



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 14 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**

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024)

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**

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>7</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
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 <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>8</sup>	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 <sup>9</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>5,6</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>11</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Party abbreviations**

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

# CONTENTS

---

ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Photography in chamber .....	3783
BILLS	
Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 .....	3783
Introduction and first reading .....	3783
State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 .....	3783
Introduction and first reading .....	3783
Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025 .....	3784
Introduction and first reading .....	3784
Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 .....	3784
Introduction and first reading .....	3784
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion .....	3785
PETITIONS	
Animal care and protection legislation .....	3785
Housing.....	3786
Prahran electorate planning .....	3786
MEMBERS	
Acting Speakers .....	3786
DOCUMENTS	
Annual reports.....	3786
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee .....	3787
Alert Digest No. 13 .....	3787
DOCUMENTS	
Documents .....	3787
BILLS	
Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025 .....	3789
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 .....	3789
National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 .....	3789
Royal assent .....	3789
Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025 .....	3789
Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 .....	3789
Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 .....	3789
Appropriation.....	3789
MOTIONS	
Motions by leave .....	3789
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program .....	3790
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Motor neurone disease .....	3796
Motor neurone disease .....	3797
Middle East conflict .....	3797
Motor neurone disease .....	3797
Ashby Primary School .....	3797
Ovens Valley electorate small business .....	3797
Sunbury agricultural show .....	3798
Reverend Kim Cain.....	3798
Bayley House.....	3798
Royal Brighton Yacht Club .....	3798
Bayside development .....	3798
Solar Homes program .....	3799
Land tax.....	3799
Welcoming the Babies .....	3799
Flood mitigation.....	3800
1st Point Cook Scout Group.....	3800
Wyndham Harbour.....	3800
Hepatitis.....	3800
Victoria's Pride street party .....	3800
South East Volunteers .....	3801

# CONTENTS

---

Waverley RSL .....	3801
Vermont South Club .....	3801
Brandon Park Reserve.....	3801
Mark Merry .....	3801
Northcote electorate .....	3802
Melbourne Royal Show .....	3802
Mal Campbell .....	3802
Faye Dapiran .....	3803
Sunshine Heights Cricket Club .....	3803
Multicultural Youth Awards .....	3803
St Charbel Parish, Greenvale.....	3803
Diwali .....	3804
Greenvale Primary School.....	3804
ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT	
Address by First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria co-chairs.....	3804
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Crime .....	3808
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel .....	3810
Community safety .....	3810
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel .....	3812
Employment.....	3812
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel .....	3813
Housing.....	3814
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel .....	3815
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund .....	3815
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel .....	3817
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Nepean electorate .....	3817
Monbulk electorate.....	3817
Shepparton electorate.....	3818
Point Cook electorate .....	3818
Eildon electorate .....	3818
Sunbury electorate .....	3818
Richmond electorate.....	3819
Laverton electorate.....	3819
Pahran electorate .....	3819
Glen Waverley electorate.....	3819
BILLS	
Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 .....	3820
Second reading.....	3820
Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025 .....	3888
Council's agreement.....	3888
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Postponement.....	3888
ADJOURNMENT	
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund .....	3888
Suburban Rail Loop .....	3889
Public transport .....	3890
Wantirna dog park and playground .....	3890
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund .....	3890
Mickleham Road upgrade.....	3891
Housing.....	3891
Illegal Dumping Taskforce .....	3892
Local government rates .....	3892
Metro Tunnel .....	3893
Responses .....	3893

**Tuesday 14 October 2025**

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

*Announcements***Photography in chamber**

**The SPEAKER (12:06):** I wish to advise the house that I have given approval for a photographer to take photos during proceedings today. During the address by the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria I have also given approval for the photography of the lower galleries. The photographs will be used by the Parliament for community engagement purposes and by the First Peoples' Assembly.

*Bills***Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:06):** I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 to improve the experience of voluntary assisted dying, to consequentially amend other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:07):** I ask the minister to give a brief explanation of the bill.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:07):** This bill amends the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 to improve patient access and the experience of voluntary assisted dying, bringing Victorian legislation in line with other Australian jurisdictions.

**Read first time.****Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.****State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

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

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, the Congestion Levy Act 2005, the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Limitation of Actions Act 1958, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Building Act 1993 and the Domestic Animals Act 1994, to repeal the Taxation (Interest on Overpayments) Act 1986 and to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:08):** I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:08):** The bill amends Victoria's taxation laws to give effect to several changes, including altering the congestion levy rate zones and exemptions that apply in Melbourne's CBD and adjacent areas, excluding the alpine village of Dinner Plain from vacant residential land tax, introducing a new land tax exemption for low-value land with a non-permanent shelter being used as a residence, excluding New Zealand citizens from foreign purchaser additional duty, amending the registration fee for

domestic animals and greyhounds and other amendments to ensure taxation laws continue to operate as intended.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### **Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:09): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 in relation to the meaning of ‘labour hire services’, ‘fit and proper persons’, ‘monitoring’, ‘investigation and enforcement powers’ and ‘information sharing’ and the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria Act 2020 in relation to causing or threatening to cause detriment and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:10): I request that the minister provide a brief explanation of the bill.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:10): The bill amends Victoria’s labour hire licensing laws to give effect to recommendations 3 to 6 of the Wilson review and will also create an offence of causing detriment or threatening to cause detriment to a person who makes a complaint or provides information to the workforce inspectorate as part of its new complaints referral function.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### **Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:10): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 and the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (12:11): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:11): This bill will strengthen commercial passenger vehicle industry laws and improve industry transparency to address fare overcharging and other driver misconduct by implementing a suite of legislative reforms under the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017. It will also support the introduction of account-based ticketing technology in Victoria by amending the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 to enable passengers to use new methods as a valid entitlement to use public transport services.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, a member in the chamber is wearing a political slogan, which is in contrast to a previous ruling from the Speaker, and I would ask if you would ask that member to not wear that slogan in the chamber.



**Ellen Sandell:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would have thought that one of the recognised national flags of our country is something that we are all united on and is not a political slogan.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business did not direct me to which member or what, and I cannot see anything from where I am sitting.

**James Newbury:** The member for Richmond.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Is the member for Richmond wearing a political slogan?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I know what you are referring to. The member for Richmond's coat is buttoned. I am not going to ask the member for Richmond to unbutton her coat. The matter is dealt with. There is no point of order. I have ruled on the point of order. If you wish to raise it further, I can refer it to the Speaker.

**James Newbury:** On a separate point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do note that your ruling is in contrast to the Speaker's ruling previously in this Parliament.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order. I am happy to refer the matter to the Speaker for her to respond.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

#### **Notice given.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (12:14): General business, notices of motion 5, 6 and 28, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

### *Petitions*

#### **Animal care and protection legislation**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) presented a petition bearing 3314 signatures:

#### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly The delay in the introduction of the draft Animal Care and Protection Bill to Parliament. The draft Bill seeks to replace the current and less efficacious Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986. The RSPCA has more animal neglect, cruelty, and abuse cases than they can manage with the number of inspectors they have. They are hampered by current legislation that is no longer fit for purpose when animals need to be seized immediately and in large numbers.

On the Mornington Peninsula, a group of over 10,000 individuals have signed a community petition to the RSPCA and Agriculture Victoria and 2,100 people joined a peaceful protest page on social media to try and assist in a rescue. There are dozens more neglect cases like this across social media and mainstream media drawing attention. Action is needed now.

#### **Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly Table the draft Animal Care and Protection Bill in Parliament as soon as possible.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

## Housing

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe) presented a petition bearing 900 signatures:

Issue: This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly a Future Homes application at 125 Mountain View Parade, Rosanna 3084, which has been called in by the Minister for Planning.

This first of its kind application, proposes a four-storey building comprising 17 apartments, on a quiet suburban street not designed for such density. The site is located beyond the required 800m of a train station, and only marginally within an 800m radius of the shops as the crow flies, but not via conventional public routes. The site's suitability for easily walkable access to amenities is contentious.

The Future Homes program, first introduced in 2022, is a failed pilot scheme, implemented without meaningful public consultation on the pilot's outcome. To date, the program has not resulted in a single approved planning permit, raising serious questions about its effectiveness and practical viability. The scheme has the capacity to drastically and quickly alter neighbourhood character by applying bulk-scale, cookie cutter designs that overwhelm the area.

Future Homes also lacks adequate mechanisms for independent oversight, removing third-party rights and limiting the voice of local Councils undermines transparency, fairness and integrity in the planning process.

Action: The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister for Planning and the Governor in Council to reject the Future Homes planning permit application for 125 Mountain View Parade, Rosanna 3084 (ref: P137/205, P1135/2024) and to initiate a comprehensive, transparent review of the Future Homes program – one that includes genuine community and local Council input in shaping the future of our suburban neighbourhoods.

## Prahran electorate planning

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) presented a petition bearing 99 signatures:

Issue:

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria, draw attention to Planning Permit Number 0687/24 for a backpackers' accommodation at 7 Duke Street, Windsor. Windsor is already experiencing elevated levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. This proposal would intensify these issues by introducing a high-turnover, transient use in a quiet residential street.

The proposed backpackers accommodation would more than double the population of Duke Street, without any corresponding upgrades to parking, waste, or infrastructure. The scale and nature of the development are incompatible with the area's character and present unacceptable risks to community safety, amenity, and liveability.

Action:

We respectfully request the Legislative Assembly urge the Minister for Planning and Stonnington City Council to withdraw Planning Permit 0687/24. The development fails to support a safer, more sustainable neighbourhood and places unreasonable strain on local infrastructure. Windsor deserves planning decisions that prioritise long-term community wellbeing, safety, and sustainable urban growth.

## Members

### Acting Speakers

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (12:16): Under standing order 20 the Speaker has tabled her warrant amending the panel of members to preside as Acting Speakers to discharge Jackson Taylor.

## Documents

### Annual reports

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (12:16): On behalf of the Speaker, I have some updates for the house following some changes made to tabling requirements under the Financial Management Act 1994. Amendments to the act came into effect on 20 August 2025 adding a requirement for the relevant minister to report to each house the date they received any annual report tabled under section 46 of the Financial Management Act. The clerks and the Department of Treasury and Finance have agreed that this reporting will ordinarily occur in the tabling letter provided to the Clerk with the report. The tabling

letter will then be published alongside the report in the tabled documents database to inform members. The amendments also introduce the ability for a minister to request that an annual report be tabled on a day that neither house is sitting. In anticipation of the Clerk potentially receiving a large volume of reports to be tabled on a non-sitting day, the clerks have put a deadline of 2 pm for ministers to submit documents required for tabling. This is to ensure the administrative work required for tabling on a non-sitting day can be completed and all requests actioned. The guide for tabling on the website will be updated to reflect these changes.

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Alert Digest No. 13*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:17): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 13 of 2025, in stapled volumes A and B, on the following bills and subordinate legislation, together with appendices and a minority report:

- Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025
- Statewide Treaty Bill 2025
- SR No 42 – Forests (Tour Operator Licence Fee) Amendment Regulations 2025
- SR No 43 – Land (Tour Operator Licence Fee) Amendment Regulations 2025
- SR No 47 – Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Parkville Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Service) Regulations 2025
- SR No 48 – Subordinate Legislation (Road Management (Works and Infrastructure) Regulations 2015) Extension Regulations 2025
- Ministerial Order 1468 – Order Amending Ministerial Order No. 1125 – Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion of Students in Government Schools
- Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025
- Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025
- Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025

**Ordered to be published.**

### *Documents*

#### **Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

- Audit Act 1994* – Revised report on the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office year ended 30 June 2025
- Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17D granting a lease over Albert Park
- Inquiries Act 2014* – Report of the Board of Inquiry into the McCrae landslide – released on 9 October 2025
- Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984*:
  - Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 31 (*Gazette G37, 11 September 2025*)
  - Notices under s 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 47/2021 (*Gazette G41, 9 October 2025*)
- Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* – Certificate under s 7
- Local Government Act 2020* – Final report of the Commission of Inquiry into Whittlesea City Council – Ordered to be published
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* – Psychological Health Compliance Code and related documents under s 151

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission – Matter involving the Member for Western Victoria Region and the Member for Warrandyte District – released on 24 September 2024

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

Ballarat – C240, C252  
Bayside – C192  
Boroondara – C419  
Casey – C286  
Darebin – C225  
Frankston – C161  
Glen Eira – C274, C275  
Greater Geelong – C481  
Horsham – C89  
Hume – C273, C274, C280, GC261  
Knox – GC261  
Latrobe – C149, GC217  
Melbourne – C426, C486  
Melton – GC261  
Merri-bek – C231  
South Gippsland – GC217  
Surf Coast – C149  
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC288, VC289, VC292  
Wyndham – C281, GC261  
Yarra – C317  
Yarriambiack – C34

Road Safety Camera Commissioner – Report 2024–25

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Accident Towing Services Act 2007* – SR 97  
*Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992* – SR 88  
*Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996* – SR 92  
*Confiscation Act 1997* – SR 90  
*Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* – SR 95  
*EastLink Project Act 2004* – SR 98  
*Food Act 1984* – SR 96  
*Improving Cancer Outcomes Act 2014* – SR 89  
*Melbourne City Link Act 1995* – SR 99  
*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* – SR 103  
*Road Management Act 2004* – SR 100  
*Road Safety Act 1986* – SRs 101, 102  
*Serious Offenders Act 2018* – SR 94  
*Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* – SR 93  
*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* – SR 91

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102 and 103

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* – Notice to Fix Fees under section 73

Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) – Report on the 2024 local government elections

Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal – Members of Parliament (Victoria) Guidelines No 1/2025

Victorian WorkCover Authority (WorkSafe) – Report of requests under s 10 of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, s 11 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and s 595 of the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*

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

*Bail Further Amendment Act 2025* – Whole Act, other than Division 2 of Part 2 – 30 September 2025 (*Gazette S518, 24 September 2025*)

*Corrections Legislation Amendment Act 2025* – Remaining provisions – 11 September 2025 (*Gazette S488, 9 September 2025*).

### ***Bills***

#### **Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025**

#### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025**

#### **National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:21): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 and the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025.

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

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

#### **Statewide Treaty Bill 2025**

*Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:21): I have received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025, the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025.

### ***Motions***

#### **Motions by leave**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (12:22): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government and the Minister for Children for failing to protect vulnerable children in state care following new revelations of rape, violence and abuse in Victoria's residential care system.

**Leave refused.**

**Nicole WERNER**: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for allowing the residential care system to become a breeding ground for crime, as revealed by whistleblowers, with children as young as 10 exposed to drugs, violence, older offenders and a pathway to criminal activity.

**Leave refused.**

**Nicole WERNER:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for failing to keep children safe in residential care.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:22): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that after 737 days Victoria joins the entire Western world in welcoming the return of the living hostages and the promise that all deceased hostages will be returned, the ceasefire and the renewed move towards peace once and for all in the Middle East.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:23): What a privilege it is to be able to stand before you all and introduce in this week our government business program, and what a government business program it is. This week is an opportunity for members in this place to show whether they are leaders or whether they are followers, whether they are on the right side of history or indeed the wrong side of history. It is a very significant debate that will be taking place in this chamber in a few short hours – a debate as to whether or not we will establish a treaty with our First Peoples here in the state of Victoria. If we do so, we will be the first state or territory to do so, but we will bring Australia at last into line with other Commonwealth nations that have already had for a long time treaties with their First Peoples.

Because of the nature of the government business program and the importance of the bill that we will shortly be debating, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, I do want to flag that it is the government's intention that we sit until 10 pm tonight. On this side of the house members have said very clearly that they are leaders, that they want to speak directly to their communities about why they will be supporting a Statewide Treaty. They will be doing that because they want to see better outcomes and better living conditions and they want to see equity and fairness for our First Peoples, who for too long have been denied those basic things that the rest of us have the opportunity to take for granted. So as I said, it is our intention that we will sit until 10 pm tonight. I understand that you, Deputy Speaker, and the Speaker will work to organise dinner breaks as required.

I very much look forward to, on this historic day, listening to the contributions of every member of this house that is going to stand up and make a contribution; I want to hear them all. I want to hear what those on the other side have got to say for themselves, quite frankly, because for a long time they were in support of treaty. They were in support of treaty until they saw an opportunity to take the low road. That is what they saw, and that is what they have gathered together –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I look forward to the contribution of the newly appointed – returning for a second shot at it – Manager of Opposition Business. I look forward to the contribution of the member for Hawthorn. I look forward to the contribution of the member for Kew. I look forward to those contributions in particular because I know that their communities support the work that we are doing. But as I said, I look forward to the contributions of members on my side of the chamber who have been speaking to communities that are a bit ambivalent about this, but because they are leaders, because they are strong and they will do what is right, they will stand in this place and they will argue for Statewide Treaty, and then they will share that with the communities that they represent to say why this is the right thing to do, because we are about fairness and justice and equity and doing the right thing by the First Peoples of this great nation of ours.

We will also be debating the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Again, this is all about our government's ongoing commitment to deliver on the recommendations of the Royal Commission

into Victoria's Mental Health System. We understand that the principal act needs updating and amending as our service system continues to evolve, so we will be debating some changes that we are making to the act and the Health Services Act 1988 to enable the information-sharing reforms set out in recommendation 62 of the royal commission.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister, if you could assist the Chair, I am not sure that I heard you move the motion for the government business program. I am sorry if you are repeating yourself.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I am so excited to be here, can I tell you. I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 16 October 2025:

Statewide Treaty Bill 2025

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

Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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

It is such a historic week, I was carried away. Deputy Speaker, I ask for your forgiveness. I commend the government business program to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:28): If there was no other sign of how shambolic this government is in managing this chamber, the government forgot to move the government business program before delivering the speech on the government business program. If I may reflect on the time since I have been Manager of Opposition Business, the standards have slipped, not that they were good to start with. It is not as if they were high-flyers and big achievers in this chamber. At best they were near passes on their best day, but today we have had the Leader of the House in this place get up to speak on the government business program and forget to move the motion.

What are we debating this week? We only know because in her last 20 seconds the Leader of the House figured it out and ran it off. It was very, very quick. You could see in the contribution from the Leader of the House how shambolic their management of this chamber is. The management of this chamber is a joke. I can tell you I am going to start in the way I intend to proceed: we will be opposing the government business program. You will see in my management of opposition business that we will be holding the government to account for their appalling behaviour in this chamber and taking the fight right up to the government when it comes to the appalling management of this chamber.

I must confess to the chamber that I was aware the Leader of the House had not moved the motion, but I thought we might get to the full 5 minutes and the Leader of the House might just fully forget. I thought, 'Will I be kind and let her know that it has not been moved?' – because that would be an epic error – and I thought on this one occasion, on this first day of being in the job, I would not be kind. I am sorry, Leader of the House. But fortunately on this occasion you were prompted with 20 seconds to go and we heard of a motion after the speech was given.

The Leader of the House did speak to a number of significant issues that are occurring this week in the chamber. Another significant debate that will soon commence is on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025. Notice was given earlier today, which I imagine will be a significant opportunity next week.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order –

**James NEWBURY:** I did not even take a point of order when you did not move the motion.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we are talking about the government business program. The voluntary assisted dying bill is only being introduced today – the bill has not even been distributed in the chamber – so I think the Manager of Opposition Business is getting way ahead of himself. He should focus on what the government business program has before us this week.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Brighton had just started straying.

**James NEWBURY:** I have got to tell you, I would not have done this, but Leader of the House, of all the people who could have a go at someone on detail, after your contribution just now I certainly think I would not be leading with my chin on that. You did not move the motion on the government business program.

We will be opposing this government business program. I did go to the government, and I did ask for consideration in detail on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025, which is very important to the community. Significant numbers of our community in Victoria more broadly have raised issues around this bill and the government's mismanagement of locking up parks. We all remember the Premier saying, 'We won't lock up parks.' She said it on the front page of the *Herald Sun* last year. Well, guess what this bill does. It locks up parks. I think there will be an interesting debate on that particular bill. The bill was an opportunity for consideration in detail. Disappointingly, the government has not got the capacity to take the bill into consideration in detail, because it is hard. You have got to answer questions, you have got to be on top of your brief and you have got to be good at your job. Not everyone is. That is why the government said they will not take it into consideration in detail. We will be opposing the government business program. I will be holding the government to account in this chamber, because their mismanagement has been shown very, very clearly today.

**Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:33):** What a fascinating insight into the focus of those opposite this week: T-shirts and technicalities in the week of treaty. What a focus for those opposite. The Manager of Opposition Business made a reference to this government on their best day. Can I make the suggestion that this is their worst day; this is the worst day of those opposite. If they want to accuse us of appalling management of the chamber, as we have heard from those opposite, may I suggest that they stop making it harder for us by shuffling their seats all the time. Perhaps it would be easier if we knew exactly where they would be sitting.

