacinta Allan has prioritised the hunters and the shooters over good environmental policy and over nature.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! Just a reminder for the member to use correct titles.

Ellen SANDELL: It is not the first time the Premier has prioritised the politics of hunting and shooting over nature protection. We all remember that the government was about to ban duck shooting in Victoria, as it has been banned in many other jurisdictions across this country, and then the Premier made a political decision and decided to intervene and say they are not going to ban duck shooting. Labor likes duck shooting so we will continue duck shooting in Victoria. The government has also pulled the remit from the Great Outdoors Taskforce. It had a remit to investigate new parks as part of the \$1.5 billion transition away from native forest logging. That remit was revoked, so now it does not have a remit to investigate new parks. The Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos even explicitly rejected a decades-old plan for the Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands while concurrently announcing his plan to expand recreational deer hunting at a forum with a small number of hunters recently, which was all over social media.

I do not think this is what Victorians want. I think Victorians want to protect nature, and it is pretty disappointing that Labor has backtracked on their promise for future national parks. When it announced that it was creating these central west national parks Labor put out a press release and said it will not be creating any new national parks. It is more than a broken promise, it is a betrayal. It is a betrayal of future generations who deserve to see our forests protected for them, for their children and their grandchildren. It is also baffling, because we know that the vast majority of Victorians want more national parks. Redbridge polling in 2024, just last year, found that 80 per cent of Victorians support the creation of new parks. Victoria has some of the most biodiverse, beautiful forests in the world. People absolutely love them. They are a national treasure. They are the most carbon-dense forests in the world, with the tallest flowering plants in the world. If we fully funded our national parks and protected these forests, we would get out and enjoy them, safe in the knowledge that they are protected for future generations, whether that be from loggers or from shooters.

Labor wants the Greens to get up and give them a big pat on the back for finally delivering one of their promises when it comes to national parks, but this really is the bare minimum. It is something that has been promised for many, many years. You cannot just promise national parks and in the same media release close the door on any future national parks. That is not a good, evidence-based environment policy. It is not thinking with the future in mind. It was a huge win to end industrial-scale logging in Victoria, and it is something the community is very proud of. People still talk to me about what an

incredible win that was, that our forests can finally be protected from logging. But it did not happen because Labor just woke up one day and decided; it came after a long, long fight and after decades and decades when so many of our forests were destroyed. Beautiful, irreplaceable areas have been destroyed, and people still contact me distressed that logging is still happening by stealth in some areas of Victoria in our incredibly precious forests.

We have just seen over the last few weeks that the damage done in Victoria is not quite over. We learned last month that Japanese timber company Opal, or Australian Paper, is suing the Victorian government for over \$400 million simply because they were not able to destroy the little remaining native forest left in Victoria. Logging companies could have transitioned to plantation timber and recycled paper decades ago, but they wanted to keep getting this free resource from Victoria and destroying native forests for as long as they could to make as much profit as they could. And now that is over – finally, the ride is over – they are looking for even more handouts from the Victorian taxpayer. The thing is they are only able to proceed with this case because there is a dodgy piece of legislation still on Victoria's books, the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996, a gift from the Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett in 1996 to the native timber industry. The wood pulp agreement still exists here in Victoria. It should have been torn up years ago. We, the Greens, have a private members bill right now to do just that. We first introduced it in 2018. There is nothing stopping Labor picking that up and passing that legislation next week. Labor has been very reluctant to get rid of that, and now look at what has happened: the state is open to lawsuits from logging companies because we are not letting them log our incredibly precious resource for free.

We know there are other loopholes in the end of native forest logging. There are forest produce licences, which any government in the future could simply revive for timber harvesting. There is the possibility of so-called salvage logging or bushfire prevention works that are being co-opted by timber companies for profit and greatly damaging our native forests.

A member interjected.

Ellen SANDELL: It is true. I have seen it for myself. I have seen the evidence. I have seen the evidence from the Australian National University that shows that salvage logging and excessive bushfire works are actually being used as a smokescreen for commercial logging and causing huge devastation and actually making our forests more fire-prone. That is the thing. They are making our forests more fire-prone by opening them up, and I do not think any of us want our forests to be more fire-prone, given what is happening with climate change.

The Greens, as I mentioned at the start, will support the creation of new national parks in this bill, but given the issues that I have canvassed, we will be putting forward some commonsense amendments in the upper house to close some of the native logging loopholes and to stop the dangerous deer hunting that are included in the legislation.

Finally, during this historic week, we acknowledge all the traditional owners who were involved during the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's consultation process prior to this bill being introduced to Parliament. While much of their feedback has been adopted in this bill and process, many did stress that there needs to be stronger and more collaborative engagement in the future. As we know and as others have said, First Nations Victorians have managed this land for tens of thousands of years. They have knowledge that is too often ignored or put to the side, and we would do well to listen and learn from them about how to care for country and ensure that traditional owners have the power over their land that rightfully belongs to them.

Currently, under our National Parks Act 1975, as I understand it, only Parks Victoria can be designated as the land manager for a protected area. We understand that there is legislation being brought to Parliament soon, hopefully, to change the law so that traditional owners and First Nations custodians can be designated as land managers of protected areas. We look forward to seeing that legislation as soon as possible to help move forward the fight for land rights and self-determination in this country.

We hope that in the creation of this legislation the government will meaningfully engage with and listen to traditional owners about how land should be protected and managed and that, in line with VEAC's recommendations, adequate resources are provided to traditional owners to be land managers of new parks and reserves in Victoria.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (16:39): I rise to support the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. In doing so I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Environment and the Parliamentary Secretary for Outdoor Recreation and member for Kororoit as well for their and their teams' work in bringing this bill to the chamber. Victoria is home to diverse landscapes, from native grasslands to dense forests, from wild mountain ranges to rugged coastlines. They harbour our native species and are havens to Victorians from all walks of life. We have a responsibility to care for these landscapes to make sure that Victorians can experience and enjoy them in the ways that they love to.

That is why we have continued to work and progress reforms, investments and initiatives that have all been designed to better protect, preserve and secure the future of our natural environment, landscapes, waterways and of course forests for current and future generations to continue to enjoy. That is why we have continued to take, first and foremost, real action on climate change. We have implemented the nation's leading carbon reduction and renewable energy targets. We have brought back the State Electricity Commission, the SEC, to oversee and drive our efforts to support the return of public-owned and zero-emissions energy. We have introduced *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037* strategy, which sets out our plan to stop the decline of native animals and plants. We have developed our first ever adaptation action plan to coordinate a whole-of-government plan to embed climate resilience into every sector. We have introduced the state's first container deposit scheme, the CDS, to drive recycling efforts and help keep our natural environment and local communities free from litter, and we have supported many local environmental sustainability initiatives, including via some of our shared interests here, Acting Speaker Walters: the Moonee Ponds Creek, the Merri Creek, the Edgars Creek and the Westbreen Creek, which are beacons and the lungs of the northern suburbs corridor. But it is also of course through the historic steps that we have taken to end old-growth forest logging and, more recently, to end native forest logging and harvesting. The biggest environmental policies in our state's history, when combined, are helping take real action to protect our state's environment and future sustainability. That is why we are bringing this bill to the chamber.

National parks are not only about caring for important natural and cultural values, they are also about providing opportunities for the public's enjoyment, recreation and education. Whether it is walking, hiking, picnicking, nature observation, fishing, camping, a bit of four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain bike riding and more, the reality is more and more people are continuing to enjoy and experience our wonderful outdoors, particularly people from Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West. In 2022–23 alone national parks and other parks and reserves in Victoria welcomed 90 million visitors, contributing significantly to local and regional economies in terms of jobs, small business and other outcomes. Along with these measures in the bill, the recent release of Victoria's new tourism plan 2025–2030 and *Experience Victoria 2033* also highlights the important role our national parks and natural outdoor spaces can continue to play to drive further economic and visitation growth for these communities. The visitor economy of course is growing, and visitors are no longer solely drawn to flagship attractions here in the Melbourne CBD but increasingly, particularly those coming from the Asia-Pacific and China, are looking for those authentic heritage, cultural and environmental and nature-based tourism experiences. As I said, whether it is through First Nations cultural experiences, Victoria's incredible natural outdoor spaces, our one-of-a-kind biodiversity, our unique early pioneering and gold rush period or our national parks, our outdoor offerings are truly well positioned to all be leveraged for further preservation and visitation.

That is why, following the cessation of old-growth forest and native forest logging, we moved to establish the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council reference group and Great Outdoors

Taskforce to consult statewide and with local communities about the future conservation and recreational tourism opportunities across these 1.8 million hectares of Victorian native forests, home to 380 rare or threatened species which rely on government protection for their future. The government's 21 responses to VEAC's report committed to creating three new national parks, two conservation parks and seven new or expanded regional parks, as well as retaining areas of state forest and creating several nature and other smaller reserves. The Minister for Environment at the time noted the wideranging demands on this public land to not only provide safe homes for our threatened species but also provide more opportunities for Victorians to recreate and connect with nature and their communities. This bill reflects that need for balance and responds to the needs of Victoria's general community and our flora and our fauna.

That is why this bill provides for a number of new national, state, regional and conservation parks and reservations, including the creation of the Mount Buangor National Park, Pyrenees National Park and Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. It will create a new Cobaw Conservation Park and Hepburn Conservation Park and add hectares to Bendigo Regional Park and the Wimmera Heritage River area. It will create the Mirboo North Conservation Park in West Gippsland. It will add 230 hectares to the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area – now the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area – and excise some areas around the Alpine National Park and Dandenong Ranges National Park. It will add land to Brisbane Ranges National Park, Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and Yallock-Bulluk Marine Coastal Park. It will create Wandong Regional Park – 850 hectares – and update plans for a number of other parks, including Baw Baw and Kinglake national parks, Avon Wilderness Park, Cathedral Range State Park and much more. It will make several improvements to the Great Ocean Road area and also Princes Park and the St Kilda Marina and make a number of other miscellaneous changes.