But anyway, that is enough time focusing on those opposite, because the reality is that this is a week to celebrate, and this is a week that tells you what this government is about. You can see all about our government by looking across what we will be debating in the chamber this week. This is a government that is focused on people's wellbeing. This is a government which is focused on cost-of-living relief and housing. This is a government focused on improving family life. This is a government focused on truth, on treaty and on fairness. The work that we are furthering this week is not out of nowhere, it is built on the long, hard work of government that has come before. We had the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and reforms, which mean we have the privilege this week of talking about linking our mental health and wellbeing locals to the broader mental health system, and that has only come about because this government has invested so strongly in mental health.

We have the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025, and we can see there the outdoor recreation strategy being built on. We have announcements today around additional deer hunting stations. I know that members of my community equally value access to areas of great natural beauty and access to recreational opportunities such as deer hunting, and I know the farmers of the Whittlesea region certainly appreciate those who help to keep deer numbers under control near their farms. I think of our outdoor rec strategy as being a strategy for all, including families like mine, for whom time in the outdoors away from it all is where we get our respite and our strength, so I thank the minister for bringing those changes to the house today.

The work around paying tradies fairly really hits home in my community. I especially think of communities like Doreen, where we have a huge number of families who, day to day and week to week, rely on those payments coming through efficiently in their businesses. If those payments are not made on time, those families can really suffer, so I am proud to be part of a government that is bringing fairer payments to the house today for discussion. We think about those families generally with support



on the income side – helping to increase income for families – but also with extra efforts that are taken to reduce expenditure. We have the Get Active Kids voucher launching this week, and what a difference it makes to families who rightly want their kids to be involved in sport. My daughter is joining netball for the first time, and she is very excited. She told me yesterday, when she was invited to join the under-nine reserves, ‘Mum, I feel like a goddess.’ And I thought, ‘Yes, you are, darling.’

What a week. We can think back to not that long ago when children were not allowed to be with their mothers or their fathers, and that was sanctioned by the government, to a time now when the government is standing here proposing to partner with our First Nations on treaty. What an amazing journey this state has been through. I am only sorry that not everybody impacted is here to see and witness the changes that are coming, because this is truly a momentous time. It is a time that I know all Victorians will come to have deep pride in, and I look forward to the debate in the house today.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (12:38): I rise today to talk on the government business program. As the Manager of Opposition Business said, we will be opposing the government business program today because we did ask to go into consideration in detail on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. We had questions about some issues in this land legislation amendment bill, and the government refused to sit down and go into consideration in detail, so that is why, as articulated by the member for Brighton, we will be opposing today’s business program.

Obviously, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 comes into the house today, and it will be interesting to see members stand on their feet and talk about the Statewide Treaty. As a lot of members on our side, especially on the Nats side, have a heavy population of First Nations people in their electorates, it will be good to be able to bring a voice here, and I look forward to hearing some of our members talk on the Statewide Treaty as well.

The Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is another one that does come up, and I think every member in the chamber has issues regarding mental health in their community. You do not have to walk too far down your main street or down a little side street in your own electorate or your own home towns to see the impacts on people that unfortunately are suffering from mental health issues. To have some issues brought up by the royal commission being able to be spoken about in the chamber in the next day or so I think will move us down the track in trying to help out those people that do suffer from mental health issues. In my electorate in the Latrobe Valley, we are struggling to accommodate in facilities the numbers of people that are suffering from mental health issues, with some of those being medical issues and some of those being because of substance abuse, and to be able to look after them and make sure that they are getting the best help they can. I think as parliamentarians we need to stand and do the right thing and have facilities that can accommodate people that have mental health issues and make sure we are treating them responsibly and properly.

The Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025 is something that will be in my wheelhouse, being a tradie. Obviously everyone knows I am a plumber by trade, and I have seen firsthand the issues of non-payment. Unfortunately sometimes when people are on the Big Build in Melbourne, or tradies that have done work inside schools and so forth, it is the government that have been dragging their feet on these non-payments. We need to make sure there is fairer payment on jobsites and access for tradies to an avenue where they are not sitting there hoping that they are going to be paid, feeling like they are being coerced, that they have to go to the next job because they are promised if they go to that job they will get paid. We need that fairer avenue and that transparency so mums and dads that are setting up their own businesses to make an honest living for their family do not feel like they have got this weight around their neck of being able to put food on the table and keep a roof over their family’s heads because building contractors are being lax about providing the money and the payment for works that have already been achieved. We need to make sure that all these avenues are ticked off. No matter if you are a plumber, if you are an electrician or if you are a tiler working on infrastructure around Victoria, in the city or in the regions, we need to make

sure that we are looking after our tradies. So as the member for Brighton said, we are opposing the government business program today, and I look forward to the debate on it that will ensue.

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (12:43): I am pleased to speak on the government business program. I think it is safe to say it will be a busy week in the house this week. It is great to be back after about four weeks away back in our communities doing lots of important work for our electorates, and it is really nice to see colleagues so refreshed and ready and some ready for new roles. I congratulate those opposite on their new roles and the old roles that some have stepped back into.

We have four bills that we are debating this week on the government business program: the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025, the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As usual, it is covering a broad range of topics, which really speaks to the breadth and diversity of government business and the important issues that are at the heart of everything this state Labor government does, covering topics including increasing national parks and public land available for people to enjoy on weekends, supporting Victorians with their mental health and ensuring better mental health outcomes, providing for fairer payments on jobsites that the member for Morwell spoke beautifully about, and the importance of this for his community. It is something that I could not agree with him more on. It is incredibly important for our communities that tradies and subcontractors are paid fairly, and I look forward to hearing the member's contribution in that debate.

And of course we will be debating legislation to establish the first Statewide Treaty in Victoria. It is a historic week in the Victorian Parliament and for our state. As the Leader of the House said, we will have a very, very significant debate today and tonight, as I hear we will be here until around 10 pm. We have an opportunity for members in this place to be leaders – for members to be leaders in their communities, for members to be leaders who back in First Peoples in their electorates. That is exactly what I intend to be this week in this place, as all of my colleagues on this side will be. We will be leaders. We will be leaders in our community, we will be leaders in Victoria and we will be leaders for First People in this state.

I am looking forward to hearing the contributions that my colleagues will make over the course of today and this evening. It is an incredibly important bill for my community. I represent the northern part of Geelong, and across the entire Geelong region there are I think around 10,000 First Nations people. With a large population like that, this is something that I hear about regularly, as does the member for Geelong. I want to take this opportunity to commend the member for Geelong for her leadership in this space, and what a leader she is in our community.

This is something that we as local MPs hear from our communities about on a regular basis. We hear their support for treaty. We hear our First Nations communities asking our government to be leaders and to introduce this bill, to introduce this legislation and to create a fairer state for all Victorians. Treaty is not about taking anything away from anyone. It is about closing the gap – closing the gap between First Peoples and other Victorians – and it is about a better future for us all. I will be making a contribution later today. I believe I am quite low down on the speaking list, so you may be hearing from me later into the evening. I will be proud to make that contribution. I will be proud to vote in support of treaty at the end of the week, as I know my colleagues will.

It is so disappointing to see that those opposite have backflipped. After saying they would support treaty, they are now saying they will not. It is not too late. Those opposite can backflip again. It is not that hard; they have done it once or twice. It is not too late to support treaty. I hope that after hearing the contributions from members today in this place, those opposite will think twice about how they cast their vote at the end of this week.

This government business program speaks to the values of our Labor government: our values of fairness, of equality, of building a future that is better for all Victorians, of leaving a legacy behind but

leaving no-one behind, of supporting Victorians with their mental health by implementing the important recommendations that came out of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and of supporting workers. There is nothing more Labor than supporting workers on job sites and supporting workers to ensure that they get paid on time, that tradies get paid and that subcontractors get paid for the work that they have delivered. I am proud to support the government business program, and I commend it to the house.

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (12:48): I rise to speak on this government business program. I echo the words of my colleagues the member for Brighton and the member for Morwell, and I would like to add a few things. In this government business program this week the Labor government is bringing forth the Victorian treaty bill, plus the parks bill, the building bill and the mental health bill – those are the abbreviated names of those bills. But it is likely the government will sit until at least 10 pm today and potentially tomorrow as well to debate treaty, as I understand it, because most if not all Labor MPs wish to speak on it.

There probably will not be much time for those latter three bills, which will be debated in the remainder of what we have for the week. In any event, this government business program represents more of Labor's misplaced priorities, whether that is a treaty that will divide and not unite Victorians, cost a fortune and not guarantee actual improved outcomes and a closing of the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, or indeed all Victorians – and indeed could make things worse with bureaucracy being increased – or whether it is a parks bill that will lock up a further 70,000 hectares of land into new parks, which will have impacts, including things like firewood bans, restrictions for beekeepers and other usage restrictions. This contradicts the Premier's own 2024 promise that 'I will never put a padlock on our public forest'. Yet what is happening now?

What we should instead be urgently addressing in this government program are things like the growing debt under this Labor government, going up to \$194 billion in just a couple of years time, which is \$29 million of interest a day, more than \$1 million of interest every single hour, which could be spent on things like public schools, hospitals, fixing our potholes and much more. Or in this government business program we could be talking about the increased taxes under this government: 62 new or increased taxes taking from people who are working hard in Victoria and hitting their back pockets, whether it is land tax or much more, which are stopping investment in housing and stopping investment in small business and more. We could be talking in this government business program about the growing waste in Victoria on major projects and much more. Is it a \$40 billion-plus blowout on major projects, or is it even more now? We have had blowouts on the Commonwealth Games and so much more. Or in this government business program we could be talking about the housing and homelessness crisis: 65,000-plus people are now on the public housing waitlist. We have record levels of homelessness, and as an example, in my electorate we have the highest amount of people who are experiencing rough sleeping as a form of homelessness in the whole of Victoria. Or in this government business program we could be talking about fixing our roads, which are falling apart and have seen increasingly dropped maintenance of them. My wife has to keep reminding me on a constant basis when I am driving with her to switch lanes on the Nepean Highway just to avoid these constant potholes so I do not crash my car or hit someone or anything else.

We could also be talking about the cost-of-living crisis in Victoria. We have people lining up at food banks. We have people struggling to pay their bills, to purchase their groceries, to pay their rent and to keep up with their mortgages. Or we could be talking about the growing crime rate in Victoria, with people afraid to be alone in their house or to live in their house with the constant break-ins; or the rise in youth crime rates; or the 1100-plus police shortage, which has also led to reductions in police reception hours and much more, with police saying they are just trying to keep up.

Or what about public transport? I know the member for Mildura has a lack of passenger rail services in her electorate, as I have in my electorate as well. The electorates of Mornington and Mildura are two of our electorates across Victoria that have zero passenger rail services, and yet this government

wants to spend, what, \$200 billion-plus on a new Suburban Rail Loop, which is TBC on the budget papers.

**Jade Benham:** They're doing a development of the MCG.

**Chris CREWITHER:** Exactly. So this government have their priorities wrong. They should be focusing on things that Victorians actually want them to tackle instead of these things on the sidelines of what Victorians are talking about.

**Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:53):** I seek, by leave, indulgence to make a small contribution on the government business program on behalf of the crossbench.

**Leave refused.**

**Will FOWLES:** I move, by leave:

That this house directs the manager of government business to share plans about extended sittings with every member of the house and not just the Labor caucus, the Liberal caucus, the Nationals caucus and the Greens caucus.

**Leave refused.**

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (53):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, 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, 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 (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Motor neurone disease**

**Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (13:00):** Today is a special day in the Victorian Parliament. It is a day that we become a little more inclusive for people who live with a disability. I am using my new communication device to deliver my speech today. Many of you are aware that motor neurone disease will perhaps one day take away my speech forever. Because speaking for longer periods of time and projecting my voice is becoming more difficult, it is important that these devices are here to make life that little bit easier. This is not something that I need to use every day at this stage, but it does help me to be able to continue to be a voice in this place for a while yet, enabling me to make longer contributions and debate bills that are important to me and my community in the Pakenham district. Technology has certainly come a long way. It is not perfect. It makes me cringe when it goes too fast or slows in the wrong places, but I am grateful for my device being able to read my typed words in my voice. It is remarkable. Thank you to my speech pathologist Rebecca Staple. Our Parliament has become more inclusive. We have come along in leaps and bounds. Hopefully now people who live with a disability can put their hands up to potentially represent their community in the years ahead,

knowing that the Parliament of Victoria is a great place to work. Lastly, a big thankyou to my main carer Leah David as we celebrate National Carers Week.

#### **Motor neurone disease**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:02): I believe in fate. I want to congratulate the member for Pakenham on that awesome speech. I cannot believe it, but I was following her today to talk about Run4Rossey, which is about a young boy, lost at 33 to MND. The first thing that Chris lost was his voice. He could still run in Run4Rossey, but he could not speak. For the member to be able to use the machine that Chris was using is just so unbelievable. I want to congratulate her on her passion.

I want to give a big plug for Run4Rossey for Karen, Chris's mother, who has been fighting the fight and creating the awareness for the five years that Run4Rossey has been running, and to Josh Webster and Josh Newman, the two boys that played with Chris at the Frankston Football Club. Get down to Caulfield Grammar and support Run4Rossey and Chris and his fight for MND.

#### **Middle East conflict**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:03): The other thing that I cannot believe is that I can finally say they are back after 737 days. I have been wearing this pin, but I do not need to wear it anymore. My pin is done. I cannot believe I ran out of pins on Sunday when we finally heard that our hostages would be returned home. Am Yisrael chai. I am so proud that finally we see our brothers and sisters returned home.

#### **Motor neurone disease**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:03): I would like to acknowledge the member for Pakenham and her contribution today and thank her for leading the changes to this place that are needed to ensure it is an inclusive workplace. Congratulations.

#### **Ashby Primary School**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:03): Ashby Primary School is one of Geelong's older schools, celebrating 150 years of operation. Last Friday I joined principal Steven Trotter, school council president Bec Hook, teachers, staff, students and parents to reflect on and celebrate 150 years of education and history. We were also joined by former principal Meg Bone, who played a significant role in the redevelopment of Ashby, and past students who shared their memories. Built in 1875, the school is set in a historic building. It is an icon that sits in the centre of Geelong West. I thank Ashby Primary School captains Edie, Evie, Henry and Harbir for their welcoming tour of Ashby. Ashby Primary School has a proud history and is well known as a great, inclusive school. In the mid-1800s their suburb was not called Geelong West; it was actually called Ashby. All the local children attended a school run by the church, but it was seriously overcrowded, with up to 90 students in each class. In the 150 years of Ashby there were surprisingly only 25 principals, a testament to the strength of community felt in the school. Today Ashby Primary School – *(Time expired)*

#### **Ovens Valley electorate small business**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (13:05): The Porepunkah community is beginning to settle back after what has been a very, very difficult 50 days, and I want to put on record that the businesses in Porepunkah are very grateful that the Victorian government supported my calls for a business grant. In the small township of Porepunkah they were given the grant with basically no questions asked. That is how it should be, and I am very grateful for that. I do want to say, however, that only 5 kilometres down the road is Bright, a much larger centre that has about 10 times the amount of businesses as Porepunkah, and businesses in Bright and Wandiligong and other surrounding areas have been also caught up in this economic disaster, but most are struggling to qualify under the Allan Labor government's tough criteria. My information suggests that only 14 per cent of businesses outside of Porepunkah but still in the local area have qualified for the \$5000 grant. If this is correct, I am very disappointed.

As I have said all along, when a government agency, in this case Victoria Police, tells tourists to stay away from a tourist destination for an extended period of time – and for good reason, we know why – it is the Victorian government’s responsibility to support these communities. A \$5000 grant to these businesses is a drop in the ocean compared to the reported \$100 million spent to catch the fugitive, which I support and agree with 100 per cent for this manhunt. I urge the government to be fair and to ease the criteria immediately so that many more businesses will become eligible. I will be monitoring the amount of businesses that qualify and will be able to feed that information back through Parliament in the coming months. I urge the government to be fair and reasonable and broaden the criteria so small businesses will qualify for the grant.

#### **Sunbury agricultural show**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (13:06): I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about the Sunbury agricultural show, which was on Saturday in my community, and I thank every single volunteer who made the show possible. Of course it was terrific to talk to many in our community about terrific projects like the Metro Tunnel, free public transport for under-18s and seniors, the power saving bonus and of course school upgrades and many other upgrades that are happening right across the electorate. I want to take the opportunity to thank Narelle Reino, Kate George and the wonderful team from the agricultural society who do exceptional work as well as MC Dave Quarrell for the work that they do in bringing the community together. It has run for more than a hundred years, and it is an opportunity for the community to come together and celebrate all things that are great in our community. That is why it was disappointing to see some in a local advocacy group, supported by Mr Ettershank in the other place, conducting themselves in a less than impressive manner. We are always better when local advocacy is done in a respectful and decent manner. We are always better when we respect volunteers and those within our community, and I want to take the opportunity to thank every single person who did that in an appropriate way.

#### **Reverend Kim Cain**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:08): Reverend Kim Cain, the minister of St Leonard’s Uniting Church in Brighton Beach, has confirmed that his tenure will end at the parish early next year. Kim is a much-loved moral compass in our community. His ministry has been one of compassion and gentle guidance. Personally, I very much appreciate his friendship. We are fortunate to have him in our community, and I thank him.

#### **Bayley House**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:08): In full colours, hundreds of Bayley House clients ran out onto Wilson Reserve in Brighton for their annual footy day. Even I had a kick, and you might be surprised to hear that I kick pretty hard. Bayley House is a Bayside not-for-profit organisation that provides exceptional support for people with an intellectual disability. Thank you to the league, celebrities and former greats for your support.

#### **Royal Brighton Yacht Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:08): With Royal Brighton Yacht Club celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, the club recently opened for the season. The opening was also an opportunity to announce winners of a school sail competition. Congratulations to the Bayside schools involved. Best wishes and congratulations to Commodore Peter Demura for the new season and for engaging so many schools in the wonderful project.

#### **Bayside development**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:09): We know that the state Labor government has given the big green tick to massive overdevelopment. Jacinta Allan plans to turn Bayside into the Gold Coast. Residents who are concerned about a proposed five-storey development at 531 Hampton Street

recently met to voice their opposition. That proposal is just the start. Labor is giving the green light to giant 16-storey towers across Bayside. Shame.

### **Solar Homes program**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (13:09): I was pleased to join the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Climate Action and Minister for the State Electricity Commission Lily D'Ambrosio in visiting several locations and local homes in Kororoit to see firsthand the positive impacts of the Solar Homes program on families in our community. First up we visited Brad and Theresa's home, where they recently installed solar panels and a heat pump hot-water system through the program. These upgrades have transformed the way they power their home, allowing them to access free electricity off the roof during the day. Their quarterly energy bills have dropped from around \$250 to just \$10 to \$20, providing incredible relief to their household budget. We also visited Kenneth's home, another local resident embracing solar energy. It was inspiring to hear how families just like Kenneth's are taking advantage of the program and experiencing real, measurable benefits. The Solar Homes program is making a genuine difference to households right across Victoria by helping families access renewable energy solutions. This initiative is easing cost-of-living pressures, reducing reliance on traditional energy sources and contributing to a renewable, greener future for our state. I want to sincerely thank Brad, Theresa and Kenneth for warmly welcoming us into their homes and sharing their stories. I would also like to acknowledge the minister for her leadership and commitment to delivering programs that not only support our environment but also deliver meaningful savings to local families.

### **Land tax**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:11): This Labor government has dishonestly issued more than \$82 million in incorrect land tax bills. This tired and broke Allan Labor government's track record of tax grabs has hit a new low, because they have now admitted to incorrectly collecting land tax from hardworking Victorians that was not owed. Many residents in my electorate, indeed across Victoria, contacted me distressed and shocked about their land tax bills. 1549 objections lodged by Victorians disputing their land tax assessments were upheld, representing \$82.1 million in tax revenue incorrectly assessed last financial year. The government also admitted that a further 530 objections lodged in June 2024 were still not assessed some 15 months later – as of last month, September – which could result in millions more in land tax incorrectly billed, further impacting the government's expected tax revenue. Labor's financial incompetence and budget blowouts have led to skyrocketing debt, leading to \$194 billion of debt. Wrongly charging land tax shows how desperate Labor have become, especially when Victorians are already the highest taxed in the country under this Labor government. Victorians are already at breaking point. Labor's unfair and dishonest land tax grab has only caused more distress in a cost-of-living crisis.