Through the creation of these new national parks and reservations in this bill, in combination with the cessation of large-scale native timber harvesting in Victoria, this government is delivering landmark protections for precious biodiversity and endangered species, providing a lasting legacy for future generations. This largely completes the establishment of Victoria's outstanding system of national parks. The bill will ensure a large part of the most important habitat of 380 rare and threatened species that live in these areas is better cared for. Some of these species include Mount Cole grevilleas, southern greater gliders, brush-tailed phascogales, mountain skinks and powerful owls.

In supporting this landmark bill I would like to acknowledge the many stakeholders and passionate locals I have engaged with over many months as it has progressed and developed, including my colleagues the members for Preston and Northcote, who I have advocated together with on these matters. I would like to acknowledge Kelvin Thomson, former federal member for Wills and Pascoe Vale, for his passion in this space. I used to work for him, and his passion for the environment, for a nature base and open space and our forests is absolutely contagious. In his honour, in many ways, I am advocating very strongly for this bill and ongoing reforms as we progress. I also acknowledge Matt Ruchel of the Victorian National Parks Association; Jo Hopkins from the Wilderness Society; Luke Chamberlain from Environmental Justice Australia; and the many, many locals who have contacted me, including Maggie Cowling, Nina Killham, Stirling Edwards, Graeme Lechte and so many others I have spoken with, met with and doorknocked with since being elected. Maggie Cowling wrote me a really beautiful email on behalf of the local Australian Conservation Foundation community and Wilderness Society members. It states:

As your constituents, we're relieved and grateful to see the three National Parks legislation finally brought before Parliament. We also deeply acknowledge the work that has got it to this point.

Your advocacy and the work of citizen scientists, local volunteers on the ground, traditional owners, the campaigners from Victorian National Parks Association, Wombat Forestcare, Wellsford Forest Alliance, Wombat Action Group, The Wilderness Society our local ACF community ... and other nature groups, all reflect just how much we Victorians love our natural place and want them protected.

We overwhelmingly love our National Parks. We visit them, use them for recreation and treasure them as havens in our increasingly urbanised world. We hugely support the creation of more of them. Locals who

walk with Victorian Mountain Tramping Club and other recreational groups have actively campaigned for these parks that are under two hours from our homes.

Of course, they love us back: they clean our water, benefit our health, store carbon, supply pollinators for agriculture, provide tourism for local communities and help reduce flood damage. And they are important in their own right as precious ecosystems protecting rare and threatened plants, fungi and animals like Powerful Owls and Greater Gliders.

The new parks will give sections of Victoria a chance to heal after years of damage. The result will be to protect the headwaters of six major rivers, keep out damaging industries like mining and logging, help Traditional Owners to care for Country, keep clean drinking water flowing to farms and towns, and provide us with beautiful places to explore, camp, hike and restore our own health through connection with nature.

We thank the Environment Minister –

Mr Dimopoulos –

... and hope the next steps of securing other VEAC recommendations will soon eventuate with a new Public Land Act.

We hope protections will be extended to our precious Central Highlands and East Gippsland native forests and that this will mark an end to native forest destruction throughout Victoria.

The bill does strike the right balance between enhancing protections afforded to some significant areas of Victoria's natural and cultural heritage and providing opportunities for tourism, recreation and connection.

I would like to go to those points that were made earlier by the Greens, if I can just rebut some of those points. No matter what Labor does when it comes to the environment, they are never happy. It does not go far enough and it is not done soon enough. All the Greens are good at when it comes to the environment is making and breaking fake promises. They cannot deliver anything on the environment or any other policy area for that matter, because they are not in government and they do not seek to be in government. It is only governments – Labor governments – that make those decisions. They always claim the moral high ground while simultaneously climbing that mountain of hypocrisy. Look no further than what is happening in Canberra at the moment. The federal Labor government is trying to introduce the first ever national environmental protection authority – EPA – which the Greens, since before the federal election, have been opposing and resisting and campaigning against.

It is the same with this bill here. These are practical reforms to expand our national forests across the state for future generations to protect, and they are still not happy. In the name of my local activists, I commend the bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:49): I rise today to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025, not to question the value of our natural environment but to challenge the illusion that simply drawing new lines on a map is the same as protecting it. This bill promises new national and conservation parks across central-west Victoria. It speaks of legacy, of biodiversity and of recreation. What it does not speak of and what it fails to address is the hard, unglamorous work of maintenance – of weed control, of fire mitigation and of hard work on the ground. Victoria's bushlands have suffered extensive damage from bushfires over the past two decades, with millions of hectares burnt, ecosystems degraded and in 2009 the devastating loss of 182 lives, with thousands of dwellings and structures having been lost. We have had devastating fires recently in my electorate and locally in the Grampians and Budj Bim national parks.

Effective land and fire management has deteriorated under Labor. Analysis of Parks Victoria's annual reports over the last 10 years shows a sharp decline in the capacity to manage park estates. Despite a 20 per cent increase in land under management by the government, operational funding – cut by the government – has fallen by 35 per cent. Ranger numbers have decreased, dropping 28 per cent in the past year alone. Our local park rangers work tirelessly to preserve the beauty of our parks. But it is a struggle that they cannot do alone without support, and they are not getting it. They are clearing trails, protecting wildlife and educating visitors. Their dedication is unwavering, and it certainly does not go

unnoticed. Parks Victoria has become increasingly top heavy whilst on-the-ground capacity has withered.

This decline has led to worsening conditions across the park network, particularly in three critical areas. Fuel load management – a reduction in capacity for planned burns and mechanical fuel reduction increases the risk of catastrophic bushfires, and the evidence is clear that the government is failing. Invasive weeds – blackberries, serrated tussocks and other noxious weeds are spreading rapidly in undermanaged parks, and these species outcompete native flora, degrade habitat and increase fire risk by creating dense flammable understoreys. I will talk to you about a specific example in a moment in South-West Coast. And pest animals such as foxes and rabbits are going rampant. Deer and pigs are causing widespread environmental damage. Without adequate control these pests destroy native vegetation and threaten biodiversity, and they undermine the ecological objectives of the parks themselves. Bushfires, invasive weeds and pest animals do not recognise a change in land tenure.

We have seen what happens when governments focus on park creation without committing to long-term care, and look no further than the Cobboboonee National Park in South-West Coast. This was created under Steve Bracks. At the time it was hailed as a triumph for conservation. In fact member for Western Victoria Gayle Tierney said at the time that it would permanently protect what is a very beautiful area. Well, not so much. Because of poor maintenance there is an infestation of sweet pittosporum. It is a native vegetation species, but it is not native to the Cobboboonee, so what has happened is it is creating a monoculture and absolutely threatening the biodiversity of that forest. It is a woody weed that is out of control.

Locals were so concerned that they formed the South West Woody Weeds Action Team – volunteers who work hard, come together once a week, beg for funds from government and try to make a difference to get something to occur before the forest is destroyed. This small group of dedicated volunteers are doing their best to save the forest, which has been smothered by sweet pittosporum, but without proper government support their efforts are like trying to knit a jumper faster than someone else is unravelling it. Every stitch of progress they make is undone before they can finish the next row. It is not a lack of effort by the volunteers. It is a lack of backing by the Victorian Labor government, who create national parks – and this is the example – but then walk away. They do not do what is needed to care for it and maintain it. The locals see what is being lost, and they will act. They have come together, but they simply cannot keep up with the threads being pulled so loose. Responsibility for environmental protections and infrastructure and maintenance is what we do not see once these areas are protected. This is the perfect example, and as a result, native flora are being choked out. The very biodiversity we seek to protect is under threat not from development but from neglect.

The government's Glenelg Eden project, which began in 2008, was designed to combat weed infestations across 90,000 hectares of public land. However, more than 87 unique weed species have invaded the region, threatening native biodiversity and highlighting the consequences of insufficient long-term maintenance. This example underscores my point: creating parks is only the beginning. Without sustained investment in upkeep and ecological management, conservation efforts falter.

In another area of the Cobboboonee the Great South West Walk is another great treasure that is an area of neglect. This walk stretches 262 kilometres through some of the most breathtaking landscapes, and this loop showcases everything that makes South-West Coast extraordinary. From rugged coastal cliffs and remote beaches to majestic river gorges and tranquil forests, it is a walk that speaks to the soul of our region. It is not just the scenery, though; it is the story behind the Great South West Walk. It was a trail that was built by Portland High School students, their families and the community back in the 1980s – 40 years ago. I went to the anniversary; it must have been last year or the year before. It is cared for by a dedicated group of volunteers who mow, weed, whipper-snip and keep the track thriving. Their passionate and tireless volunteers are called the Friends of the Great South West Walk. Many of them cherish the Cobboboonee National Park and have contacted me numerous times over the last 2½ years because of a modest footbridge called Ralph's Bridge that they built 40 years ago

and have had problems with because a tree fell on it in July 2023, 2½ years ago now. Since then, this beautiful section of the trail has remained closed. Why? Bureaucracy.

The volunteers did the right thing, because it is in the national park, and alerted the government to the problem. These are the volunteers, as I said, who are whipper-snipping, mowing, weeding and doing all the work for the government. But the government have said that instead of being able to just get a chainsaw and remove the tree and rebuild the bridge like they did 40 years ago, they had to wait for an environmental assessment. It took eight months for them to remove the tree, and the volunteers had to wait for that to happen. They then had insurance delays and then came more bureaucracy. Now, 2½ years later, despite their cries for common sense, the repairs, they are told, are out of scope for the volunteers to deliver. Remember, they did it 40 years ago themselves and it lasted 40 years – not a bad effort – and a tree fell on it and broke it, so it was not even because of dilapidation.

But Parks Victoria now propose a full replacement requiring heavy equipment to be brought to the site with the bridge intact instead of in parts, with significant disruption and no doubt much damage to the environment – the irony of this decision being made when this is about protecting the environment. This is despite even the independent insurer preferring a simpler repair using the existing timber. The volunteers, who have the capability, skills and commitment, have been ignored and their offer of help to reinstate a bridge has been sidelined by the minister, who should be honouring the spirit of volunteerism that built Ralph's Bridge in the first place. You would not credit this, would you – talk about allowing red tape to stand in the way of something so simple, so meaningful and so achievable. Ralph's Bridge should be opened. This is not about shortcuts; this is about common sense. It is about respecting the legacy of a community-built project and the people who maintain it. It is about reopening a treasured trail that connects people to nature, history and each other. I call on Parks Victoria and the responsible minister to truly listen and let the community do what is common sense.