### **Welcoming the Babies**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (13:12): Welcoming the Babies is back for 2025, and it is one of my favourite days on the calendar, as we get set to welcome the newest inner-westies to Footscray on Saturday 25 October from 10 am to 12 pm. Once again I have been working alongside the incredible team at Tweddle Child and Family Health Service, who are hosting the event for us at their newly renovated Adelaide Street hospital. On the day we will have a one-stop shop for new parents and expecting parents. There will be stalls from the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Maidstone Kick n Paddle, the City of Maribyrnong maternal and child health services, of course the library – you can get a little library card for your bubby – and the Westgate Multiple Birth Association, and there will be information from the Victorian Department of Education on bush kinder and of course free kinder. There will also be free car seat fit checks by Kidsafe Victoria, and these are hot properties, so make sure you go to my website to book in a session quickly. And my favourite each year – the Lions club will be putting on a sausage sizzle. Be sure to RSVP via my website. I cannot wait to meet all the new inner-westies.

### Flood mitigation

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (13:14): On behalf of all those in my electorate who are facing large increases in their home insurance bills, I recently wrote to the Insurance Council of Australia asking them to give consideration to lowering insurance premiums for people who undertake flood mitigation works to protect their property. Part of the response from the insurance council said:

This underscores the urgent need for the Victorian Government to finally establish a household resilience program, similar to the proven initiatives already delivering results in NSW and Queensland.

Your constituents shouldn't have to wait any longer for what other Australians already have access to. The contrast is stark: while other states are getting on with the job of protecting their communities, Victorian families in flood-prone areas like Echuca are left to fend for themselves. This is both unfair and unsustainable.

More broadly, I can advise that the Resilient Building Council is currently developing a multi-hazard rating tool which will assist households know what sort of resilience measures are best suited to their homes, and how these can reduce risk. This information will assist insurers better understand how risk mitigation measures may be able to be taken into account in setting premiums.

I would ask the government to help Victorians who face higher home insurance premiums to help themselves by actually setting up a household resilience program here in Victoria.

### 1st Point Cook Scout Group

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (13:15): The 1st Point Cook Scout Group has turned 50, and what a wonderful anniversary day it was. The 1st Point Cook Scout Group is one of the largest in Victoria with over 200 active young members. I particularly want to thank Charlie, Brooke, Matt, Simon, Kelli 'Kooka' and all the team who put in the countless hours, especially the young leaders. A special shout-out to Robyn and Jenny for their commitment and for the work that they have done in their roles around grants and fundraising. These organisations do not operate by themselves, so thank you for your dedication to these roles.

### Wyndham Harbour

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (13:16): On another matter, Wyndham Harbour looks magnificent, especially at this time of year, but even more so after Beach Patrol 3030 turned up last Sunday. Cleaning up the shoreline of Werribee South and adjoining areas, we were joined by Ashok, Alex, Nancy and many of the volunteers from the Ankur Narula Ministries, who have dedicated themselves to community service and were down with joining us on that day. It was a wonderful day, and I look forward to them all being back and part of that volunteerism in the future.

### Hepatitis

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (13:16): Finally, I would like to talk about the Cancer Council Victoria's launch of a three-year hepatitis B microelimination project in the community that I represent. We were there with the member for Werribee; the member for Laverton; Cr Zhao; Todd Harper, the CEO of the Cancer Council Victoria; and many others. Big shout-out to Charissa Feng, who has really driven this project. If you want to get involved, get in touch with my office.

### Victoria's Pride street party

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (13:16): Free rainbow ice cream, lots of sequins, bare bum cheeks, platform heels, streets turned into massive dance floors, shopfronts turned into exhibition spaces and live dioramas – this is Collingwood and Fitzroy when they are flooded with joy every February at Victoria's Pride street party. It has been a celebration of LGBTQIA+ pride, visibility and community since 2022. It transforms Gertrude and Smith streets into a vibrant, jam-packed, free, all-ages block party that showcases local and international artists, community groups and local traders. It has become a cornerstone of Melbourne's cultural calendar and a cherished annual event.

Midsumma has done an incredible job of delivering this event in the last four years, and the City of Yarra has been its gracious host. But despite its success and its huge contribution to our shared culture



and our local economy, the party may soon be over, because beyond 2026 the government has no plan and no funding committed to another one. Our community absolutely loves hosting this event. It celebrates who we are and it brings people together. I urge the Victorian government to commit to holding Victoria's Pride street party in Collingwood and Fitzroy until 2030.

#### **South East Volunteers**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (13:18): I recently had the pleasure of joining South East Volunteers in celebrating their 40th birthday. This incredible organisation, in conjunction with different levels of government, has served our community with generosity and kindness, empowering social connection and inclusion. Through their transport services that help our most vulnerable neighbours, they provide the dignity and respect that everyone deserves in living an independent and fulfilling life. In 2024 alone South East Volunteers delivered more than 30,000 support interactions, close to 14,000 transport trips and more than 7000 safety register calls, and trained 250 additional volunteers who now serve our community with distinction. They have trained up more than 28,000 volunteers over those 40 years. To the CEO Gavin Watson and the entire team, thank you for all that you do in making our city a safer, more welcoming and inclusive place.

#### **Waverley RSL**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (13:19): I wish to congratulate the Waverley RSL on their 75th anniversary. A longstanding institution in the heart of the Glen Waverley district, it has played an integral role in recognising and supporting those who have served. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our armed service personnel who have made and continue to make incredible sacrifices. I look forward to continuing my engagement with the Waverley RSL, and I would like to thank the member for Mulgrave for holding the fort at the 75th anniversary.

#### **Vermont South Club**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (13:19): A special shout-out to the Vermont South bowls club, who are opening their new greens on the weekend. Since winning their first pennant in the 1994–95 season, they have embedded themselves as a powerhouse in bowls competition. Best wishes to president Di Agius and the team for what is sure to be an exciting weekend.

#### **Brandon Park Reserve**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (13:19): Finally, I was down at Brandon Park Reserve to inspect the progress on a \$500,000 investment by the Allan Labor government – *(Time expired)*

#### **Mark Merry**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (13:20): Today I would like to acknowledge the wonderful achievements of Dr Mark Merry, principal of Yarra Valley Grammar, who will retire at the end of 2025 after 24 years as a principal. With 16 of those remarkable years spent at Yarra, he considers this to be a highlight of his 40-year career in education. Whilst at Yarra, he has also served in the prestigious roles of both Victorian and national chair of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia and chair of the Associated Grammar Schools of Victoria. Dr Merry's leadership and dedication, working with the board and school executive, has strengthened academic performance and positioned Yarra Valley Grammar amongst Victoria's top VCE schools. He has overseen significant capital works, providing students with outstanding facilities and creating a school the entire community can be proud of. Dr Merry's work has broadened connections both internationally and locally, elevating the school's reputation for excellence and prestige. As a result, the school has seen enrolments double. Above all, he has created a genuine culture of service, community and care and a focus that is all about the students. In recognition of Dr Mark Merry's 16 years of outstanding leadership, the new performing arts and media school was named in his honour – a well-deserved and lasting testament to his contribution to the school. Mark, enjoy your retirement, and thank you for your leadership, commitment, service and friendship over the years.

**Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (13:21): It has been busy in Northcote. At Bracken Creek I joined the Merri Creek Management Committee and Friends of Bracken Creek, where 14 of us collected 40 kilograms of litter in just a couple of hours – hands-on environmental care that makes a real difference to our local waterways. Alongside the members for Cooper and Preston, we held a community safety forum with Victoria Police and residents. Thank you to Acting Inspector Michael Pope and Senior Constable Peta Williams for leading a discussion around issues from graffiti to personal safety. On Oakover Road I welcomed new neighbours over coffee in a transformed precinct – once 26 dilapidated houses, now 296 modern, energy-efficient homes and open spaces right on the Mernda. With the Minister for Climate Action, we kicked off more Solar for Apartments rebates in Alphington to cut bills and modernise home energy. While doorknocking, at meetings and at the drop-in session, I spoke with dozens of residents about proposed planning changes in Thornbury. Locals tell me we need more homes close to transport, but they want local nuance, and that is the detail I am taking back. I visited Thornbury High School with the Deputy Premier to see their outstanding STEAM building, built by our Labor government. At Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston with Minister Pearson, we saw the skills and jobs centre in action, delivering real pathways to employment. Local Pick My Park ideas have been released – a brilliant opportunity for local government to access state grants to improve our open spaces. And in huge news, Tweddle will deliver Northcote's early parenting centre, bringing over 100 years of expertise to our community.

**Melbourne Royal Show**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (13:23): I commend the work of Melbourne Royal on another fabulous Melbourne Royal Show recently. With their theme of 'Let it show' it certainly was an opportunity to let the rural areas of Victoria shine and show. We know that agricultural and pastoral societies put on incredible shows right across regional Victoria, and it is a fabulous event to attend because we can see the best things that our local community can produce. Whether it is the wonderful fleece, whether it is fabulous stock and flocks of sheep, whether it is our grains and oilseeds, whether it is our wonderful, artistic design and production in our rural areas, whether it is from young primary school aged children to our oldest Victorians, whether it is around those incredible cakes which I am always quite envious of, and looking at how delicious they would be – I have that ongoing thought that one day I will enter a carrot cake and be the grand champion for Victoria – whether it is our beautiful wines across the region and our spirits or whether it is our beers, we do it best in rural and regional Victoria.

Again, I would like to commend Melbourne Royal for the incredible work that they do in showcasing the very, very best of rural and regional Victoria and ensuring that we all understand how important rural and regional Victoria is to the Victorian economy.

**Mal Campbell**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:24): I rise today to pay tribute to the late Mal Campbell, who sadly passed away recently. Mal served as the president of the Surrey Hills Cricket Club for eight years and was a well-known and valued member of the club. Mal was adored and respected by the whole sporting community at Surrey Park. He was passionate about cricket and proud of his club and cared deeply about creating a place where players and families felt welcome. Mal had a real love of sport, not just cricket, but for the entire Surrey Park community. You would often see him at local football matches, chatting to players and volunteers, cheering them on from the sidelines. I was fortunate enough to know and have a great relationship with Mal. He was always welcoming and accommodating and had a great sense of humour. My sincere condolences to his wife Stephanie, their sons Ryan and Michael and everyone in the Surrey Park community. Mal's kindness, commitment and passion for community sport will forever be remembered. Vale, Mal Campbell.

**Faye Dapiran**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:25): I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Faye Dapiran, longstanding Surrey Hills resident and life member of the Victorian ALP. The many who knew Faye well speak of how friend and community focused she was, her sense of fun and her love of a chat about the footy, her beloved Geelong Cats and the current affairs of the day. One to never suffer fools and always speak her mind, she was a woman of many passions and interests. A student of the 1960s and 70s, her political awakenings were formed around the Vietnam conflict and the civil rights movement, punctuated by the music of her beloved Beatles. Her lifelong commitment to the Labor cause saw her work for MPs Anna Burke, Lidia Argondizzo and Mike Symon and the union movement as well as being a very active branch member and campaign worker at countless state and federal elections. Vale, Faye Dapiran.

**Sunshine Heights Cricket Club**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (13:26): With spring now officially sprung and summer well and truly on its way, cricket season is starting to heat up for most of our local community sporting clubs right across Victoria, and that is why for me there was no better way to celebrate the beginning of the season than to spend it down at Sunshine Heights Cricket Club in my electorate last week to celebrate the installation of their brand new LED electronic scoreboard at Ainsworth Reserve in Sunshine West. The scoreboard would not have been possible without our government supporting the club in last year's state budget with an \$85,000 investment towards the cost of installing it, and I clearly remember calling Walter from the club on budget day last year and telling him that they would be receiving this funding. He was absolutely overjoyed with happiness, and seeing the club last week as we turned the lights on, that same gratitude and same excitement was there on so many faces. For the club it means more time to practise at night and more options for games. There are two clubs that play from this site, the other being Sunshine Heights footy club, and we are talking about hundreds of members across both clubs who are going to be benefiting from this brand new scoreboard, though the footy club might actually have to wait until next season to get the most out of it. But whether it is here at Sunshine Heights cricket club and football club, the \$70,000 we have funded this year to support Western Suburbs soccer club or the funding we delivered for Trug Thunder footy club on the other side of my electorate, it is clear our government will always back our local sports clubs in the Laverton electorate.

**Multicultural Youth Awards**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:27): The Multicultural Youth Awards 2025 were announced at the Victorian Parliament on 3 October. This was a night to remember as we celebrated and showcased the outstanding achievements of young people of multicultural background. Yusuf Liban, president of the Multicultural Youth Group, and the team organised this prestigious event attended by several dignitaries, members of Parliament, CEOs, families and friends. It was an evening of enjoyment filled with hope, happiness and optimism as we learned about and honoured extraordinary young people doing extraordinary things. These awards are unique, and it is important we provide the investment and support they deserve. Congratulations to all award winners: the overall award, the Australian Youth Minister's award, Zayd Safi; Entrepreneur of the Year, Annie Zhou; Outstanding Contribution to the Community award, Devika Chaudhary; Inspirational Young Person of the Year, Zayed Safi; Volunteer of the Year, Marina Abe; Academic Excellence award, Mehwish Ateeq; Sportsperson of the Year, Yasmin Haddara; Implementing Aboriginal Self-Determination award, Saige Bell; Young Apprentice/Vocational award, Zahra Ebrahimi; Young Woman of the Year, Shiao Lu Ooi; Young Leader of the Year, Jad Saeed; Young Influencer of the Year, Hadeel Alshuraymi; and Creative and Performing Arts award, Fiston Baraka. Thank you to you all for your outstanding contributions to Victoria.

**St Charbel Parish, Greenvale**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:28): Last weekend I had the privilege of joining the Premier and Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay at the inaugural St Charbel gala, an inspiring celebration of faith,

community and vision alongside hundreds from the St Charbel Parish community, and together we launched the visionary St Charbel master plan, an exciting road map for the future development and growth of this vibrant and faithful community led by Abouna Charles Hitti and the Antonine Maronite order. As the member for Greenvale, I am proud to support this important initiative and deeply grateful to all who made the evening such a meaningful and successful beginning to the journey of bringing the vision of the St Charbel master plan to life.

### **Diwali**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:29): Across recent weeks it has been such a joy celebrating Navratri and Diwali across our community. It was a particular pleasure to welcome so many community leaders and organisations from Greenvale and across Melbourne's north, like Kali Mata Mandir, BAPS Mill Park and Northern Melbourne Marathi Mandal to the Premier's Diwali state reception for a joyful celebration of culture, connection and shared values. Diwali reminds us of the power of light over darkness and the importance of compassion, selflessness, unity and respect – common values that resonate deeply across our diverse Victorian community – and to all those celebrating in the weeks ahead, I wish you a Diwali filled with light, love and new beginnings.

### **Greenvale Primary School**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:30): I was thrilled to attend Greenvale Primary School's recent annual art show and writers festival. This year's themes 'Art through the ages' and 'A journey through time' beautifully showcased the creativity and talent of our young artists and storytellers. Thank you to the school community, thank you to the teachers who put in so much hard work and thank you to the students for showcasing their wonderful talents.

### **Business interrupted under resolution of house of 11 September.**

#### *Address to Parliament*

#### **Address by First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria co-chairs**

**The SPEAKER** (13:31): Pursuant to a resolution of this house I have the privilege to invite Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa, Dja Dja Wurrung woman Ngarra Murray and Gunditjmarra man Rueben Berg to the floor of the house. On behalf of the honourable members of this house I acknowledge, as we do every sitting day, the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, as well as elders with us here today from other communities. Co-chairs Murray and Berg, I now invite you both to read out the names of the members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and address the house.

**Ngarra MURRAY** (13:32): The assembly represents the five regions of Victoria – South East, South West, North East, North West and Metropolitan – and the reserved seats of the Barengi Gadjin, Bunurong and Dja Dja Wurrung clans; Eastern Maar; First People of the Millewa–Mallee; Gunaikurnai Land and Waters; Gunditjmarra traditional owners; Taungurung Land and Waters; Wadawurrung Traditional Owners; Wamba Wemba and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung.

I will now introduce to the floor the assembly members: Alice Pepper, Gunnai, Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti, Gunditjmarra, Arernte; Alister Thorpe, Gunai, Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmarra, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung; Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung; Barry Firebrace-Briggs, Yorta Yorta, Ulupna, Wamba Wamba, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung; Belinda Briggs, Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba; Brian Stevens, Gunai; Uncle Bryon Powell, Wadawurrung; Djaran Murray-Jackson, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Barapa Barapa, Wergaia, Wiradjuri; Aunty Donna Wright, Kerrupmara, Nillaan, Gunditjmarra, Dhauwurd wurrung, Djab wurrung, Kamilaroi; Aunty Esme Bamblett, Bangerang, Taungurung, Wiradjuri; Gnerick Gnerick Gary Murray, Dhudhuroa, Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wemba, Wergaia, Wiradjeri, Waywurru; Indi Clarke, Wemba Wemba, Mutti Mutti, Boon Wurrung, Trawlwoolway, Lardil; Jacinta Chaplin Morgan, Wadi Wadi, Wamba Wamba;

Jason Kelly, Mutthi Mutthi, Wamba Wamba; Jordan Edwards, Gunditjmara, Waddawurrung, Arrernte; Kaley Nicholson, Taungurung, Wamba Wamba, Barapa Barapa, Yorta Yorta, Bunurong, Mutti Mutti; Levi Power, Yorta Yorta; Lisa Briggs, Gunditjmara; Lowana Moore, Wamba Wamba; Melissa Jones, Latje Latje, Jupagulk; Uncle Michael 'Mookeye' Bell, Gunditjmara, Boandik; Nerita Waight, Yorta Yorta, Narrandjeri; Nicole Atkinson, Bangerang, Gunditjmara; Peter Hood, Kurnai; Uncle Rodney Carter, Dja Dja Wurrung; Sheree Lowe, Peek Whurrong, Djab Whurrung, Kirrae Whurrung; Aunty Tracey Evans, Gunditjmara, Bundjalung; Troy Austin, Gunditjmara; Troy McDonald, Gunaikurnai, Gunditjmara, Boandik; Zoe Upton, Bunurong, Trawoolway.

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ngarra Murray, and I am a proud Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Dja Dja Wurrung, Dhudhuroa woman. I am an elected co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, alongside Rueben Berg.

First Peoples have been caring for country for at least tens of thousands of years. Pre colonisation Victoria was home to about 60,000 First Peoples, comprising 300 to 500 clan groups and speaking over 40 First Peoples' languages. Each language carried the stories, lores, songs and knowledge systems that connected people to country. Aboriginal people are deeply connected to the land through stories, languages and systems of relational sovereignty that have guided our way of life for thousands of generations.

Being part of the oldest continuous living culture on this planet is to walk in the footsteps of our old people, whose knowledge, stories and spirits stretch back more than 60,000 years. It is to carry a history so vast that it predates the Egyptian pyramids. It is to hold the wisdom of this land and the lore that has been passed down from generation to generation. The enormity of this truth is humbling and powerful. It means we have unbroken bloodlines. We are guardians of the world's most ancient stories and the keepers of a legacy that continues to guide our future. Connection to country is as profound as it is unique. Our cultural practices are founded on and embedded within a worldview in which people and country are one. The sovereignty of First Peoples in Victoria has never been ceded and continues to exist.

On behalf of the assembly, we pay respect to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, their ancestors, elders and family clans of this country. Here in Naarm, the land of Bunjil and Waa, the Wurundjeri have been generous and shared and provided a platform and a place for the fight for equality. That includes this place, the Parliament of Victoria, so we thank Uncle Andrew Gardiner for the welcoming this morning and Thane Garvey for the smoking ceremony to keep us grounded on a big day for everyone in this Parliament. I acknowledge all First Peoples in the room today, particularly our assembly members; the inaugural co-chairs, Aunty Geri Atkinson and Marcus Stewart; former treaty commissioner Aunty Jill Gallagher; our elders; the Treaty Authority members; and former Yoorook justice commissioners. I acknowledge the leadership of the Premier Jacinta Allan; the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins; the Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples Christine Couzens; Sheena Watt, Gabrielle Williams and all the cabinet members, a number of whom have walked with us on this 10-year journey.

Our ancestors as children watched the white man come to our country. They would have seen many of their people die. Some were killed in cruel reprisals when they tried to keep their territory. Some were shot down in the blackfella hunt – no different to the kangaroo hunt; simply to clear the land. Some were given presents of poisoned flour. Some died from the white man's diseases, some from his alcohol. The history of dispossession in this country is long. Our dispossession was effected by the colonisers through a systemic campaign of intentional violence. Our people felt the impacts of colonisation and dispossession physically, culturally, spiritually, economically and legally.