Creating new parks without a clear, funded and enforceable maintenance strategy is not just irresponsible, it is environmentally dangerous. It risks turning our most treasured landscapes into ecological disasters, like the two examples that I have put forward here, and it betrays the very environmental values we claim to uphold. The real test of conservation is not just how many parks we create but how well we care for them. If we are to expand our parks system, then we must expand our commitment to maintaining it. Otherwise we risk repeating the mistakes of the past, and that is what Labor do very well.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:59): We have the most extraordinary natural, diverse landscapes and native grasslands, dense forests, wild mountain ranges and rugged coastlines. I know as a Victorian growing up how delightful it always was to go into the bush, to see the beautiful birdlife and see the delicate ecosystems that we all treasure and how quickly it can help you to relax and centre and have a much better nexus to land. I am very excited about the expansion of parks and, I should say, the creation of three new national parks, two new conservation parks and seven new or expanded regional parks. This is a great thing for all Victorians and not least for fostering biodiversity in our great state of Victoria.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Eildon has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. She has proposed to omit all of the words after 'That' and replace them with the words that have been circulated. The question is:

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

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

Assembly divided on question:

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

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

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

Assembly divided on question:

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

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.**Read second time.**

Third reading

Motion agreed to.**Read third time.**

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

Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

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

Question agreed to.**Read second time.***Third reading***Motion agreed to.****Read third time.**

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

Statewide Treaty Bill 2025*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

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

Assembly divided on question:

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

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.**Read second time.***Third reading***Motion agreed to.****Read third time.**

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

Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.**Read second time.***Third reading*

The SPEAKER: As the required statement of intention has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of this bill must be passed by an absolute majority.

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.**Read third time.**

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.*Adjournment*

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Princes Highway maintenance

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:14): (1350) The adjournment debate I have this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the immediate repair of copious dangerous potholes on the Princes Highway west of Geelong all the way through to Colac. This road has become a nightmare over recent weeks with the rain that luckily has finally come to western Victoria. I was reminded of this this afternoon when I had two visits from local schoolchildren in my electorate – from St Mary’s in Colac. It was interesting. I know many people in this place have visitors from their local school communities, but I challenge anyone else to have had this. I think I had eight questions from the first cohort and about 10 questions from the second cohort, and every single one of the grade 6s and grade 5s from this group raised roads as the single most important issue and asked me, on behalf of their mums and dads, to push hard to get the road surfaces repaired in our electorate. Quite frankly, when young students are travelling – and many of these kids take buses every day to and from school on country roads – even they are fearful and worried about the state and condition of the roads. They know that they cause accidents. They know that mum and dad, if they hit a pothole, break a rim or burst a tyre, have all sorts of grief. Many of these children will have families that have horse floats and trailers and other contraptions on the backs of their cars. From the back seats of the car, they know that these things are at risk and in danger, and that puts the whole family, the whole car and others – neighbours and communities – at risk.

The road surfacing across Polwarth, as a general rule, is nothing short of a disgrace. This week I also hosted the various south-west council groups – Corangamite shire, Moyne and others – who form the greater area that makes up south-west Victoria, and each one of those delegates, whether it was Mayor Makin from Corangamite or another representative, raised the need for increased road funding. We heard at the lunch break today from the SouthWest Victoria Alliance, when the mayor of Warrnambool Ben Blain again raised the need to see roads on the agenda as a crucial part of ongoing prosperity and need in rural and regional Victoria, and south-west Victoria is by no means an exception. We heard from one of the businesspeople that were speaking to the group. His road repair costs for his modest-sized business are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for extra damage to

cars, trucks, tyres and so on. The roads in western Victoria are in crisis. Minister, I seek your action to at least get the Princes Highway west of Geelong repaired.

Electric bikes and scooters

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:17): (1351) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the status of the Department of Transport and Planning's proposal for the safe regulation of e-bikes and a potential temporary ban on their use on trains due to the safety risks posed by large-capacity lithium ion batteries. E-bikes and e-scooters will remain an important transport mode as we work to build a more connected, accessible and sustainable state, especially in inner suburban areas like Pascoe Vale, Coburg, Brunswick West and of course Northcote. They play an increasingly important role by extending what might be a traditional car, bike or walking trip, flexibly connecting people to places of work, learning, shopping and services. They reduce traffic congestion, car parking pressures and carbon emissions; are a better link to train, tram and bus corridors; and help us continue to support active transport, health, mental health, wellbeing, recreational and cost-of-living outcomes for all. However, following the previous federal Liberal government's decision in 2021 to revoke the importation permit system that forced importers to prove their e-bikes met world-leading European safety standards, that did not have a battery more powerful than 250 watts and did not exceed speeds of 25 kilometres an hour, we have concerningly seen safety undermined for many across our community. Following some recent incidents across Victoria, New South Wales and elsewhere that were associated with the risk of lithium ion battery fires on public transport, DTP is now reviewing community submissions on its proposed temporary ban.

In this respect, and further to previous engagement discussions and representations and correspondence I have shared with the minister's office and the department, I strongly encourage DTP to give the appropriate weight and consideration to the strong feedback that I have continued to receive from many, many locals who have contacted me on this issue, including Merri-bek Bicycle User Group, Faith Hunter, Rob Dunn, Meg A'Hearn, Ken Wilson, Mary Casey, Jesse McNelis, Louise Dumas, Shanouk de Silva, Alison McCormack, Beau Atkinson and so many others. I particularly draw their attention to an email received from Prue Healy, which I believe best encapsulates how many locals feel:

I am solo parent who works full time but struggles to make ends meet. I rely on my ebike to help me make ends meet. I ride to and from work, dropping off my child to school each weekday and anywhere we need to go on weekends.

My family and many of my friends don't live in Melbourne. In order to visit them, I ride with my son to Southern Cross station and board a train to where-ever our destination happens to be: Dandenong, Gippsland, Gisborne, Geelong. Then ride onwards from there ... Without the option of taking my bike on the train, I simply cannot afford to visit these family and friends. I cannot afford the petrol nor the wear and tear to the car. Nor can our environment quite frankly, or my mental health.

Along with this extensive local feedback, I also draw the minister's attention to the pragmatic feedback I have received from the Merri-bek Bicycle User Group, which includes:

Well over 5,000 people a day in Merri-bek use their bicycle to get around and increasingly many of these bicycles are electric.

We suggest that a ban without tackling the broader issues of Federal import regulation and Victoria's ability to regulate e-bikes will not work.

They have put forward several recommendations, a couple of which I just want to draw to the minister's attention, including that DTP engage in a full consultation process with the bike industry, fire services, public transport services, police organisations and users to develop a way to identify safe e-bicycles and measures for e-bikes on trains now and into the future and that then informs a future approach.

Murray Plains electorate police resources

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:20): (1352) My matter is for the Minister for Police. The violence which is out of control in Melbourne is now spilling over into regional Victoria. We have had tragic stabbing murders in Morwell and in Mildura and most recently a close escape for a young hospitality worker in Echuca who was attacked by knife-wielding thugs when he tried to stop them stealing a sign from the business.

Regional Victorians have watched with horror Melbourne's descent into a world of murder and violence, but now the violence is spreading into regional Victoria because offenders know they will be bailed quicker than the police can do the paperwork. When offenders eventually get to court, their sentences do not reflect community expectations, and police see all their work means nought to protect the community because the offenders are back on the street again. I now have people coming into my office telling me their teenage children are abandoning the main streets of our towns because they no longer feel safe. Some have had to run into businesses and wait inside until their family can come and collect them in cars.

Retailers in towns from my electorate have shown me video of people brazenly walking into their shops, filling bags with goods and walking out without paying. Those staff should not have to risk their safety because the government will not give the police the officers they need. Police are frustrated that the light court sentences are not acting as a real deterrent to crime. Can the police minister advise me when all the current vacancies at the police stations in my electorate will be filled?

Thornbury planning

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:21): (1353) My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning. I ask the minister to explain how community feedback on the draft planning maps for the Thornbury train and tram zone will inform the final maps to better reflect the nuance and context of the local area. Thornbury is one of Melbourne's most distinctive inner-north communities, a place where trains, trams, cafes and creativity meet. It is a place people love and a place people want to live. With that growth comes the need for more homes of all kinds – private, affordable, social. Locals understand this, and I have heard from many who want to see more housing options, particularly for younger people and families wanting to settle down. Importantly, residents want these homes delivered gradually and through sensitive planning that augments what makes Thornbury special. It has been encouraging to hear from locals who are thinking about how we plan for housing and growth in a way that supports affordability, sustainability and livability.

Right now, through the consultation, people are talking about the opportunity to deliver real benefits to our neighbourhood, including more investment in our transport network and open spaces. They are speaking about the opportunity to support High Street as a vibrant business precinct and to encourage more trade on St Georges Road and the opportunity to give more people secure homes. But residents are also concerned that the current drafts are not sensitive enough to the current pressure points and future needs of the area. They want to see more street-by-street analysis that recognises the differences in our microneighbourhoods. As a lifetime local in the inner north these nuances are obvious to me, but they may not be to planners, and that is where community voice is so critical in getting this right. That is the intent of this phase of consultation. The maps have been released in draft to ensure local knowledge can refine boundaries, heights and safeguards before anything is made final next year.

Residents have already raised thoughtful feedback about height transitions, catchment boundaries, heritage, public spaces, housing variety and design quality. They have provided insight on important sites, how we use the area and what we want to see in the future, and I say future because sometimes that is lost in the conversation. This is not a development plan but rather a planning amendment – that means it gives parameters around future planning applications rather than proposing development. The intent is to enable gradual growth over decades close to transport and services so as to avoid urban sprawl, which has serious environmental, agricultural and social costs.

We know this, and we know Thornbury can welcome more homes. It is why, as the member for Northcote, I have been working to draw tangible investment into our suburbs and grow our services for the future. That means major upgrades at Preston South Primary, Thornbury Primary, Thornbury High and Penders Park. It means works at Merri kinder, Raleigh Street kinder, Thornbury kinder and a new Darebin Creek kinder. It means planning for accessible tram stops on High Street and expanding the Austin Hospital emergency department, a new distress support service and plans for a new early parenting centre.