We heard many of these truths through Yoorook. Our people are storytellers by nature, and we ensured those stories were carried forward. Yoorook was the first formal truth-telling in this country, but it will not be the last. Through treaty, we will ensure ongoing truth-telling. That is because we have been vocal about the impacts on and the conditions of our people for a long time. In 1933 William

Cooper circulated a petition asking for Aboriginal representation in Parliament, to have a say on the decisions that directly affected our people. In 1937 William Ferguson and Jack Patten launched their initiative. They called for the emancipation and betterment of Aboriginal people. In 1938, at the Day of Mourning, the explicit call from people like my grandfather Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls was for equality within the community, and 90 years on – until very, very recently – we were still having the same conversation, talking about the same struggles and calling for the same actions. For a long time this country and this state tried to forget or erase the past, but we remembered. This time for paternalistic governments making decisions on behalf of our people ends with this treaty. No longer will policies be made about us without us. Our people will no longer tolerate being the political football that politicians kick around looking to further their own selfish interests.

We are sovereign peoples with the oldest systems of governance on earth, and we bring that knowledge forward to today, where we stand at a crossroads. We as a state, all Victorians, are presented with an opportunity for a new way forward. This treaty heralds an era where everyone prospers. It is built on respect, truth and shared responsibility, where First Peoples culture, knowledge and authority are not just acknowledged but central to how we govern, care for country and make decisions together. It is children growing up proud of who they are, walking confidently in two worlds, knowing their language and history and that their rights are honoured. It is healthier lands and rivers because decisions are guided by thousands of years of wisdom. It is a future where Victoria is known not just for its natural beauty but for the way it nurtures culture, celebrates diversity and ensures that safety, dignity and opportunity are shared by all. In this era our ethos and civic responsibility are defined by how deeply we value one another. It is felt in stronger relationships and in communities thriving. I hope this is something that is felt and embraced by all Victorians no matter their cultural background.

This new era is the culmination of the work from everyone here in this room, particularly those who you can see in the gallery, but also of the tens of thousands of people across the state that walked with us on this journey bridging the past to now. Victoria has led the way for a decade in enacting that change. We have passed legislation in this place before, twice, without opposition, with overwhelming support from all sides of the political sphere, and today we seek to continue that path. I invite all members of this place to support us once again and enable meaningful change. At the forefront of creating change is Gellung Warl. I invite everyone in this room and in this state to stand proudly as we walk that bridge towards Gellung Warl. In Gunaikurnai, Gellung Warl means tip of the spear, a spear that is crafted with a task in mind. Created with care, a spear is not haste alone, nor is it passive; it is endurance, it is measured calmness and understanding the timing to take action, and that time is now. Thank you.

**Rueben BERG** (13:43): Ngata. Ngatook Gunditjmarra. Ngatook Kirrae Wurrung. Ngatook Djaparung. Ngatook Worimi. Ngatook Parabeena. Leenyar meering than yang poonart. Wanyoon Wurundjeri Meering. T'do Wurundjeri Leenyar. T'do Wurundjeri Kakoon.

Gellung Warl, the tip of the spear. Across these lands spears were made for different needs: pronged spears for the shallows, close work; single-point hunting spears for distance and accuracy; ceremonial spears that speak to status, process, responsibility, made from wood, straightened by hand, spear point reinforced by fire, fibre and sinew bound with resin so the point and the body do not part. This is our guide. The tip is Gellung Warl; the wood of the spear, our community; the binding is treaty; the line of sight and the throw are our self-determination. We shape the point together, bind our purpose and we take responsibility for the throw.

When we talk about the work involved together to get us to this stage of the treaty process, it is about much more than the current members of the First Peoples' Assembly. It is the members of the Aboriginal treaty interim working group, the community assembly, the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group and previous members of the assembly, as well as all of those community members who participated in the roadshows, consultations, treaty engagements and yarns. It is the traditional owner workshops, the Aboriginal community controlled organisation workshops from 2017 to today, where we stand here in Parliament to talk about the first Statewide Treaty.

This first Statewide Treaty is a renewed and enduring relationship between First Peoples and the state. It honours an unbroken connection to country and to Aboriginal lore, law and cultural authority. It affirms a simple principle recognised around the world: First Peoples decide First Peoples' issues. For the last 200 years, we have had successive governments saying they know best about our business. Countless bodies, commissions and policies have been set up without the leadership of First Peoples. Even with governments with good intentions, it just does not work. All of us can agree our approach must change. Today we can agree to move forward together by discontinuing the centuries of ineffective and harmful policies. This is not a favour asked, but a right recognised. Not a louder plea, but a clearer purpose. Not charity, but justice.

Treaty must live beyond the page. Treaty will be felt in classrooms and on riverbanks, in hospitals and in homes: truth that lives in schools so our children learn the story of this place, whole and honest; country that speaks its names so signs, forests and maps call places by their language names again and reflect some of the earth's oldest stories; programs led by First Peoples so the work of honouring and building our communities is in our hands; independent eyes on government and on us so promises meet results and results get outcomes. We do this not to divide Victoria but to complete it, not to take anything from anyone but to make this place more whole for everyone.

Good intentions have too often outlived good outcomes, so the Gellung Warl will begin this work immediately. We will set measurable milestones. We will implement practical, impactful pathways. We will report progress openly. We are answerable to our community first, through *lurbargirrar gnuurtak tulkuuk*. We will accept scrutiny from our people, from this Parliament and from independent bodies, and we will measure success where it counts.

Truth-telling will continue through *Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna* – place-based, self-determined, building the public record and enabling healing. Government accountability will be real through *Nginma Ngainga Wara*, examining policy, programs and spending, naming institutional racism and embedding cultural safety. These are not performative gestures; they are powerful tools – and tools are for getting work done.

Everyone here can take pride in leading the way in Australia, like Victoria has done time and time again. Victorians do not turn away; we step forward, accepting the weight of history and the responsibility to carry it. But we can also take comfort in knowing that treaty is not a novel idea – Niagara, 1764; Delaware, 1778; Waitangi, 1840; Sámi, 1972; Inuvialuit, 1984; Nunavut, 1993; Nisga'a, 1999; Whitecap Dakota Nation, 2023. There are hundreds like them, but this one is ours – Naarm, 2025. Around the world, treaties have been in place for centuries, and quite simply, they work. When First Peoples lead, outcomes improve. So while this is an historic day, I reiterate that we Australians are late to it. We choose it now by emulating what succeeds and shaping it to this country and our communities.

To the Parliament: I remind you that treaty lives beyond the page; it must live beyond these walls. To our people: stand with us – steady, patient, proud. From today we are no longer asking for a seat at the government's table; from today we set our own table, and we lead the work that affects us. Treaty is about our people bringing their stories, truths, ideas and scrutiny to this newly set table – our table, our work. And to every Victorian: no matter your story, this treaty is an invitation – one that has been called for for a long time – that we now arrive at. Whether you and your families have been here for five years or 50,000, people seek Victoria as a home, as a place that is respecting and accepting of all people.

There are many powerful guides for us on this journey to treaty. My dad Jim Berg once said, in reference to culturally scarred trees:

If you look at a scarred tree, it's ... starting a healing process where it's coming towards the middle ... To me, that ... represents the people. On one side we have Koori people and, on the other side, non-Koori people, slowly coming together and reaching out for each other.

The healing process has begun.

Dad was talking about just the start of healing, something that can take a long time, but not long ago, just a few weeks ago, my eight-year-old daughter wrote a report about treaty for a school project, which said:

Treaty is a group of men and women, to help Aboriginal people get their true rights back, which makes it really really important to Aboriginal mobs, such as the Gunditjmarra.

Treaty has moved from a far-off aspiration to a soon-to-be-realised reality, and it will become something which future generations will see as the standard way of doing business.

Between my dad, me and my daughter we represent three generations of the Gunditjmarra. We carry truths in our hearts and healing in our hands. I stand here now, and I urge everyone today to join us in making history, in heralding in a new era – the treaty era. Let us walk forward together – walk with truth in our hearts and fairness in our stride. Thank you.

**The SPEAKER:** We thank the members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for being with us today. We thank the co-chairs, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, for their inspiring words. I ask members to acknowledge the co-chairs as they withdraw from the chamber.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 1:55 pm until 2:01 pm.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge in the gallery a visiting delegation from the Parliament of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa: the Honourable Dr Ntuthuko Mahlaba, the Honourable Mthandeni Dlungwana, the Honourable Marlaine Nair and the Honourable LJ De Klerk.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Crime**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday Chief Commissioner Mike Bush said we have a major crime problem here in Victoria. Does the Premier accept the chief commissioner's position that Victoria has a major crime problem?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): Not only do I accept and support the chief commissioner's plan that he released yesterday for a new-look Victoria Police, I back the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. I respect the operational independence of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. We most certainly do not do on this side of the house like those opposite have done repeatedly and undermine the work of –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour. Members will be removed without warning. I will not tolerate this level of disruption.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to the question. She is being evasive.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Before I was interrupted by the new Manager of Opposition Business, I was reminding those opposite that you do not support Victoria Police when you are undermining their work to get dangerous weapons off our streets.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members do not need to ask me to call them. I will see them standing.



**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I do feel that I need to stand up for your integrity. The Premier should not be reflecting on you. Reflecting on you is entirely unparliamentary, Speaker.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Of all the people to talk about integrity. Ask the member for Hawthorn about that, member for Brighton.

When it comes to supporting the work of the chief commissioner, I reinforce most firmly that this government does support the work of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. Indeed, in listening and taking the advice of Victoria Police and in listening and understanding the experiences of victims of crime, we have already accepted that there is a challenge here in this state to address this repeat, brazen pattern of behaviour that cannot be tolerated and will not be tolerated, which is why we have already moved to strengthen the bail laws in this place – bail laws, I note, that those opposite opposed on the way through – and introduced the ban on machetes in this state.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will tell you how it is going. Two thousand machetes have been handed in over the past fortnight, in addition to the 12,000 weapons that have been taken off the streets as a result of our government giving police more stop-and-search powers. That is how it is going, member for Malvern, as you are heading out the door. I will give you those figures on your way out, member for Malvern. And we are doing this because – again, I do want to go back and restate – it is from listening to victims of crime. It is understanding that this is not just a grave matter of concern; it is a repeat, brazen pattern of behaviour that must not be tolerated. It will not be tolerated. In understanding that there is more to do, it also does go to that very important point of supporting the work of Victoria Police, not undermining it, which is why we support the plan that the chief commissioner released yesterday for a new-look Victoria Police to keep our community safe.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): According to the most recent statistics, crime in Victoria increased by 16 per cent with one offence committed every 49 seconds, including a 42 per cent increase in car thefts, a 22 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries and a 16 per cent increase in serious assaults. Why is the government cutting police funding, closing police stations and leaving thousands of police jobs empty despite this rampant crime?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): The Leader of the Opposition in his supplementary question has just proven the point that I was making in answer to the substantive question. It is questions like that which undermine the work of Victoria Police. There has been no funding cut –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the Premier is being evasive.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It is entirely within the remit of me answering this question to tell the Leader of the Opposition how he is wrong. Going back to answering the question, the chief commissioner has made this clear yesterday and over the course of today. He has refuted –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Manager of Opposition Business, I ask you to come to order. I ruled your point of order out of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** He has refuted this deliberately misleading and undermining claim from the Leader of the Opposition. He makes it time and time again, which means the chief commissioner has to time and time again remind the Leader of the Opposition that he is wrong when it comes to those claims that he is making about the level of funding to Victoria Police. We have –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I do not know what the Premier is answering, but this question specifically went to the major crime crisis identified by the chief commissioner.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** On the point of order, Speaker, I would have thought the Manager of Opposition Business's elevation back to that role meant that he had a role in question time tactics. The question that the Leader of the Opposition asked went to statistics and then made an incorrect claim about the level of funding to Victoria Police, and that is the question that I am addressing in my answer.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I said, we support Victoria Police; we do not undermine Victoria Police. We give them the resources and the tools and the powers they need to do their work.

#### **Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): There are some who said this about the Metro Tunnel: some said it would never happen, some called it a hoax, some said it would be a disaster and some said it was nothing but smoke and mirrors. Do you know what we call it on this side of the house? Victoria's biggest transport project in a generation: five new underground stations that from early December will be delivering hundreds of extra services every week, whether you are in Sunbury, Pakenham, Cranbourne or any point along the line in between. And of course let us not forget our friends on the Frankston line, because with the opening of the Metro Tunnel we put the Frankston line back into the city loop. This is the biggest transformation of Melbourne's and Victoria's rail network in more than four decades. It is being delivered a year ahead of schedule, and it is opening in early December.

These are not ordinary stations; these are magnificent underground stations that are going to serve our city for the future. Just look at State Library – 42 metres below Swanston Street. The depth is lower than the height of Marvel Stadium, with platforms that stretch 220 metres long, some of the widest in the world, 12-metre-high columns with 70-tonne beams, the longest escalator anywhere in Melbourne, and of course that direct connection into Melbourne Central and city loop services. Let us take a moment to thank those thousands of construction workers who worked incredibly hard constructing the most complex project that has ever been delivered in this state. That is because our Labor government backed it, we funded it and we built it, and it is now opening. Whilst we have built five new stations, those opposite have had five new leaders, but our stations will take you somewhere.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Lara withdrew from chamber.**

#### **Community safety**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:12): My question is to the Attorney-General.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.**

**James NEWBURY:** On Sunday a father and his 23-year-old son were randomly attacked by a group of teenagers. The alleged youth offenders were charged and bailed but then returned to the scene

while the media was still reporting, with one gloating that he was ‘addicted to stabbing people’. Why do dangerous youth offenders keep getting released under bail laws weakened by this government?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:13): I acknowledge the question by the member opposite, his first in the role of Shadow Attorney-General. I will forgive him this once for getting the facts wrong. I will forgive him this once. He is new to the role and he is still getting his head around the portfolio, but we do need to acknowledge that his facts are wrong. I remind the member that if he is going to use this place to ask questions he must come with the correct, factual information.

First of all, I do want to acknowledge the family that was involved. Of course this is a really distressing incident. It is nothing that we want to be seeing on our streets, and it is exactly the reason why we have been responding to victims and to communities around expectations and around why we needed to do more work to toughen our bail laws, and that is exactly what we have done this year. Two tranches of bail laws have been introduced that make our bail laws the toughest in the nation. Two weeks ago the highest degree of probability test – this is the toughest test in the nation for bail laws – commenced. That is on top of all the other bail reforms we have introduced this year.

But of course we must also get back to the facts and the statistics. The statistics are speaking for themselves. Forty-six per cent –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very serious question that raised a very specific case. The minister made a big song and dance about it, and I would ask her to come to the question.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I ask members to raise their points of order succinctly. I will not tolerate conversations across the chamber. The Attorney was being relevant. The Attorney to answer the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY**: Forty-six per cent is the increased percentage of young people on remand. That is a significant increase, and that shows you that our tougher bail laws are working. We know that, obviously, there is more work to do, and I want to acknowledge our Chief Commissioner of Police, who came out yesterday to acknowledge that police need to do more, which is why he is reorganising police.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are 2½ minutes into the answer. The minister said the facts were wrong. Where?

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

**Sonya KILKENNY**: I was acknowledging our Chief Commissioner of Police for his announcement yesterday on the work that Victoria Police will do for a new-look police to get more police out on the streets to ensure that there is more focus on crime prevention and supporting our communities and supporting victims.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question to hide from the fact that the facts of this case were absolutely right. You should be ashamed.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Brighton, I ask you not to use the term ‘you’; it is a reflection on the Chair. It is not a point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY**: The member for Brighton was incorrect in his facts at the beginning of his question.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:18): How many more dangerous youth offenders that are addicted to stabbing people need to be released before the Attorney-General will admit that her bail laws are failing to keep Victorians safe from dangerous youth offenders?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:18): As I said, our laws are working. Our bail laws are working. The facts speak for themselves. Forty-six per cent is the number –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be factual. I am raising a case on Sunday where someone was attacked. The minister is required to be factual.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I ask you to be succinct in your points of order. It is an expectation that every member who is on their feet in this place is factual.

**Sonya KILKENNY**: As I said, 46 per cent is the increase in the number of young people on remand. That is a significant increase, and that goes directly to the question of ‘Are our bail law reforms working?’ Yes, they are. The facts speak for themselves.

### Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:19): Victorians have waited patiently as the Metro Tunnel has taken shape beneath their very feet. Behind worksite walls, under our streets, thousands of Victorian workers have been building five brand new, state-of-the-art stations and twin 9-kilometre tunnels. While Victorians have been patient, they will not need to be patient any longer. Last week the Premier and I announced that the Allan Labor government will be opening the Metro Tunnel with the summer start in early December, a full year ahead of schedule.

This project is so important because it allows us to deliver services across our network for generations to come. It gives Victorians more ways to move, and during the summer start we are saying thank you to Victoria with free public transport every weekend. Once the Metro Tunnel opens, every tram, every bus and every train across metropolitan and regional Victoria will be free, from the first service each Saturday to the last service each Sunday, for everyone. We will run 240 extra services each week over the summer so that Victorians can get to know those brand new stations and also get to better understand their new journeys. Then from 1 February we will make the big switch, overhauling the public transport timetable and running more than 1000 extra services every single week, all of this made possible by the Metro Tunnel project.

That is just the beginning, because soon after there will be extra services being rolled out on the Upfield line, on the Craigieburn line, on the Werribee line and on the Sandringham line. We will be able to keep doing that now for generations to come because of the Metro Tunnel project. Those opposite called this project a hoax. They turned their backs on Victorians. By refusing to plan for the future they committed to sending Victoria backwards. They would get rid of colour TV if they could. But Labor governments build not just infrastructure, but opportunity.

### Employment

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:21): My question is to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I remind members once again that this is not a house of conversation. It is a house of debate.

**Jess WILSON**: My question is to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. Yesterday the government claimed that Victoria’s economy is thriving. Why then has Victoria’s unemployment rate been above the national average for 19 consecutive months?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:22): I am pleased to take a question from the newly minted Shadow Treasurer because this gives us an opportunity to talk about the way in which the economy is operating under the Labor government. I am really pleased that Victoria’s unemployment rate has fallen and remains low, by

historical comparisons, at 4.4 per cent. That is important to note – 4.4 per cent in 2025. Compare and contrast that to November 2014, when under the former Liberal government the unemployment rate was 6.7 per cent. The reality is that under this government we have got the settings right, because when you talk about employment it is about the three Ps. It is about population growth, and we are leading the nation when it comes to population growth. It is about participation, and the participation rate here in Victoria is at an almost historic high, in the high 60s – 67, 68 per cent. And it is about productivity. That is why it is so important that we start to embrace new technologies like AI and like digitals, because that will provide the way in which we can lift material living standards.

In addition to that, in the time that we have been in office we have created more than 896,000 jobs – since we were elected – a 31 per cent increase and the highest absolute percentage increase of any state. The other point to make is that from 1 July this year – I am so proud of this – every small business with a payroll of less than \$1 million is paying no payroll tax, for the first time ever. So we have got the settings right. The settings are right. The economy is growing. If she looks at the budget forecast or looks at the budget papers, the Shadow Treasurer will see that Victoria’s economy is expected to increase from \$600 billion to \$700 billion across the forward estimates. The economy is expanding because we have the settings right, and material standards are lifting as a result. I will compare and contrast our record on job creation in this state, on any measure, to the lazy effort of those opposite when they were last in government.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:25): Yesterday the government admitted that only 2.3 in every 10 jobs created were in the market sector. Will the minister admit that this government’s 60 new or increased taxes, introduced to pay for this government’s record debt, are costing private sector jobs?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:25): I do not accept the analysis that was published yesterday. It was selective, it was sloppy and it was out of date. The reality is that over the last year Victoria has created 77,900 jobs, the highest employment growth in the nation, with non-market-sector job growth broadly in line with New South Wales. The reality is that we have created that level of growth because we have got the policy settings right. I know that the Shadow Treasurer has only just arrived, but I do note her predecessor committed the coalition to a debt cap. The question for the Shadow Treasurer is: do you stand by that policy? If the answer is yes, what is the debt cap? What is the number? The issue here is that when you start talking about a debt cap, like those opposite have postulated in the past, it comes down to the fact that you have to either increase taxes or cut services. What is it going to be? Are you going to cut services?

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, I ask you not to use the phrase ‘you’; it is a reflection on the Chair.

**Jess Wilson:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, yesterday a government spokesperson confirmed 2.3 jobs in every 10 jobs. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

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

**Danny PEARSON:** Using ABS data over the year to March 2025, Victoria – *(Time expired)*

#### Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:27): The Allan Labor government is opening doors for thousands of families, young people and workers who want to live in well-connected suburbs – suburbs with great access to public transport – and soon these connections will get even better because in December, a full year ahead of schedule, the Metro Tunnel will open. This transformational project will deliver faster journeys, more services and direct access to jobs, education and opportunities linking the west, the centre and the south-east of our city, from West Footscray through to Caulfield, Oakleigh, Springvale, Noble Park and Dandenong.

But the benefits do not stop there. By freeing up space in the city loop, the Metro Tunnel adds capacity across the entire network, with over 1000 new train services when we flick the switch. That is why our train and tram zone program is so important, delivering more than 300,000 new homes across

60 metropolitan train and tram centres. This is good policy and good reform, building homes where Victorians want to live right around those train stations, and it is backed by our fast-track development pathway for projects that include affordable homes. By slashing –

*Interjections from gallery.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister will resume her seat until the gallery is cleared.

**Public gallery cleared.**

**Sonya KILKENNY:** We are slashing stamp duty as well. Right now we are consulting with communities on draft maps for 25 train and tram zone activity centres, including stations along the Sunbury to Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. Each map is carefully designed street by street, metre by metre, with more height for homes near train stations and gentler, low-rise change in surrounding areas. While we are opening doors to more homes and better connected transport, those opposite just want to slam them shut, locking young people out of the suburbs they grew up in. Only Labor has a plan to deliver for Victoria; those opposite just have their exit strategy.

**Housing**

**Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:29):** My question is to the Premier. Victoria is in the midst of a housing crisis, rental stress is at record levels and young Victorians are finding it impossible to even dream of owning a home. More than 65,000 people remain on the public housing waitlist. In September the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place stated in response to a question about completions that over 11,100 homes are ‘completed or in construction or planning’ under the Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund. There is a major difference between a home that exists and one that is only in the planning stage. People cannot live in a permit. Premier, how many of those 11,100 homes have actually been completed?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30):** I thank the member for Ringwood for his question regarding our government’s work to build more public housing. We are doing this through our Big Housing Build because we understand that not only do you have to build more homes everywhere across the state, as the Minister for Planning was just referring to in her statement to the house, whether it is around train and tram activity centres or in regional areas, in the outer suburbs or in the inner city. We need to work with the private sector to build more homes, and we are doing that, because Victoria leads the nation in the number of homes that are being built, completed and are underway. We lead the nation by some thousands and thousands of homes. But on this side of the house we also understand that the government has that centrally important role of building homes for the most vulnerable in our community, that we should and must and do invest in more public housing, which is why through the Big Housing Build we are actually delivering more than 13,300 social and affordable homes across Victoria.

In terms of the breakdown, I would go and refer to the minister for housing for the latest figures because I know there are projects that are being completed every single month. In terms of that question, the request was for a breakdown between projects that have been completed and projects that are underway. I will seek that information from the minister for housing. I say this because I look at my own electorate of Bendigo East and my neighbouring electorate of Bendigo West where we have a number of projects that are being supported through the Big Housing Build, where we partner with organisations like UnitingCare and other agencies to build more homes through the Big Housing Build. And I am confident that colleagues around the state have projects in their own electorates that are coming to completion. I will seek that information from the minister for housing, but it comes to the central point that we need to build more homes for everyone but particularly to support the most vulnerable in our community, which is what our Big Housing Build program does.

One other constant that is there in our Big Housing Build is projects that continue to be opposed, particularly by members of the Liberal opposition. We reject that. We understand that we need to build

more homes, and through the good work of the Minister for Planning we are also seeing more and more homes being built by the private sector. In the 12 months to the end of August 2025 there were 55,000 homes approved. To give you a comparison point, that is 6100 more than New South Wales, which is the next biggest state. But we know there is more to do, and that is why we will continue through our planning regime and through our funding programs to build more homes for more Victorians.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:33): It is abundantly clear, with the refusal of the minister in the other place to detail the number of completions and the fact that the Premier does not know how many completions there have been, that the number is not a good number. Does the Premier accept that all of this work, all of this noise, around housing is thus far primarily delivering permits rather than homes?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): I appreciate the member for Ringwood perhaps wrote his supplementary question before having heard the answer to his substantive question. I reject the claims that he has made in his supplementary question, because they are also not borne out in the answer I gave to his substantive question. We are building more homes through our Big Housing Build, as I said earlier. There are more than 13,300 social and affordable homes that are being delivered or are complete or underway through that program. In terms of the breakdown, we can provide additional information. But the point here is that we are building these homes. There is a program here that is funded. It is delivering homes. We are doing that through our \$6.3 billion of investment, and we are partnering with the private sector to build more homes right across the state.

#### **Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:35): Christmas has come early. The Metro Tunnel stations are complete, all five underground stations, and there will be hundreds of extra services from December – in fact, as the minister said, 500,000 extra in peak periods. That matters for many reasons. It also matters for major events. One of the reasons we are the major events capital is because you can get to a major event – you do not need a car – by train, by tram or by bus. As a comparison, some of the members in this chamber, including the Premier, went to cheer on Melbourne Storm in our northern state, in Sydney. They had to pack a lunch. They really had a real trek to get there – 16 k's out of the CBD to Accor Stadium. You have to go into Sydney CBD, get to Central station, catch a train and then catch another train to Accor. I looked at Google Maps, and it said 55 minutes to get to Accor Stadium for the NRL Grand Final. The comparison is that in Melbourne the MCG is 5 minutes from Richmond station and one stop away from the closest Metro Tunnel station. My favourite example is that for the grand prix the member for Cranbourne and the member for Sunbury and everybody in between on that line can now access, with Anzac station, the grand prix circuit without changing trains at all. They can get off at Anzac and walk a few hundred metres to the track. Only in Melbourne will you have that amount of capacity to get people to major events, including the Boxing Day test. The first two days have sold out – 200,000 people already.

#### **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for Environment. Will the minister guarantee there will be no increase in the emergency services tax to cover the cost of faulty forest fire management firefighting appliances, which have currently been pulled out of commission?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:37): I thank the Leader of the Nationals, the member for Gippsland South, for his question. This is a very important matter, and it is important on two fronts. One is because there is consistent fearmongering on the other side. Our good men and women in forest fire management and in fact right through the volunteer and the paid workforce that look after all of us, but principally look after regional and rural Victorians, because that is where natural disasters seem to land more and more –

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, could you cease and desist from banging on the table, please.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** Sorry, Speaker. Of course. So the answer to the question of the Leader of the Nationals is no –

*Members interjecting.*

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** Sorry – apologies. Our forest fire management services are fully funded and they are fully prepared for this upcoming and very, very concerning fire season – the good men and women, the fleet, the aerial fleet, all the resources. The chief fire officer assures me we are abundantly prepared with our partners, including the CFA and the SES, and all the other good work that we have done in preparing public land predominantly but also private land for the bushfire season ahead. What the emergency services levy does, as you have heard multiple times from the Premier and others, is guarantee the funding for the future of all these important services so they are not up for question when they come in and cut everything.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, under the act forest fire management or DEECA, for which the minister is responsible, must advise the Treasurer of its funding needs before she sets the emergency services tax rates. The question that I have asked the minister to come back to is: will this need to increase to pay for these faulty appliances?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! For a start, can I just say once again that a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** As I referenced, the fearmongering from the other side about faulty appliances –

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** The member has never held an executive position, so he does not understand how these things are operationalised – ever. One day, hopefully never, he will get the privilege.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, you will leave the chamber for half an hour. Order! The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

**Minister for Environment and member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** If there are further members that wish to speak while I am on my feet, now is your chance. Leader of the Nationals, you will ask your supplementary question to the Premier.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:41): Thank you for your direction, Speaker. Premier, by what date will all forest fire management G-Wagon and Unimog firefighting appliances be fully back in service?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:41): I thank the member for Gippsland South for the supplementary question, and that is obviously one that will be best answered by the head of Forest Fire Management Victoria. I will not pursue the –

**Danny O'Brien:** He's not here.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** No, because he is not an elected official, which is why I will go and seek the advice of the official from Forest Fire Management Victoria. What is important here is that we work with our emergency services to ensure that they have the resources they need for what we know is going to be a difficult and dangerous fire season, and they do have those resources because we back our emergency services. We do not undermine our emergency services. I also make it absolutely clear



that every dollar raised from the emergency services fund is going back into our emergency services because they are doing more for our community, and the only people who want to cut our emergency services are those opposite. If you cut the levy, you cut funding to our emergency services, whereas we back them, and every dollar is being invested into our emergency services.

**Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (14:42): I rise to update the house on how this government is delivering for young people with better transport options, like the Metro Tunnel a year ahead of schedule. When it comes to opening in December, this project will be a game changer for the way we travel around Melbourne. It means important new stations that connect to work, university, hospitals and of course the heart of Melbourne, the Shrine of Remembrance. It means increased capacity at the city loop, delivering more services more often, and it means uplifting the services for growing communities along the Sunbury and Pakenham lines. It also means better opportunities for young Victorians to be able to access transport so they can better connect to where they need to go. This is so important, and our government is supporting young people across this journey. That is why from January we are making it free for every single young person under the age of 18.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all youth councils across Victoria and the Victorian Youth Congress, which have strongly advocated for this free public transport, and a special shout-out to Catholic Regional College St Albans. Young people have been involved every step of the way, including designing the brand new youth Myki. How good was Charlie’s winning design? Fantastic. On this side of the house we are supporting our communities and our young people, providing them with connections and providing better opportunities for all young Victorians to grow in our state.

*Constituency questions*

**Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:45): (1309) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Nepean residents have been raising ongoing concerns about unauthorised camping and occupation along the arterial road reserve on Boneo Road between Rosebud and Flinders. Mornington Peninsula Shire Council has confirmed that this land is a declared arterial road reserve for which VicRoads, and therefore the Department of Transport and Planning, is the responsible road authority. Despite this, the department continues to advise that enforcement is a council matter, leaving residents frustrated and the issue unresolved. I will note that it resulted in a man being arrested in the last couple of weeks and those residents continuing to be put at risk. Will the minister direct the department to take immediate enforcement action under its powers as the responsible road authority to remove the unauthorised occupants from the Boneo Road reserve?

**Monbulk electorate**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (14:46): (1310) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, how will the Suburban Rail Loop benefit commuters along the Belgrave and Pakenham lines? Many residents in my electorate of Monbulk rely on the Belgrave and Pakenham lines to travel to work, study and appointments across Melbourne. With Melbourne to be home to almost 9 million by the 2050s, the size of London today, that growth is putting pressure on our outer eastern suburbs in my electorate, with more congestion, longer delays and more pressure on transport and services. With the Suburban Rail Loop, Australia’s largest transport and housing project, set to manage that growth and transform how Victorians move, work and live around the city, communities across the hills and foothills are eager to better understand how it will manage growth, reduce travel times and better connect communities to the jobs and services they need. I look forward to the minister’s response.

**Shepparton electorate**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (14:46): (1311) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the information that I seek is: will the completion of stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade include extra carriages to address the overcrowding at peak times currently being experienced? Overcrowding is a significant issue on the Shepparton line, leaving many travellers having to stand and feeling unsafe during their journey. My office has been inundated with frustrated travellers raising the issue of overcrowding and unsafe travel. With the recent announcement of free weekend travel on public transport across Victoria from December this year to February 2026, it is expected it will see increased patronage. We need to ensure that people can travel safely on public transport and that they have a seat. We also need to have adequate public transport and infrastructure to address the needs of an increasing population. The current public transport needs, including trains and bus services, are currently not being met in my electorate. We have been waiting for far too long for this upgrade that was due to be finished in 2023 and is still yet to be completed. I look forward to the minister's response.

**Point Cook electorate**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (14:47): (1312) My question is for the Minister for Police, who, thankfully, is at the desk at the moment. Can the minister please provide me with an update on the Point Cook police station, its progress and the benefits that it will bring to the community?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Point Cook, an update is an action. I would ask you to ask a question.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Sorry. What is the latest information that is available on the Point Cook police station and the build that is currently going on? The minister has been there himself and was there for the first dig. Since that time, we have seen some wonderful progress on the police station. The buildings are up. I am really keen, and I know the community is really keen, to understand exactly how it is progressing, so I look forward to the minister's response.

**Eildon electorate**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:48): (1313) My question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. The demand for social and community housing for low-income earners and those on pensions is very high, and the government is failing miserably in this area. Why then is the public housing facility Kalimna House in Healesville not being used to its full potential? Kalimna House at 5 Bradshaw Drive in Healesville can house up to 22 single adults. I understand that currently there is only one occupant. This leaves 21 vacant rooms, and it has been that way for over 12 months. With the public housing crisis in Victoria, locals are now wondering how so many purpose-built rooms for low-income earners can remain unoccupied for so long. More than two years ago I was advised that a redevelopment was being considered. However, in the meantime, this facility has been underutilised. We know the state is virtually broke, and this is an example of why.

**Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:49): (1314) My question is to the outstanding Minister for Energy and Resources. Minister, how many constituents in my electorate of Sunbury have claimed the latest round of the power saving bonus? As Victorians know, this is a significant and important program that goes to providing cost-of-living relief for people within local communities. It is my understanding that since 2018 more than 4.5 million applications for power saving bonuses have been submitted. What we know is that this relief goes to providing, as I mentioned earlier, greater cost-of-living support for local families and local communities. I want to thank the minister and her entire team, including the department, for the important work that they do, and I look forward to the minister's timely response.

**Richmond electorate**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:50): (1315) My question is for the Minister for Climate Action. My hairdresser in Abbotsford wakes up in a panic every time it rains. She leaves home to pack sandbags to keep the stormwater out. And now we know why: Melbourne Water has just released updated flood maps, and it is not good news. Homes across Richmond, Cremorne, Burnley, Fitzroy, Collingwood, Abbotsford and Clifton Hill are at risk of severe flooding. This is climate change up close, and we must act on this information. But Yarra council had this information a year ago. The mayor buried it, putting the community at risk. We cannot afford any more climate denial. We need an upgraded stormwater system and urban greening, and Victoria needs a resilient homes package, just like they have in New South Wales and Queensland, to support people in high-risk areas and mitigate the impacts of climate disasters. Minister, when will the government establish a resilient homes package?

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:50): (1316) My question is for the Treasurer in the other place in her capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations. Just last month we wrapped up one of the largest surveys conducted by our state government, on our nation-leading working-from-home policy. Nearly 37,000 responses were recorded by this survey, and they overwhelmingly show a positive response by Victorians to this policy. We know that working from home works for families, and whilst it is indeed true that not everyone can work from home, everyone can benefit. It means greater flexibility for folks living in our suburbs, especially in communities like mine in Wyndham, where the vast majority of people work outside the municipality. It means less pressure on our transport network, both road and rail, as there are fewer folks tackling the morning and afternoon crush to work, and it means that work becomes an option for a lot more people, including women, parents and carers. My question to the minister is this: how many of the responses to this survey came from suburbs and postcodes within my electorate?

**Prahran electorate**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (14:52): (1317) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and concerns the route 8 tram through Prahran, specifically Park Street and Domain Road in South Yarra. When will the Allan Labor government commit to reinstating route 8 along its original route? I wrote to the minister on 17 July requesting reinstatement, and three months later there has been no response. Route 8 stopped in April 2017 for Metro Tunnel construction. Routes 6 and 58 replaced parts of it, but Park Street, Domain Road and the south-east area of the botanic gardens have been left with absolutely nothing. The Metro Tunnel is complete now and Anzac station is finished, but it is anyone's guess when that will be operational. The infrastructure remains, the overhead wires are up, the tracks are down and there is a newly built tram stop, but the trams keep running down Toorak Road instead. My constituents and local traders want answers. The Melbourne South Yarra Residents Group, representing hundreds of residents, wants this service reinstated. Please assist us.

**Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:53): (1318) My question is directed to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and my question is: how will the Allan Labor government's initiative of providing tailored support to reduce mental injury in workplaces support residents in the Glen Waverley district? We understand that the mental wellbeing of every Victorian is critical, and this is an important step in addressing both the psychological and physical risks associated with stress. This builds on the recent announcement that under new regulations employers will be required to identify and manage psychosocial hazards in their workplaces. These practical and proactive measures will seek to ensure that Victorians feel heard, supported and safe at work. The mentally healthy workplaces service will be free and confidential, helping businesses identify and manage psychological hazards. I trust that this will be welcomed by both employers and employees alike. I thank the minister in advance for his response.

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Speaker, just on unanswered questions if I can: unanswered questions on notice for the Minister for Health, 2889, 2888, 2840, 2839, 2838, 2837, 2836, 2835, 2834, 2833, 2832, 2831 and 2830; unanswered questions for the Minister for Police, who I notice is sitting at the table, 2866, 2864, 2863 and 2851; for the Minister for Housing and Building, 2488, 2865, 2803 and constituency question 1280; for the Minister for Environment, 2804; for the Minister for Skills and TAFE, 2762, 2761, 2760 and 2759; for the Treasurer, question on notice 2454 as well as constituency question 1280; and for the Premier, adjournments 1226 and 1187 and constituency question 1176.

**The SPEAKER:** Could you hand your list to the Clerk, please, member for Ringwood.

**Martin Cameron:** On a point of order, Speaker, on unanswered questions here also: question 1985 to the Minister for Health for the Minister for Mental Health; question 2722 to the Minister for Victims; question 2718 to the Minister for Health for the Minister for Regional Development; question 1259 to the Premier; question 2814 to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs for the Minister for Skills and TAFE; and question 1292 to the Minister for Health for the Minister for Mental Health. I ask if you could follow them up, and I will hand them in to the Clerk.

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

While we are talking about unanswered questions, as of this morning the Minister for Health has 25 outstanding questions; the Treasurer, 20; the Minister for Environment, 18; the Minister for Mental Health, 15; the Minister for Police, 13; the Minister for Government Services, 12; the Minister for Housing and Building, 12; the Minister for Public and Active Transport, seven; the Minister for Skills and TAFE, five; the Minister for Planning, five; the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, four; the Minister for Consumer Affairs, four; the Minister for Emergency Services, three; the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, three; the Minister for Education, two; the Premier, two; the Minister for Community Safety, two; the Attorney-General, two; and the rest, one.

### *Bills*

#### **Statewide Treaty Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:58): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, and I acknowledge that this is a very special day for those in the Indigenous communities. I hope that this debate can be undertaken with respect and respect for differences of views. Whatever your view on treaty, and I will go to our position shortly, I do acknowledge that this is a historic day, and I acknowledge the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly, Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, and their contributions just before question time here in the chamber. I accept that the bill will, obviously, pass this chamber and will likely pass the other and become law, and I acknowledge those who have been working towards that end for many years.

I do want to be clear, though, from the start that the Nationals and Liberals will not be supporting this legislation, and this is no surprise to anyone in this chamber or indeed in the state. Our position has been that for some time. To say that we are very concerned about this legislation would be to understate our position. We do not support treaty. We certainly do not support this bill. I must say from my own personal point of view, even if I supported the concept of treaty I could not support this legislation, and there are a number of reasons why that is the case. I do want to be very clear that the Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this, and if elected next year in November we will be seeking to repeal this legislation.

I will reiterate my point that I think we can agree on outcomes that we are seeking even if we disagree on how we get there. We have for a long time and certainly during my time in this place, particularly with the member for Murray Plains as the then shadow minister, been very focused on closing the gap and addressing that issue. I said to the First Peoples' Assembly only a month or two ago that we disagree on the journey but we agree on the destination. We will always be working towards addressing those very fundamental issues where Aboriginal people are at a disadvantage. That is going to be the focus of our engagement, not on treaty, which we do not think is the right way to go.

We support equal treatment, equality of opportunity and justice for all Victorians, irrespective of their race, ethnic background, how long they have been here in Australia or any other characteristic. We support ensuring that everyone has the equality of opportunity to live a full, healthy, productive and happy life. That is something that we believe we can achieve for Aboriginal people, because we know and we understand the fact that on so many of the markers we are failing on closing the gap. And when I say 'we', this is a government that has been in power in Victoria for 20 of the last 24 years or more, and we have gone backwards. I acknowledge that the treaty is an attempt to change that, but we have been working on this now for eight years or nine years, and the government has failed. In child protection, for example, in 2023–24 Aboriginal children were placed in out-of-home care at a rate 20 times that of non-Aboriginal children; the suicide rate among Aboriginal people was 30 per 100,000 in 2023, making them over three times more likely to die by suicide than non-Aboriginal Victorians; an eight-year gap persists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy; Aboriginal employment sits much higher than for non-Aboriginal Victorians, and all of these are signs of failure to close the gap.