Thornbury is a sought-after destination. For better or worse there has been a lot of ad hoc development already, so we know there are benefits to a cohesive plan. What we ask for now is that community insights shape refinements to ensure that the final planning controls genuinely balance our housing need with our local identity. I look forward to hearing from the minister on this.

Hawthorn electorate housing

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:25): (1354) My action is for the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is that the minister meet with my local residents to discuss the proposed activity centres for Hawthorn, Glenferrie and Auburn, which will see in the case of Hawthorn 16 storeys or more, in the case of Glenferrie 12 storeys or more and in the case of Auburn 16 storeys or more. I say 'or more' because under this planning system, as it is evolving under this government, there are no integrity safeguards anymore. This government will do whatever deals it likes behind closed doors, whether it is the public interest uplift scheme, which it has buried in the amendments, or its development facilitation program, which has already seen many thousands of apartments be approved without any proper scrutiny or oversight.

On Monday night I held a forum in my electorate at Glenferrie Primary School, and around 200 or more people turned up. They were angry, they were concerned and they are not being listened to. We went through, in the course of our discussion, a number of issues. On the panel was me, my colleagues from the other place David Davis and Georgie Crozier, respected commentator Max Shifman and also a local and dedicated representative from the community on these matters, Jane Oldham, who is a member and president of the Boroondara Community Group, which has been active and a very constructive voice for the community's concerns about these planning proposals. The first message that we imparted to our very large and concerned audience was: the government's proposal is not going to lead to affordable housing in any of these activity centres. It is common knowledge that the return on investment for developments, certainly in my area, will be around about \$15,000 a square metre, and that is a common rule of thumb that is used. That is going to produce two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments that are well over \$1 million. Now, you find me a young couple or a young person who, in the absence of a bequest or an endowment from parents or grandparents, is going to be able to afford that. They are not going to be able to afford that. That is the first thing – the affordability argument collapses.

The amenity, character and neighbourhood arguments resoundingly suggest that 16-storey buildings anywhere in these areas – or for that matter Thornbury, Moonee Valley or wherever else these things are being proposed – are going to destroy these communities because they are not sensitive to local needs, site-specific needs or infrastructure needs. They are going to destroy the livability and amenity of these areas. The government has just developed these plans without any proper consultation, and our approach on this side of the chamber is to work constructively with councils and local communities to get the best outcomes that will deliver better standards of living for our people.

Sunshine superhub

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:28): (1355) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the early works currently being done on our Sunshine superhub. As the minister knows, it has been more than six months since both state and federal governments committed \$2 billion each to completely transform Sunshine station into a huge transport interchange, the biggest this side of the Yarra. I am not exaggerating when I say

what we are doing here at Sunshine is the key to unlocking rail in Melbourne's west. We are talking about more than 40 trains an hour being able to travel through Sunshine station, including our new Metro Tunnel services, which I am so excited to hear are going to commence operation in early December. It is the first stage of works on the Melbourne Airport rail project. It will connect Victoria's rail network to the airport for the first time and provide an interchange for up to 70 per cent of Victoria's regional rail services. While I am at it, let us dispel a myth: you will not have to change trains at Sunshine to catch a train to and from the airport, people, because the airport trains will travel to and from the city via the Metro Tunnel.

But even more important for folks in the west is that these superhub works are the important first step to enabling electrification out to Melton and Wyndham Vale, something I know folks in my electorate are eager to see and have long awaited, because we need to separate those future metro services from the regional rail services that currently go out to Ballarat, Geelong and beyond, which is why the superhub will create two new platforms and an additional 6 kilometres of new rail track to help make all of this possible. It is not just a lick of paint and it is not just about a station, which is why I know my community would greatly welcome an update on how early works are progressing so that they can join us on this really important journey and on the next stage of transforming our rail network in Melbourne's west.

Greater Bendigo mining exploration licence

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (17:30): (1356) My adjournment today is for the Premier. Today I rise to speak to an issue that has actually been brought to me by a resident from the Premier's local electorate but that has impacts for people across regional Victoria and the environment that we all rely on. The action I seek is for the Premier to meet with the members of the Citizens Against Residential Mining group, who since February have been unsuccessful in getting a meeting with her to discuss an important local issue.

In June this year a licence was granted to Falcon resources to explore for gold in a 94-square-kilometre area to the east of Bendigo, including an area that is under a new housing development. The mine's operations also sit just a kilometre away from the Campaspe River, one of Victoria's very important river systems and a key water source for both irrigation and domestic use. With its proximity to the Campaspe, there is a real risk of water used at the mine in the tailings dam leaking into the river. Evidence from the Save the Campaspe group that contaminated mine wastewater contains high levels of arsenic, antimony and zinc has been provided to us.