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I hear those opposite say that is why we need treaty. I have not seen yet any evidence that this will actually change it, and this will be a difference of opinion in how things are done. And I would like to say to those opposite and to anyone listening today, we can have a difference of opinion on how things are done. Words have been thrown to me here across the table and frankly by the minister a couple of weeks ago in the chamber to say that we are peddling a policy that is shameful and wilful ignorance – that is what the minister said – and that we are choosing fear and division over respect and progress. There is no respect in abusing people because they have got a difference of opinion. You can have a policy and an objective in mind and be trying to achieve that objective and have a different way of getting there. As I said to Rueben Berg a few months ago, our objective is the same: closing the gap. We do not agree with the way the government is going. We are planning to go a different way, and I have talked about that before. I would ask everyone –

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Our First Peoples' Assembly chairs talked about respect. The Premier in her second-reading speech talked about respect. I would hope that we can show that through this debate.

I want to acknowledge from the start the clear and obvious harm caused by colonisation in Victoria to First Nations people. I can only really speak from my own experience in Gippsland and what I have heard there. A few years ago there was a debate over Cairns celebrating, if you like, the journey of Angus McMillan as the so-called discoverer of Gippsland – the first European through Gippsland I think is how it is better put. We do not know enough about Indigenous history, or we do not have enough taught to us. I have been really pleased in the last few years that that is changing. One of the things that I have learned and that my children now learn is the creation story of the Gunaikurnai with Borun and Tuk and how that how they came to be in Gippsland and how that is one of their creation stories.

I acknowledge the horrendous impact that occurred, particularly the amount of massacres. Gippsland was no different to anywhere else in the country where there were massacres. I have followed this debate quite a bit, as I mentioned, particularly in relation to the history of Angus McMillan. People

will be aware of the book from a couple of decades ago by Peter Gardner called *Our Founding Murdering Father*, which was about Angus McMillan and posited his involvement in various massacres in Gippsland. I have just finished reading a book, though, that replies to that. It is a book called *A Convenient Scapegoat* by Rob Christie, which again does not for a second deny that those horrendous massacres took place but goes into some of the history and the evidence as to whether Angus McMillan himself was involved. I have visited Libby Balderstone at Warrigal Creek station; Libby's house is only a few hundred metres from the site of the Warrigal Creek massacre. These are devastating things to come across, but they are also from a period where written history was extremely rare, probably deliberately so in some part on the case of the settlers – things were covered up – and I acknowledge that absolutely some horrendous things happened.

I would also like to point out that from that there were good acts, including one that touched me and my family particularly. I only discovered this issue a couple of years ago. In my family I am descended on my mum's side from the O'Rourke, who came across from New South Wales, the Monaro, about the same time as John Batman was settling Melbourne, into Suggan Buggan, Gelantipy and Wulgulmerang, that area. Two of the O'Rourke boys were out one day and came across – there are different aspects of the story – the aftermath of a massacre or at least an Aboriginal woman who had been shot on the banks of the Snowy River. These men came across the woman. She was dead, and next to her was a baby. They picked up that baby and took it home, and the baby became Jambi, later known as Ned O'Rourke, and was raised by the O'Rourke family as one of their own. I have not got the family tree here in front of me, but I think they had 10 or 13 kids, depending on who you believe, of their own, and added Jambi to that family. Ned O'Rourke, as I said, was raised by the O'Rourkes. I think it is a fascinating story.

What added to the fascination is how I found out about it. Ken Hodge, who was a cousin of my mum's, had done some research himself on this issue, again as a descendant of the O'Rourkes, and was keen to find descendants of Neddy, of Jambi. By sheer coincidence he was at Southern Cross Station. He lives in Mortlake, and he was on his way back to East Gippsland and came across some Aboriginal people, and he said, 'Are you from Lake Tyers?' and they said yes. He had played footy against Lake Tyers and knew people from there. They got talking, and lo and behold he met Elaine Terrick, who was a descendant of Ned O'Rourke. Within a few minutes they worked out that they had both been searching for descendants of the respective families. There is a video online on YouTube about this story, and in it Ken Hodge says, 'I thank your people for allowing my people to settle in this area,' which might be an interesting way to put it. He said they were outnumbered. They were a small family and they were very, very isolated. They could have been wiped out I think were the words Ken used. And Elaine says to him, 'We're a pretty good mob.' And then she says, 'And you were a pretty good mob too.' I think that is the way we all should be trying to work together. I tell that story because I guess everyone has similar stories or has some history, particularly those of us whose families have been around for a long time, and yet there are many recent immigrants who do not have that connection and that history, for whom all of this discussion is very new.

I now want to talk a bit about the legislation itself and highlight why we are not supportive of it. For me personally, and I think for all of us on this side, the norms of the Westminster system are very important – that you have elected representatives, ministers who are members of the Parliament, who are part of the executive but accountable to the Parliament and by being accountable to the Parliament are accountable to the people. That is something that I think is extremely important and has served us very well. What I am concerned about with the establishment of Gellung Warl are the governance arrangements around it that are outside the norms of that Westminster system, and effectively Gellung Warl is granted a level of unprecedented autonomy, operating independently of ministerial direction – it cannot be directed by the minister – and given substantial and ongoing taxpayer funding. I know that is deliberate, and this is where we disagree. This is not something that the government is trying to

hide, nor the First Peoples' Assembly, but I do not support that as a principle that should be introduced in this legislation. The bill states that:

Gellung Warl is not subject to the direction or control of the Minister in respect of the performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers.

That is something that concerns me in terms of accountability. I will talk a little bit more about accountability later.

A second aspect of that is that the bill requires that every member introducing a bill must prepare a statement of treaty compatibility, detailing whether the First Peoples' Assembly was consulted, the nature and timing of any advice and an assessment of the bill's alignment with treaty principles. That basically says every piece of legislation has to be at the very least consulted on, if not indeed ticked off by, Gellung Warl. What concerns us is, in parallel with that, clause 1 of the bill uses the phrase 'matters that affect First Peoples', but nowhere in the legislation is there a definition of 'matters that affect First Peoples'; almost by definition any matter could or will affect First Peoples. I think the absence of a clear definition of that phrase creates legal and procedural ambiguity, enabling the First Peoples' Assembly to assert relevance over virtually any area of public policy. Again, I appreciate that may well be the intention of the government, that First Peoples have a say over literally everything that we deal with; that is not something I think is fair. Going back to my initial statement, I think the Liberals and Nationals support equal treatment and equality of opportunity and justice for all Victorians, and I do not think that one group of Victorians should have that additional privilege without being elected to Parliament. That is the nature of our arrangements.

In addition to that, the First Peoples' Assembly has power to make representations to inform Parliament on legislation, advise government departments and service providers and question ministers and secretaries during engagement hearings. Noting that this legislation will get through, I wish them well in that because as members of Parliament we get to question ministers, and we rarely actually get any answers, so I hope they do better than us. Similarly, the First Peoples' Assembly is mandated under the act in clauses 86 and 87 to meet with departmental secretaries and the Chief Commissioner of Police, and those agencies – the departments and VicPol – must develop consultation guidelines which must be considered by government authorities and state-funded service providers. They are, again, matters that no other organisation or group has access to under law in Victoria, and that is a concern that we have.

I appreciate the electoral process that both was set up previously in 2019 and 2023 for the election of the First Peoples' Assembly and now is codified under this bill and appreciate the acknowledgement that we have heard from co-chairs past and present that the actual turnout, if you like, for those elections was small, particularly in 2019. It increased in 2023, but still only 2000 voted in 2019 and about 4200 voted in 2023 out of 7000 on the roll and out of an estimated 50,000 Aboriginal people who could have voted. I raise that because it then goes to the issue of the community answerability framework, which is covered in some detail in the bill. The stated aim is for Gellung Warl to be democratically and publicly accountable and answerable to community. The rhetoric stresses answerability to community. I asked in the bill briefing who we are referring to when we say 'community', and the answer was 'the Aboriginal community'. I do not see the same level of answerability to the broader Victorian public, and that is also a concern. Yes, the First Peoples' Assembly, the other part of Gellung Warl, are answerable to their community. But this Parliament needs to be answerable to all Victorians, and that is an area of this legislation that I do not support.

Another area where again there is a separate and different rule which I do not think is fair is the exemptions from things like freedom of information. There are significant exemptions from freedom of information for Gellung Warl. There are some broad automatic exemptions for entire categories of documents, and that goes to culturally sensitive or culturally secret information. I understand some of that. There are reasons for that. But it effectively places cultural secrecy on the same level as cabinet confidentiality but with much broader scope and far less oversight. The First Peoples' Assembly,

literally under the act, has more FOI and secrecy protections than ministers or other statutory bodies. Again I do not think that is something that we should have in a strong democratic Westminster system.

Finally on the legislation, the issue of ongoing funding for Gellung Warl through a standing appropriation bypasses the usual budgeting processes. I understand we have the Parliament, the electoral commission and maybe one or two others that do receive standing appropriations, but they are based on discussions with Treasury and on need, whereas the legislation literally puts this money, \$207 million, if I am not mistaken, in the first four years. But when you read the operational and capital expenditure funding ongoing over the next 10 years, it actually equates to around about \$2.7 billion, depending on the discount rate that you used. That is a significant investment. I would welcome the minister or further speakers giving some clarity on this, but certainly that initial funding in the next four years is largely for the set-up of Gellung Warl. It is not for health services or for housing or for child protection or for any of those matters – employment and economic opportunity for Aboriginal people. It is actually the cost of setting up Gellung Warl.

Finally on that issue also, the government's decision to hand over what is currently the Aboriginal community infrastructure program, which will become the First Peoples' Infrastructure Fund, directly to Gellung Warl to control, again, is giving taxpayers money to an unelected body to make decisions. The Parliament at this point has the opportunity to have a say on that, and that is why we are having our say and saying we do not agree with that. We think that the principles of democratic responsibility and accountability should ensure that whenever taxpayers money is being spent, there is a minister ultimately responsible, and this is not the case under this proposed legislation.

There are a number of other parts of the legislation that are probably a little bit vague and we need clarity on, particularly with relation to the framework on water entitlements. The bill empowers the assembly to issue guidelines and standards on the sharing of water entitlements, but what that actually means we do not yet know.

**A member** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** No, Minister, I have actually been to the briefings. I remember asking questions of the then Minister for Water about some entitlements that were allocated in last year's budget, or maybe the year before's, and the minister could not tell me what the status of those entitlements were. These are some of the questions that I think need answering.

What will we do? My colleague in the other place Melina Bath has been on a journey since becoming the shadow minister at the start of this year, literally and figuratively. She has gone from Orbest to Mildura to Portland and everywhere in between, meeting with Aboriginal communities, with Aboriginal community controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) and with traditional owners. She has given me a couple of points from the feedback that she got on those trips regarding what the community is calling for: practical, place-based solutions; flexible and long-term funding; greater autonomy and representation; early and respectful engagement in planning; and policies that reflect lived experience and community priorities. That is why we have announced today our alternative to treaty, and that is to establish First Nations Victoria (FNV) – a standalone department dedicated to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, taking them out of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and giving them their own organisation, one that can work with Aboriginal people. There will be a ministerial advisory council to ensure that we are working with them. Melina Bath's intention for that is particularly to devolve the decision-making to those areas that are on the ground trying to address those Closing the Gap issues.

Why we have done this – again, I will give credit to the member for Murray Plains, who took this policy, or a very similar version, to the last election – is to put in some accountability. I hear some commentary from people who are on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and who have sat next to me when I have been asking questions of the minister for Aboriginal affairs in the past about education completion rates, about child protection matters, about housing and all of those things, and



so often the response was ‘That is a question you need to ask the minister for housing’ or ‘That is a question you need to ask the Minister for Education.’ It was a very, very good way for ministers to avoid accountability for this. That is why we will establish First Nations Victoria, responsible to a minister who, with a ministerial advisory council, will work with Aboriginal people to address those issues.

I want to go to a little bit about where that aligns. There are four nationally agreed Closing the Gap priority reforms. Bear with me on this. Priority reform one is formal partnerships and shared decision-making. First Nations Victoria will establish, as I said, a ministerial advisory body made up of Aboriginal leaders across regions and sectors. We will embed co-location with ACCHOs to co-design services and align programs with local priorities. We do not want to have people sitting in the Department of Premier and Cabinet telling those, particularly ACCHOs and the like, on the ground what they will do. We are going to send them out to work with them directly. Priority reform two is building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector. Our First Nations Victoria alignment consolidates funding and reinvests savings into ACCHO capacity building, implements performance-linked funding agreements with ACCHOs and recognises ACCHOs as essential partners in service delivery and policy implementation.

Priority reform three is transforming government organisations. First Nations Victoria will create a standalone department to coordinate Aboriginal affairs across government, lead an Aboriginal Workforce strategy to build capability both within the public service and in the Aboriginal workforce more generally and introduce binding policy instructions to drive accountability across agencies. Priority reform four is shared access to data and information at the regional level. FNV will commit to quarterly dashboards with regional data and case studies on our approach to dealing with the Closing the Gap issues, ensure annual reporting to Parliament and public transparency and use this data to guide corrective action and inform policy decisions.

That is the alignment that we are seeking. One of the things that Ms Bath in the other place heard about so often was the lack of flexibility. I have got the member for Eildon sitting beside me, and she mentioned visiting Oonah at Healesville, others in Mildura, in Horsham and in Portland, where they have funding for housing, for example, but what they really need is dental services. They said that the bureaucracy and the red tape of being able to transfer funding from one priority to another just does not work. I think what we are seeking to do is to devolve power to those organisations to ensure that what the Victorian government is doing is actually delivering on need as best it can where it is needed, particularly to address the Closing the Gap priorities.

I just want to touch on one or two other matters that are relevant to this legislation. I know the government talked about and indeed the Premier in her second-reading speech talked about the use of First Nations language as a practical way we can show respect. I would agree with that. The fact that the Kurnai people, whose term Gellung Warl has been used, are upset with that highlights that the government has not necessarily got this right. I acknowledge that I am sure there is a difference of opinion within the Kurnai and the Gunaikurnai. I think the Gunaikurnai did give permission, but it is a matter that highlights that there is not unanimous agreement on this matter among the Indigenous communities in Victoria.

The other thing I would like to mention from the Premier’s second-reading speech is that she thanks the Victorian community for coming along with us on this journey. I would posit to the Premier and to the minister that most Victorians did not even know this journey was occurring. I acknowledge that it has been in train since, as I said, 2016 or 2017, but very few people, until this was actually announced some months ago as coming, were even aware of it. What is now the case, though, is that Victorians will be able to have their say. I know that there have been calls by some that there should be a referendum or a vote on this. That is not something I support, but the reality is that now Victorians will have the opportunity, because the Liberals and Nationals do not support this legislation and if elected in November next year, within 100 days we will introduce legislation to repeal the treaty

arrangements, and the Victorian people will have their say. We do not support treaty. We want to continue to work with Aboriginal people to close the gap.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (15:28): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land of the Parliament and my electorate, the Wurundjeri people, and I pay my respects to Wurundjeri elders past and present. Also, I would like to quote Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Wurundjeri elder, who reminded us this morning:

This Parliament stands on the traditional ceremony ground of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. It is where we conducted Ceremony. Our Council of Elders held important discussions, and they made significant political and customary lore decisions with our immediate neighbours of the Kulin Nation. Our Ancestors did this for thousands of years before European occupation. Parliament House is the home for many discussions and important decisions that impact the people of Victoria. To date, important and critical decisions have been made about our people without our people and with no success ...

something that those opposite fail to recognise.

Treaty is about allowing our people to make important decisions with the State. Treaty is essential for all Victorians, including the First Nations People of Victoria.

I thank Uncle Andrew for that quote.

I extend my respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us here in the gallery today and acknowledge the long fight for treaty, for justice. I know that many elders are not with us here today physically but are in spirit. They have advocated tirelessly for treaty too, and it is because of them that we are here. I am deeply grateful for the leadership of the 32 elected members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, to the leadership of Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, and to the inaugural chairs Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart. You have all been an integral part of the success that brings us here today to discuss this bill. History will remember your strength and your courage to make this state a better and fairer one. History will remember this moment as one in Victoria which celebrates the courage and generosity of our First Peoples. This is a moment that reflects a collective decision to embark on a new beginning, one rooted in respect, healing and justice.

Aunty Jill Gallagher was the treaty advancement commissioner. She said:

I have long dreamt of being part of a society where all Victorians, both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous, can celebrate and enjoy the many benefits that come with being part of one of the world's oldest living cultures.

Together we can build a state that honours the truth, respects our culture and stands strong with the First Peoples ...

This bill is a direct result of the first Statewide Treaty negotiations. It gives effect to the many commitments of the negotiated treaty. And treaty is an affirmation; it is a commitment. It affirms our shared history, and it is an affirmation of First Peoples' sovereignty and their rightful place in this place as the oldest living culture. It commits us to putting this recognition into action, a commitment to walk alongside First Peoples in true partnership, because for too long our journey to reconciliation has been marked by the heavy echoes of our past. We struggle with the legacy of dispossession, of violence and broken promises that have cast a long shadow. And this shadow did not just appear; it was created by actions – actions of people who governed Victoria. These actions created the stolen generations. They stole wages from Aboriginal workers. They removed Aboriginal people from their lands and children from their families. The Yoorrook Justice Commission documented this, and I want to quote Aunty Eleanor Bourke as the chair of Yoorrook:

It has been the greatest privilege of my life to be a part of Yoorrook. I am so grateful for the rich contributions and the depth of evidence provided to the Commission. The product of our work is a short version of an ancient culture. I hope all Victorians and indeed, other Australians have a better understanding of our shared history and the connections between past and present. This is an important step to acknowledging Aboriginal self-determination which is becoming a reality now. Treaty ensures the historic truth-telling work of Yoorrook will live on. Your achievements here will resonate into the future.

Due to the legacy of colonisation, First Peoples have faced loss of land, culture and language. This has led to poorer life outcomes and systemic disadvantage, and today this is known as the gap. All governments are working towards closing the gap in recognition that the structures need to be reformed, reversed, and really, to stop the disadvantage, we have to change the systems. First Peoples have said that truth-telling and treaty are the best way forward to closing that gap for good. For generations First People have been denied the right to determine their own future, to have their own voices heard, and to shape the policies that impact their communities. This bill is a critical step towards righting those wrongs, ensuring we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

History will remember those opposite for their continued desire to ignore the truth of our history and the voices of First Peoples. Their ignorance and disrespect for First People is evident in the slapped-together policies that have been announced today, and those opposite continue to be stuck in the Dark Ages, dividing Victoria, cutting services and thinking they know what is best. It is very paternalistic. The opposition leader did not attend even one government briefing on this matter. I am not sure if that is pure ignorance or arrogance. Throughout my time as minister I have seen that working together in true partnership with the Aboriginal community can improve Aboriginal lives. I have always understood that change comes when we listen, learn and act together. Treaty changes how systems work so we do not rely on individuals, but as a collective we can all accelerate the change we need to close gaps.

This bill acknowledges the diversity of First Peoples and their right to self-determination through the establishment of Gellung Warl, a strong and enduring statutory corporation evolving from the success of the First Peoples' Assembly. Gellung Warl will exist with our democratic structures and will be subject to oversight bodies. It is a formal and robust structure to give voice to First Peoples so that communities who have been historically marginalised are at the forefront of decision-making. The bill enacts ongoing truth telling through the establishment of Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna. It will ensure ongoing dialogue with local communities to build social cohesion, respect and reconciliation. The bill will also deliver on our commitment to the national Closing the Gap strategy by establishing Nginma Ngainga Wara, an independent accountability mechanism. Accountability will ensure governments can close the gap across all systems by improving policies and services. It will ensure that commitments to First Peoples are met and remain unbroken.

The bill sets up the structure for the transfer of resources, and it ensures Aboriginal communities have the resources and decision making to thrive into the future. The practical outcomes from this treaty include delivering the First Peoples' Infrastructure Fund; delivering Aboriginal events to be managed by Gellung Warl; participating in place naming; delivering curriculum resources for the teaching of Yoorrook's official public record, *Truth be Told*; and delivering a First Peoples' Institute to develop the next generation of leaders. These are all tangible outcomes that are embedded with self-determination. Treaty will support Aboriginal-controlled organisations to be stronger in their infrastructure and workforce expertise, and treaty will strengthen traditional owner organisations and give respect for language and the celebration of culture.

Uncle Paul Briggs, a Yorta Yorta elder and good friend, has said that the introduction of Australia's first treaty in the Victorian Parliament is beyond historic, it will assist to shape how the nation relates to and engages with the First Peoples of this continent. With respect it will reframe our sense of nationhood and shape our identity. It is a credit to the invincible spirit of the First Nations people and non-Aboriginal people that have worked tirelessly over so many generations to make today happen. It brings hope and healing to the present and to the future of all Victorians. Through treaty we are creating a new beginning where every Victorian can be proud of our diverse state, where the pain of the past is acknowledged and where the hope of a better tomorrow shines brightly for all.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:38): I am happy to rise today to speak on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. From the outset it has been stated that we oppose this bill. Bills like this are always contentious. You will split communities on their opinion around these bills and what they deliver. People will have varying opinions, and you will probably never get 100 per cent agreement from

anyone. In my seat of Narracan I have the Kurnai elders of Aunty Cheryl Drayton, Aunty Pauline Mullet and Aunty Linda Mullet.

When something like this comes up I consult heavily with my local Indigenous elders, because I can take the opinions of the many but I tend to take the opinion of the few that it actually truly, truly affects, and in my area that is the Kurnai. The Kurnai, especially Aunty Pauline, Aunty Cheryl and Aunty Linda, were extremely disappointed with the government using the term *Gellung Warl*. They were never consulted, and they have asked me to read this letter out that they wrote to the Premier. Out of respect for my elders, I will read this letter out if you indulge me, Acting Speaker. This is from Aunty Pauline Mullet:

I write to express deep concern regarding the use of the term *Gellung Warl* in the Treaty Bill recently introduced to the Victorian Parliament.

*Gellung Warl* is a word from the Kurnai language a language that belongs to our people, our ancestors, and our Country. It has come to light that this term was selected without the informed consent of Kurnai Elders. This is not a minor oversight. It is a serious breach of cultural protocol and a disregard for the sovereignty of our language and traditions.

To use our language to name a political body that the Kurnai people do not support is not only inappropriate it is harmful. It misrepresents our stance and risks turning our sacred words into symbols of a process we have not endorsed. Language is not a decorative gesture. It is a living expression of identity, authority, and custodianship.

This act risks undermining the very principles of truth-telling, respect, and justice that the Treaty claims to uphold. If the government and the Assembly are serious about healing and reconciliation, they must begin by listening and by removing *Gellung Warl* from the legislation until proper consultation and consent are achieved.

I respectfully but firmly request that:

- The term *Gellung Warl* be immediately removed from the Treaty Bill
- The Victorian Government and the First Peoples' Assembly engage in direct consultation with Kurnai Elders before using any aspect of our language or culture
- A public statement be issued acknowledging this misstep and committing to culturally safe practices moving forward

If this Treaty is to be built on truth, respect, and justice, then it must begin by honouring the voices of Traditional Owners not speaking over them.

I trust you will treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves.

Yours in land culture & integrity

Pauline Mullet

Kurnai Elder native title holder

Thank you, Acting Speaker, for allowing me to read that out for the Kurnai in my area. They are extremely disappointed. Even when the minister was asked about this, she referred it off. Part of what I see with treaty is that treaty has been established through government failure, and I think that can be well documented. Since this government –

**A member** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** I hope that this debate today is respectful and that people do not interject. We are all here representing our communities. As a local member of Parliament, when people come into my office I do not see colour, I do not see race, I do not see religion; I see a person that needs help. I treat everyone equally. I meet with my Kurnai elders monthly. I talk to Aunty Cheryl a lot. I talk to her a lot because I want to understand the cultural complications that they experience. I have heard stories from Aunty Cheryl about the way they were treated up on Jindivick track and the experiences they suffered. Aunty Cheryl has explained to me in depth what they went through, so I have a very good understanding.

When we talk about closing the gap – and I see this in my area – I see our Indigenous youth addicted to drugs, addicted to alcohol, and it is something that we need to fix. Since this government came into power in 2015, we have seen incarceration go up. Incarceration rates have increased, and that is a failure of government. This is where I see the government using treaty as a deflection tool, not as taking accountability for the failures the government have put forward, and that to me is problematic. We have heard from the member for Gippsland South in the first half hour. He touched on quite a few points. I mean, when we are talking about taxpayers money funding Gellung Warl, we have to remember it is taxpayers money, and it does require oversight, and it should require scrutiny. That is something that does not sit well with me, that we have an assembly that really is answerable to nobody. Even in this chamber we have the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. We have PAEC, where ministers get scrutinised about their spending through the budgets. Now, to have no scrutiny I think is a mistake.

When we talk about – and the minister touched on it earlier. The minister talked about ignorance and disrespect. Then I put to the minister maybe she was ignorant and disrespected the Kurnai people by not even reaching out to them to talk about the use of their language in this treaty. As I said, when people come into my office, I do not care who they are. I work hard for the person that is in front of me to get a result and hopefully an outcome from the government.

As the member for Gippsland South pointed out earlier, the ministers will be answerable to this assembly. Well, I completely echo the sentiments of the member for Gippsland South. I hope the ministers do answer questions, because we cannot get answers to questions, and this is a problem.

**Natalie Hutchins** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** If the minister wants to keep interrupting or debating me on this, I am happy to debate her on this. I will take the minister up on her interjection. She is very happy to sit in this chamber under the protection of parliamentary privilege and mouth off, but not once has the minister bothered to talk to the Kurnai people. Now, if the minister wants to sit there –

*Members interjecting.*

**Wayne FARNHAM:** If you are saying that Aunty Cheryl Drayton is a liar, then I would like you to say that in public. Say it in public. If you think Aunty Cheryl is a liar, I dare you to say that in public.

**Natalie Hutchins** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Yes, you did respond, and you deflected it. I have seen the correspondence.

I am going to leave my contribution there. We are being very clear why we oppose this bill, and I would ask the minister, in closing, to actually reach out to Aunty Cheryl and talk to her directly and get her point of view before sitting there and mouthing off without the facts.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (15:48): It is a great honour to rise to contribute to the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. I do want to begin by acknowledging the original owners of the lands on which we gather today, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to their ancestors, to their elders, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today and thank them for their care of our lands for 65,000 years. I also want to acknowledge Uncle Andrew and the smoking ceremony and welcome to country today and how incredible that was.

But I also took note of what he said, ‘We come with purpose’. All of us on this side of the chamber have come here today with great purpose, to introduce treaty for the First Peoples of this state. I do want to thank the First Peoples’ Assembly co-chairs for those beautiful speeches. Ngarra and Rueben, thank you so much. They meant so much to all of us here today. We have witnessed today you telling this place of the great significance of treaty and what that means to First Peoples. There have been many memorable days in this place. However, this is probably the most memorable for me, for all on

this side of the house and for everybody sitting here today and watching online. I know it is a day I will never forget.

I want to acknowledge the significance today of the work of the First Peoples' Assembly, the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the Treaty Authority in the long journey to get where we are today. All of this started with many conversations and in 2017 the appointment of the treaty advancement commissioner Aunty Jill Gallagher, who I know is here today. Critical to the treaty journey is the Yoorrook Justice Commission final report *Yoorrook: Truth Be Told*, which tells the history of Victoria through the voices of First Peoples who testified before the commission. I want to put on record that I acknowledge the stories told, those still to come and those that were never told, and I know how much that means to people here today. I want to thank the Yoorrook commissioners for their historical work and their courage and resilience, and I know how hard that was. This bill includes truth-telling in education, using the Yoorrook Justice Commission's official public record as a resource to support the implementation of truth-telling in our schools. All students in Victoria will learn the truth and the history of our state. This is a chance for all Victorians to acknowledge our past, heal and move forward together.

To the First Peoples' Assembly, congratulations. We are here. We have seen how successful the assembly has been since it was established. It is a powerful body representative of all Victorian Aboriginal people. This is what self-determination is all about. I acknowledge the inaugural co-chairs Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart and the First Peoples' Assembly members and thank them for their significant contribution to this treaty journey. To the sitting co-chairs Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg and all members of the First Peoples' Assembly, thank you for your continued journey and getting us where we are today. The Treaty Authority, the very first in this country, are the umpires and will ensure that the treaty process is fair for all parties involved.

It has been easy for governments of all persuasions to ignore the truth, to make commitments and break them and to steal away the trust of First Peoples, so I know that this has been a difficult journey for many. But for me, when I did my inaugural speech in this place and I talked about why I was here – I will not go into the family side of it, because I will get too emotional – it was all about good policy, what good policy does in this place and how it impacts on people. Those in this place today know – well, on this side – what good policy means and that this is good policy. This is what we need to do.

Thank you to all First Peoples who have been involved in this journey for their courage and resilience, because treaty addresses many of the issues that we have talked about. While we are here today debating the first ever treaty in this country, this is a government that has kept its promise not only to First Peoples but to every other Victorian. To our Premier, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and former premiers and ministers, I am so proud, as I know everyone on this side is, that this Labor government has stayed committed to this journey and will deliver treaty with the First Peoples of Victoria.

It is the right thing to do. We have consulted and had community support, and there have been so many letters that I have received, and I know many others have and have been reported in the media, from so many groups across Victoria – different groups, different agencies, different organisations and general public support. We keep hearing from those opposite about how bad treaty is for Victoria. That is not what I am hearing. As part of this process, for many months I travelled with the minister and with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, going around the state, talking to people about what treaty is and what it means, and we were met with positive responses, people asking questions – what does this mean for us? – and engaging in those conversations. I know the First Peoples' Assembly have done all that work as well, but I think to say that Victorians do not want treaty is completely wrong.

Treaty did start with bipartisan support, but it did not take those opposite long to rescind that support. I do ask those opposite: what are you so afraid of? What scares you so much about treaty and First Peoples? Is it the truth? Is it the history of colonisation that you are so afraid of – the massacres, the

stolen generations, stolen lands, generational trauma or the systemic racism on which our system was built?

We are not closing the gap. I listen to those opposite. I do not want to go into it too much – it is really distressing hearing some of the comments that have been made from the other side – but when they talk about closing the gap what they are saying is they are going to maintain the status quo, they are not going to change anything, they are not about self-determination for First Nations people. What they listed off in their new policy or whatever they call it, what did it mean? It is basically what is already in place that we know is not working; we know it is not working.

We have so much to learn from First Peoples; the beautiful culture, the connection to country, the cultural knowledge that cares for country, waterways and life – these are really beautiful parts of First Peoples' culture that we do not often hear talked about because of all the deficit. We need to be promoting these things. We need to be supporting treaty so that we are addressing the wrongs of the past, but we are also acknowledging a beautiful culture that First Peoples have been willing to share with us for over 200 years. But we have rejected that, and we have rejected that through colonisation and systemic racism.

I am going to run out of time now, and I have not even got to the content of the bill, but I am so proud of what this government is doing, because we can all stand here knowing that we were here today supporting self-determination of First Peoples, that we are going to listen to the voices of First Peoples, whether it be in meetings or whether it be on the floor of Parliament, and I think that is an incredible thing to be able to do. We do not do it well now, I agree, but the systems that would be put in place through treaty are what will make a huge difference. We are standing together on this as a government, as the First Peoples' Assembly; we are standing together to make it work. For those opposite, I just feel you are not genuine in what you are saying when you stand on your feet in this place. We are all concerned about what this means, but I would hope that you would consider supporting this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (15:59): I rise today to speak on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Our role in opposition is not to rubberstamp feel-good ideas; it is to scrutinise, to ask the hard questions and to make sure what we pass works for the people it affects and the people we represent. Many say just vote for treaty because it feels right, but when I question their rationale I worry that they have not read the bill. They do not seem to understand what it does or see the harm that will be caused.

I have seen firsthand the incredible work done in Aboriginal communities. I spent 15 years working in an Aboriginal community controlled health organisation dating back to 1997, so I saw the power of self-determination, local people training their own health workers, elders leading programs and communities taking charge of their own futures. I saw it work. I saw it make a difference, and this all happened without treaty. Some argue that past governments have failed to address Indigenous issues such as violence, discrimination and neglect only because their efforts were not informed by, led by or owned by Aboriginal peoples. They go further to claim that only a treaty can empower First Peoples to make decisions about matters that affect them. This is untrue. This narrative overlooks the wins that we have already achieved. There are successful programs today that are indeed informed by, led by, owned by Aboriginal communities – and achieved without treaty. My friend Michael Bell, who sits in the back of the chamber today, known to many as Mookeye, serves on the treaty commission. He and I recently caught up and reflected on the progress we made during our time working in Aboriginal health services. We were guided by Aboriginal boards. We worked in a way that was shaped by the wisdom of the local elders and the cultural protocols that we abide by. Not every health initiative was embraced. For example, the proposal for a needle exchange program was declined by elders, and although I personally supported it and explained its health benefits, the decision ultimately rested with the community. It reflected their values, their culture and their right to choose, and I respected that. And the way they did it worked.

There are many other successes. Locally our otitis media, or ear infection, rates were down; our immunisation rates were exceptional; and our asthma and diabetes management was effective – and so much more. Elders are living longer and healthier lives in the area where I worked in in Framlingham and other areas in South-West Coast that I can point to. We are dealing with aged care issues like dementia now, issues that come from longer life spans, and that is a real, obvious sign of success. You cannot deny that. At places like Heywood, Framlingham, Warrnambool and Portland I have seen the results of community-led health models, and I have seen the trust built between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. That is the kind of progress we should be proud of and duplicate to close the gap.

But ironically, this legislation puts that progress at risk. It will divide us. It is already creating resentment. I am seeing this, I am hearing this and I am disgusted by it, but it is what is happening. If we start giving one group of Australians different voting rights to another, we are not building unity, we are sowing division. How do we explain to the people of Victoria that some people can vote at 16 while others cannot and that voting in Indigenous elections may be optional while all Victorians are required to show up on election day for state, federal and local elections? These are not minor details. They go to the heart of our democracy, fairness and equality under the law. Our democracy is not perfect, but it is one of the best democracies on earth.

When I was at school I was not taught the truth about our history, and that was wrong. I have been told stories that are heartbreaking and stories of real suffering. I remember my Indigenous friend the late Lionel Harradine, whose name I have permission from his family to mention here in Parliament, told me about his mother, who worked at a local doctor's in New South Wales. When authorities came to take the children, the doctor would quietly warn the family. It is a horrible story. The children would hide under the willow trees by the river. But one day the authorities came too close. The children tried to swim across the river. Lionel's sister suffered an asthma attack, and she was caught. She was taken. The family was shattered, and the brothers and sisters and Lionel became part of the stolen generation. I know the stories of Condah: poisons mixed into the flour to deliberately kill the children. Children died in agony. These are not stories to be dismissed. They are truths, and they must be told. But how we tell the stories matter. We must teach the truth without laying guilt on people today, who had no part in those wrongs. We must build understanding, not bitterness. We do not need a law to teach history. The government already controls the curriculum. We do not legislate multiplication tables or grammar, so why legislate history? If there is a will – and I really believe there is – it can be done without embedding division into the law.

My electorate of South-West Coast is the land of the Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar people. The Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar people are famous for their extensive landscape engineering prowess, shown in the construction of kilometres of eel aquaculture channels, holding ponds and fish traps in and around Budj Bim – an amazing place to visit, by the way.

There was a powerful article in the paper on the weekend that captured the growing dissent within the Aboriginal community, who gave dire warnings. We have successes like I have described and we do not need another layer of bureaucracy – the money, the energy, the passion and the compassion should go there. If we really want to close the gap, we should be looking at the successful models, not creating another layer of bureaucracy and potential for corruption. That sentiment resonates deeply with what I have heard in my consultations with local community members, especially those who lived through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, ATSIC, era of the 1990s. Many of the local Aboriginal community have spoken candidly about their disillusionment with past consultation bodies, recalling how some got a voice but most did not, with this ultimately becoming a source of division and pain. People tell me again and again that this moment feels like a reiteration of that time: the government attempts to establish parliamentary representation, but without general community trust, it falters. We must learn from these histories, not repeat them, the Aboriginal local people tell me. That is why I am concerned to see legislation used to stir emotion, score political points and create division.



If anyone tries to suggest that my opposition to this legislation is somehow against the Indigenous community, I can assure you nothing could be further from the truth. I have spent years working alongside Aboriginal communities. My history of support is longstanding and deeply rooted. In fact I may be the longest serving non-Indigenous person at Framlingham without marriage or family connections. I say that not for recognition but to underscore the depth of my commitment; those who claim otherwise are simply wrong. The reason I stand opposed today is because of my support for the Aboriginal community, because I have seen firsthand the decades of hard work, resilience and leadership that Aboriginal people have invested in closing the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

This legislation, despite its intentions, threatens to undo that progress. This legislation, rather than healing, will divide us. It is not the Aboriginal community that is causing this division; it is the Labor Party, through their legislation and drawing lines between us. It creates different rules for different members of our community – that is not unity, that is not equality, that is not what we strive for as Australians. We must be vigilant and we must be honest. We cannot undermine them with policies that fracture and confuse. I oppose this legislation because I believe in a better way forward – one that honours the past, listens to the present and builds a future of true equality. That is at the heart of our approach, as articulated earlier in the debate by the Leader of the Nationals. Our job in this Parliament is not to legislate based on emotion; it is to legislate based on outcomes. This is not about ‘the vibe’. It is not about recognition. We all support that, and let us be honest, if there is someone in this place who does not want a better outcome for Indigenous communities, I would like to know who they are. I would like to hold them to account.

Let me finish by saying this: I have a deep respect for Aboriginal communities. I have worked alongside them and I have seen the good that has been done. But I cannot support legislation that risks undoing that work, that divides rather than unites, that replaces reconciliation with resentment and that will not close the gap.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (16:08): I want to begin, like others have, by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are currently gathered, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and also to acknowledge the traditional owners of my community in Dandenong, the Bunurong people, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present and the many, many First Nations people we have here with us today. I will have a bit more to say about that shortly.

Treaty has been a long journey, but however long we in this chamber feel that it has taken, for our First Nations communities it has been hundreds of years in the making. Our patience is not a patch on theirs, and I want to start by talking about patience. Unlike many politicians, Aboriginal communities think in generations, not moments. This might explain their patience in getting to this point, but even more so I think it explains why First Nations communities wanted treaty in the first place – it is about resetting a relationship for generations to come. It is about allowing each generation to grow beyond the last.

In non-Aboriginal Australia we are quite familiar with that concept. Most of us have enjoyed high levels of formal education, longer life expectancy and more financial stability than our parents. But that has not been the story of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the main, with key indicators of health and wellbeing remaining stubbornly unchanged for decades. And that has been a decision. Not their decision – it has been the decision of governments and parliaments for hundreds of years, and it has not always been malicious, but it has often been born out of ignorance. Government policies have been too focused on doing ‘to’ Aboriginal communities, not walking ‘with’ them – policies that assume we have all the answers and never stop to not only ask what they think but sit and listen deeply. We have the opportunity to change that.

Over the course of our journey towards treaty we have heard many allegations about what it might or might not be, and no doubt throughout the course of this debate – we have already heard a little bit of

it – we will hear similar claims. Some of them will be downright nefarious, spoken by people who know that what they are saying is simply not true, spoken with the deliberate intention to mislead – and that is for them to grapple with in their quiet moments when they are alone with their own conscience. On this side we know with great clarity that we want a future where all Victorians enjoy strong health and wellbeing outcomes, where no Victorian is economically excluded or discriminated against – a Victoria that experiences the collective social and economic benefits of thriving communities that are doing well. We all stand to gain from that. When it comes to closing the gap, an objective shared by many governments across many decades, there really is only one way forward, and that is treaty. We have tried all the others.

While there have been some modest gains, there have also been many failures, with progress either stalling or going backwards on two-thirds of Closing the Gap targets at any given time. The Productivity Commission confirmed for us what we need to do – it confirmed for us that we need to do things differently if we do not want to still be admiring the problem in another 30 years. They told us that to meet our Closing the Gap targets we need to put decision-making about Aboriginal affairs into Aboriginal hands. That is what treaty is all about – shifting the dial and finally, finally, getting better outcomes. Again, we all stand to gain from achieving those better outcomes: we gain economically from greater collective prosperity and we gain collectively from having greater social cohesion and from having healthier communities and fewer state resources needing to be invested in expensive, pointy-end systems. It means more and more money can be invested elsewhere to meet other shared priorities. For those who believe themselves to be the arbiters of good financial management, this is a no-brainer.