There is a long history of environmental damage and impacts to human health caused by historic and current goldmining, particularly in the Bendigo region, which I am sure you would be aware of. For example, arsenic dust as a result of mining operations at the Fosterville Gold Mine, not far from the Falcon resources licence area, has meant that residents cannot drink their tank water because of the contamination from the arsenic. Leaks from the tailings dam from the site have also led to arsenic and other pollutants being found in the local groundwater, we are told. Given the size of Falcon mining's exploration licence, many local residents are concerned that this could happen on a greater scale if gold is found at this new site. Already a tailings dam has been constructed at the Falcon resources exploration site, with two more recently approved. Tailings dams like these are banned in a number of other countries due to the risk of them breaking posed to people, rivers and the environment. This includes in Brazil, where the collapse of a tailings dam at an iron ore mine in 2019 caused over 250 fatalities and continues to have catastrophic impacts on the environment.

These are real concerns that the local community are raising. They deserve answers. It is important that government decisions around mining make sure that protection of human health and environmental health are considered paramount. My adjournment today is to ask the Premier to listen to members of her local community, to have a meeting with them, to hear firsthand their concerns and to listen deeply to what they are.

Ballan–McGrath–Greens roads, Wyndham Vale, upgrade

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:32): (1357) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is an update on the Ballan Road–Greens Road upgrade project. This intersection is one of the busiest in my electorate, and as a local road user myself I know how frustrating it can be to get stuck in traffic at this roundabout. Local community advocates and Cr Peter Maynard have shown support and enthusiasm for removing this roundabout and improving north–south traffic flow. More than 30,000 vehicles use this corridor, and this project will shave time off that journey for people heading from Werribee to Manor Lakes. Partnering with the federal government, we are building more local roads and busting congestion across my electorate, and this will help keep Werribee and Wyndham Vale moving. I look forward to hearing that update from the minister.

Payroll tax

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:33): (1358) My adjournment is to the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for her to urgently review payroll tax, which is hurting small businesses in my electorate of Warrandyte and across our state. Victoria has now recorded the highest unemployment rate in the nation for 18 months, with 188,000 Victorians out of work and underemployment at 6.5 per cent, well above the national average. Behind these numbers are young people ignored after dozens of job applications, parents stuck in gig work for lack of full-time jobs and small business owners watching their livelihoods crushed by taxes and red tape. It includes more than 2000 taxpayer-funded nursing and midwifery graduates, who were promised jobs but now have nowhere to go. They have been told by a broke government that there are no positions they can afford to pay for. At the same time, 4242 Victorian businesses collapsed in a single year, a 48 per cent increase on last year. That is 4242 shopfronts shut, apprentices stood down and communities left with less jobs than before. And is it any wonder? Labor has introduced 63 new or increased taxes, making Victoria the highest taxed state in Australia. From payroll taxes punishing job creation to land tax hikes and the emergency services levy, small businesses are being squeezed to the brink.

Experts now warn of an economic ‘day of reckoning’ for Victoria, and small businesses in Warrandyte and beyond are already living it. Labor’s model is simple: tax more, spend more and rue the consequences. The Liberals and Nationals will lead Victoria differently. We will scrap Labor’s unfair taxes and guarantee no new ones. We will end waste and stop hidden budget blowouts by enforcing budget honesty and real-time transparency. We will grow jobs and investment through a new Victorian Productivity Commission and disciplined project delivery. Victoria does not need more Labor taxes – it needs less tax, more jobs and real opportunity. That is the choice ahead.

Metro Tunnel

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:35): (1359) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is that the minister join me at the Cranbourne train station to meet with constituents and discuss with them the exciting news that the Metro Tunnel is scheduled to open this December. The opening of the Metro Tunnel is incredibly exciting for people in Cranbourne. For parents juggling work, for people wanting to get to school or uni or TAFE or maybe even just take a trip into the city, there will be less time spent stuck in traffic and more time at home with family. For those who are under 18, next year there is also going to be free public transport. For a growing community like mine in Cranbourne, the Metro Tunnel is absolutely going to be transformational. I was delighted to bring the students from Casey Fields Primary School to a backstage tour of Anzac train station recently. These children were sparkling wits, clever and insightful. I was really so energised by the opportunity to have them, and I do say how grateful I am to principal Cameron Heath for organising the event. This will be transformational for Cranbourne: 9 kilometres of tunnel going under Melbourne’s CBD, five new underground stations and an end-to-end train line from Sunbury to Cranbourne. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Cranbourne.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:37): The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that he seeks is immediate repair of potholes in his electorate. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action he seeks is an update on the status of the regulation of e-bikes and e-scooters, specifically with regard to their being allowed on public transport. The member for Murray Plains raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action he seeks is that vacancies in his electorate are filled. The member for Northcote raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action that she seeks is an update on how community feedback will be incorporated into planning scheme amendments in her electorate. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Planning, and the action he seeks is that the minister meet with some local residents groups in his electorate.

The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action she seeks is an update on the progress of early works on the Sunshine superhub. The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action she seeks is that the Premier meet with an anti-mining group. The member for Werribee raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that he seeks is an update on works on the Ballan Road and Greens Road intersection. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer with regard to payroll tax, and the member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the public and active transport minister, and the action she seeks, which I am sure the minister will very much look forward to, is to join her at Cranbourne to discuss with local commuters how the Metro Tunnel is going to transform their travel experiences.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Can I, as always, thank the clerks and our parliamentary staff for their support during this very busy sitting week. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:39 pm.