It is no surprise to me that treaty attracts very deep support from multicultural Victorians from postcolonial nations, as reported in the *Australian* over the weekend. Anybody who has intersected with colonial systems, observed or perhaps even lived their impacts, can speak to the depth of those impacts. Many can also speak to the healing properties of treaty – the ability for it to reset relationships and set a nation on a different path with strengthened identity, strengthened prosperity and greater connection. I am of Irish heritage, and I have been fortunate in my adult life to spend a lot of time there, particularly in the north, which is still under British rule. I have seen over the past 20-odd years a revival of Irish culture, of music and of language, driven by young people who want a more positive frame. In my opinion this revival has felt like a nation growing up and growing even more proud – stepping outside of a colonial shadow, acknowledging it but being who they are without shame any longer. It has been an inspiring national journey to have witnessed.

I want to wind up by saying a few things about my time as the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples – without doubt the greatest privilege of my political career. It is a confronting role. I very quickly realised how little I knew about our nation's colonial past and about the culture that attached to this country for well over 65,000 years. It was embarrassing how insulated I had been from First Nations culture, its history and most importantly its people. Of course the fact that so many of us can go through life without ever really even knowing an Aboriginal person is one of the greatest tragedies of some of the most brutal and murderous chapters of the British colonial project in this country. Being Minister for Treaty and First Peoples changed me fundamentally and forever, and I am so glad for it. I wish every Victorian could be blessed with the patience, the rawness, the generosity and ultimately the friendship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I wish every Victorian could feel the warm embrace of a strong but hurting people, often after conversations filled with tears of both sadness and laughter – I have never cried so much in politics as I did in that portfolio.

Most importantly, I wish every Victorian could feel the invitation First Nations communities give to us when they ask us to walk with them. I say feel, not hear, because when you feel it you will know it. It sits in your chest. It is indescribable. It is so wholeheartedly positive and hope filled. It is why I have been and felt so utterly disappointed to hear so many on opposition benches talk about treaty as something divisive. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that it is the Liberal-National

coalition that is divisive, not treaty. Paternalism gets us nowhere, and yet we have been hearing it in spades in this debate so far from the other side of the chamber.

I want to wind up on a more positive note and say some thank-yous. There are a lot of them, and I wish I could name everyone individually. Of course thank you to Aunty Jill Gallagher for being the treaty advancement commissioner and getting this ball rolling – and she is up there. She is a powerhouse, and anyone who knows her knows that. Thank you to our inaugural co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly, Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geri Atkinson. There were some hard years in there of getting that ball rolling and trying to work out which way was up. We had to do it together, and I could not think of better people to have worked all that through with, and there were some difficult discussions along the way.

Thank you to Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, who took the baton, and that next generation of First Peoples' Assembly leadership. The electoral roll was grown and the voter turnout was grown by that second election, and we have seen the leadership just flourish and step into its own. It has been such a joy to watch. Thank you for your grace.

Thank you to our Yoorrook justice commissioners, who led the truth-telling process. In particular I am going to single out Aunty Eleanor Bourke and also my good friend Trav Lovett, who has had to walk, like many have, in two worlds both in working for the department and the government through part of that treaty process and also in being on the other side of things. I know how hard that is, and I want to say something shortly about that too.

To our First Peoples' Assembly elected representatives, thank you, thank you, thank you. I know it has been hard work, and I know the conversations internally have not always been easy too. To our traditional owner groups for being part of the journey and to those who may be still watching on to see if they maybe want to be part of it one day, thank you for your leadership and thank you for your honesty over the journey.

To return to a previous point, to the Aboriginal workforce within government departments who have been part of this work as well, often you are, from our side of things, the unsung heroes. It is so hard to do that work and be a part of a community but have to represent government as well. But can I tell you, having been the recipient of that knowledge and that expertise, without it I do not know that we would have got here. Government needed that voice in its ranks too, so thank you. I know how hard that was.

Thank you to our leadership in the government – and I am running out of time – of course to Nat Hutchins, the minister, and to previous minister Gavin Jennings. This was a big heart project of his for a very long time, and he brought such authority and grace and knowledge to this space. I know he has long and everlasting relationships with our First Nations communities, so thank you, Gavin. Thank you to the Premier for her leadership in shepherding this through and in sticking with it in difficult times; to Chris Couzens, who we heard from earlier, and wow, that is all I can say; and of course to the beautiful Sheena Watt, who is in the gallery here today. I know how deeply felt this is for you too, Sheena.

For everyone I encountered in my time as minister, many of whom I still call friends, thank you for helping me to grow and for inviting me to be proud alongside you. Thank you for your patience, kindness and your infectious hope. Thank you for your bravery in putting yourselves out there in some of the most hostile environments imaginable, and I am so sorry that you had to, but we are here, and thank you for allowing us to walk with you on this journey.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (16:19): I too begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and also where my electorate here in Naarm sits, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung of the Kulin nation, and paying my respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. I also want to acknowledge and pay respects to the elders of the lands where I was born and where I grew up, the Arrernte people of Mparntwe / Alice

Springs, where I was born, and the Latji Latji, Ngintait, Nyeri Nyeri people of the Millewa–Mallee, where I grew up. I also pay respects to all First Nations people who are in this room today, including my friend Yorta Yorta woman Sheena Watt from the upper house. Ngoon godgin. Danke illeme. Thank you for all that you have taught me about history, about culture, about country and about belonging.

Today this Parliament considers a bill of extraordinary consequence, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, a bill that seeks to reshape the relationship between this Parliament, the government and the First Peoples of Victoria, a bill that holds the potential to deliver truth, justice and self-determination after more than two centuries of dispossession, discrimination, colonisation and genocide. I feel like it is such a huge honour and a huge privilege to even stand in this Parliament as the bill is introduced and to add some meagre words to a topic that words simply cannot do justice to. When I was writing this speech, I did not know how I would do justice to this historic moment. I want to thank Travis Lovett, Yoorrook justice commissioner and a proud Kerrupmara and Gunditjmarra man, who yesterday gave me some sage advice. He said, ‘Speak your own truth and carry the spirit of the ancestors with you,’ so that is what I will try and do today.

I want to be clear that the Victorian Greens support this bill wholeheartedly. We will vote for it, and we will do so without amendment because treaty is not ours to change or dilute or act like we know what is best to improve it. This treaty bill is the product of years of work led by Aboriginal communities, led by the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria and grounded in deep listening and self-determined decision-making processes involving mob across all of so-called Victoria. Our job now is to listen and to respond.

Nearly 10 years ago I sat in this Parliament as the journey to Statewide Treaty began with the first piece of legislation, but we all know that the real journey started long before this with the activists, the elders, the trailblazers and the mob who over many, many decades have had to fight for what is rightfully theirs and always was rightfully theirs – the right to live in safety, dignity and prosperity on their own country. Because the sad and distressing truth is that their land was stolen from them, their children were stolen from them, their ancestors were massacred, their language and culture was stolen too, and they were robbed of a prosperous future on their own land. It is a truth that needs telling but also a truth that needs rectifying.

It is a difficult truth to face for those of us whose ancestors are the ones who did the dispossessing, but nothing changes the facts, no matter how uncomfortable we find them. The truth can be hard to hear, but that does not make it any less true. Nothing will erase the pain and suffering, but by learning about the true history of the place that we live in and then acting on that truth with treaty, we may hope to heal and then hope to fashion a future that we can truly be proud of, a future where Aboriginal people are rightfully able to determine for themselves what their future will look like, a future where we do not just walk together, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike, but where we genuinely come to celebrate and to appreciate that we live in a place with the oldest continuous culture on earth. How lucky are we? More than 65,000 years of unbroken history and culture right here. And what a generous and gracious gift it is from the First Peoples of this land to invite us to create a future on this land together. In all honesty, given our history, it feels like maybe we have no right to receive such a generous gift, such a generous invitation. But as Travis Lovett reminds us, it is not just a gift but a responsibility, and it comes with obligations – obligations to listen, to learn from the past and then also to act.

In speaking my own truth, I am aware that for my children, two of whom are in the gallery today – hi kids – their good fortune, my good fortune, did not come from thin air. Their prosperity today was not built on guts and guile alone. I am aware that their ancestors, mostly Irish Catholics escaping famine, the law and the oppression of the British Empire, in turn in many ways became the oppressors of a new land, that their ancestors on the other side of the family, from England, Scotland, Wales and elsewhere, who came here seeking a better life, worked and bought land that was not actually theirs to buy and own. It was Gunaikurnai land. It was Gunditjmarra land. It was Aboriginal land, and it still is.

And I am aware, when we looked further into their paternal grandparents' family history and found references a few generations back to women keeping the blacks at bay with muskets on the farm in western Victoria, that this is just the tip of the iceberg of the horrors that happened, the atrocities that were committed on this land that we now call Victoria, but so much of that history was kept hidden.

I feel very fortunate, having grown up in the Northern Territory and north-west Victoria, and with parents who worked in community in the Tiwi Islands and Mparntwe, that I received more of an education about our true history than many people of my generation, and I am grateful for the knowledge about culture, history and country that was shared with me. But what a huge national shame it is that most people of my generation and older received almost no education at all in our schools or in our communities about the true history of this country, and treaty is our chance to change that.

It is important to talk about our own family's history and tell the truth about it, but of course my family's story is not the story that really should be centred when it comes to talking about treaty, because treaty is the story of survival of countless generations of First Nations families who have resisted, who have dreamed of and fought for better against all odds. I want to make sure that some of their stories are captured on the record today. Treaty is the story of those that we may have heard of – William Barak, William Cooper, Sir Doug Nicholls, legendary activists whose stories are now becoming more well known; they are stories of resistance, of land rights, of activism – but it is also the story of those who are less well known. It is the story of all those who fought for treaty when it seemed hopeless and unachievable, when it was promised by Bob Hawke at Barunga in 1988 and never delivered, but who continued anyway, even though many of those elders are not here because they did not live to see the day.

It is also the story of those who are sitting in the chamber today, who carried on the fight from the elders and did see this day, like the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray – thank you for your incredibly powerful words today – and all those in the First Peoples' Assembly who represented your community so faithfully, including the treaty negotiating team led by Nerita Waight, Indi Clarke and Troy McDonald, Dr Jill Gallagher up there in the chamber and previous co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart, whose worked paved the ground for the outcome that we have here today, the members of the Treaty Authority. It is a story of the Yoorrook justice commissioners, including chair Aunty Eleanor Bourke and all the other commissioners whose difficult work of truth-telling made treaty possible. Because the truth-telling is the why, but the treaty is the what – the what we are going to do now that we know the truth.

Treaty is also the story of trailblazing First Nations women, women like Lidia Thorpe, the first First Nations woman to sit in this Parliament, who faced ridicule and resistance but who stood here to tell her mob's story anyway, and Sheena Watt, my dear friend – we go a long way back – who sits in this Parliament today. These women had the courage to step into a role in this colonial Parliament, despite the hostility they knew would come. But they did it anyway, hoping that their fight would make real change and pave the way for others, and my word it has. Treaty is also the work of so many mob, young and old, whose names will not appear in *Hansard* or the history books but who deserve to know that their contributions led to this point, especially all those who enrolled to vote in the First Peoples' Assembly, one by one, to have their voices heard, and we have heard them loud and clear.

It is the work of all the mob who kept the fire of hope burning even in the shadow of the pain of the referendum. Treaty is also the story of the people whose pain and suffering at the hands of the colonial government is immeasurable, like the stolen generations, and those who despite that extended their hands in partnership anyway. We owe them all such a great debt.

I want to talk about a friend of mine, Ian Hamm, who I spoke to today about treaty, and I told him I would mention him in my speech. Ian was stolen from his family at just three weeks old. He was raised in a different family. His name was changed. This was just a few towns over from the Yorta Yorta family that he was born into, but he never knew. Ian told me that he never, ever thought that he would

live to see the day that treaty would pass this Parliament, and his is just one single example of an experience that happened to countless thousands of others. The thing is that racist policies and ideologies do not just diminish those who are the direct targets, they diminish us all. In the same way, treaty does not just lift up our First Nations communities, it lifts up us all. Ian gave me some beautiful words today to say about treaty. He said that he remembers exactly where he was at five years old when he first saw Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. He said today feels like that. He said for his community this is their walking on the moon moment, and people will always remember where they were when treaty was signed in Victoria.

Treaty, let us remember, is not just the result of the work of the last few years but the work of decades and decades of people who dreamed of this day, who worked for this day and who might not be here to witness it but whose actions and footprints are all over it. And ultimately treaty is about belonging. When I think about the incredibly complex question of belonging, I often think about young Ian. My own children will grow up never having to experience the pain and confusion that he and others from the stolen generation did. They will never experience being ripped out of my arms as babies. They will never experience the pain of the physical punishment that was meted out just for speaking their own language or the spiritual pain of having their own culture dismissed, disparaged and denied. They will never have their own family history hidden from them, like my best friend at high school, who did not find out that she was Aboriginal until her teenage years because the shame inflicted by racism meant that her family told people that her grandmother was Italian rather than admitting that she was Aboriginal. My children will never know these pains.

My children have grown up wanting for very little, but they are lacking something if they live in a country that has not healed and has not dealt with its past. Treaty is a pathway to this healing, a pathway to all of us truly belonging together in this country with each other, a pathway to making our country whole. I am reminded of the powerful words in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, which said:

When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

Their culture is indeed a gift to all Australian children. With the advent of treaty, my children and all children will get to not just live here but have real pride in the future that we are creating, and for that I will be forever grateful.

There are those, including some in the chamber today, who oppose this treaty legislation. They say we can get better outcomes for First Nations people without treaty, but this argument is surely rooted in the same paternalistic mindset that has seen us fail to improve outcomes over generations. Treaty is about moving away from governments thinking that they know what is best for First Nations communities to handing back some of the power to community, recognising that they know and have always known what their own communities need to prosper.

There are others who will see treaty as an opportunity to use for their own political gain. To these people I say history will not look kindly on those who put their own personal and political gain ahead of doing what is right to address some of the wrongs of history, and I do not think that it is right to seek to score political points off the backs of those who have shown such generosity towards us all in finding a pathway forward.

There will also be those who say Statewide Treaty does not go far enough, that it is not enough, and question the legitimacy of the state to make these agreements at all, given the history of this country. These are important questions, but as the preamble to the legislation says, this Statewide Treaty marks a new beginning – it is just that, a beginning – to enshrine the First Peoples' Assembly as a permanent body in law, a body mind you that has already been in operation for six years and doing a great job, to ensure that there are structures in place to allow First Peoples to determine how they want to manage their own affairs and to hold government accountable for the promises they make through Gellung Warl. Surely for those of us who are not mob, when the democratic body of First Nations people

chosen by a self-determined process after 10 years of yarning and working tell us that this treaty is what they want and need, it is incumbent upon us to sit down and listen.

Treaty does not end today, but with the Greens' votes in the upper house ensuring passage of the legislation in a few weeks time we take the first steps in making history. My fervent hope is that other states and other jurisdictions, from Queensland to WA as well as our federal government, who have rolled back their own support for treaty or similar processes, will look to Victoria and see the benefits of treaty and change their minds and that they will realise that in doing the right thing for our long-term future far surpasses the political opportunism they seek to exploit in the short term.

I want to end my speech with the words of a Gunditjmara storyteller, Richard Frankland, who in 2017, around the time when this treaty process in Victoria was just kicking off, summed up treaty better than I could ever hope to. He said:

... a treaty is ultimately about hope. A treaty is a light that shines in the distance, and that light that may help us as a nation to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and plant seeds here in the present for future generations to grow trees, a forest, perhaps even change the cultural tapestry of our nation.

Treaty is here. Treaty is now. Let us get this done.

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (16:38): It is an honour to rise and acknowledge the historic opportunity that the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 provides. The member for Melbourne made some very important contributions. I want to first begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which this Parliament meets, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders past and present and all traditional owners and First Peoples across Victoria and their elders and the First Peoples people who are here with us today in this Victorian Parliament.

It does not get more important than what we are doing today and what we are discussing. For us in the labour movement, we should be so proud of what this means – the party of Mabo; the party of native title; the reconciliation act under the great Gough Whitlam, which was the equivalent of the 1960s Civil Rights Act; the apology; the Redfern speech – and here now in Victoria what we are doing with treaty is a landmark day and a landmark occasion. Paul Keating said 'the only reward in a public life is public progress', and that is what Noel Pearson quoted in his very first sentence in the eulogy he gave for Gough Whitlam. In tens of thousands of years to come people will look back at this Parliament and look back at this moment and say public progress was made for our First Nations people that have occupied this land for more than 65,000 years, and we as a Parliament and indeed as a government and as a state should be so, so proud.

More than being the Deputy Premier, I am the Minister for Education, and I acknowledge who our first educators and teachers and students were on this land: our First Nations people. As Rueben I think said in his contribution today, there have been 65,000 continuous years of wisdom. For us as a government to write the curriculum and to recognise in the statute book who our first educators were will be a momentous occasion for this state, and I cannot wait to get on with the job of doing that.

The treaty does ensure First Peoples communities are at the heart of decision-making that affects their lives. It will not only create a real, practical difference for the communities across our state, but it will also give ongoing young First Nations people more opportunities for success. As the Premier noted in her remarks, this has been a journey and there are many people that have played a part. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria since 2019 have partnered with us on this journey towards treaty, and yes, we are the better for it. First Peoples have told us for years about the impact colonisation has had on their families, their communities and their lives. What I can say is that we are all united in standing together to support this treaty and make sure that all Victorians – but especially our First Peoples – have the same outcomes and the same lives. The establishment of Gellung Warl as an ongoing representative of the First Peoples will ensure the work of the assembly continues and that it well and truly continues into the future.

I know there have been a number of statements – and arguably I would say misinterpretations – on what Gellung Warl is about, what it signifies and what its definition is. If I may read the Gunaikurnai statement on the name and read this into *Hansard*, because I think this is very, very important:

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation confirms that it considered and approved a request to use Gunaikurnai language in naming the Gellung Warl.

The decision was made through GLaWAC's recognised cultural and governance processes, informed by advice from the Elders Council and endorsed through the organisation's formal decision-making structures. All such decisions are undertaken with care, respect and oversight, to ensure that cultural integrity is upheld.

We acknowledge that individuals may hold different perspectives. As the Recognised Aboriginal Party for Gunaikurnai people, GLaWAC applies its established cultural protocols to manage matters of language and heritage with integrity and respect.

That is the nub of the issue: it is about integrity and respect, and that is what we bring here today, making sure that we all walk together for a better future.

For the incredible advice and counsel that I have received as the education minister – and many of you are in the audience today, and I know I am going to leave some people out – I do want to acknowledge Aunty Geraldine Atkinson, the president of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, and also Uncle Lionel Bamblett the general manager of VAEAI. We only met a fortnight ago, and we meet regularly for their insights and ideas. I am so thankful for their counsel.

Education can change lives, and we know this is fundamental to the importance of education. This was not the case for so many people growing up in Victoria. I want to also acknowledge that the NAPLAN results we have got in Victoria show incredible progress. What many people will not know is that it has been very much a part of Noel Pearson's work. If you look at what Noel Pearson did at Cape York – and I draw inspiration from what he did – the direct instruction, the explicit instruction, making sure that the knowledgeable teacher passes on that knowledge to the yet-to-be-knowledgeable student: this is First Nations wisdom directly having an impact on our results in the Education State, and for that I am so very, very appreciative.

Can I acknowledge everyone that has been on this journey? I do want to pay tribute to Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg for their outstanding speeches on the floor of the Parliament today. They are in *Hansard* now and will be for thousands of years to come, and they will be reference points for students, for academia and for everybody on this historical occasion. You should be so proud of how you represented the body that you represent and what your words mean. On that note too I should say that the spear I got from Travis Lovett after speaking at the commission now has a whole new meaning after what Rueben said today. I can also see you have got Terry Garwood up there next to you as well, Travis. I want to thank Terry, the head of Indigenous affairs in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. With Minister Hutchins, Terry has been with us every step of the way, as has Sheena Watt, as has Chris Couzens and so many other people on this journey – Marcus Stewart and everyone. They have been with us together, making sure we go forward and do what we need to do to make sure this is nation leading and to embed First Nations history and cultures in the curriculum.

To be the first state in the Commonwealth of Australia says everything, I think, about the progressiveness of our government and why we want a future where everyone is equal – equality of opportunity before the law. But not only that, as has been so eloquently put today, 'No decision made for us without us.' That is what it is all about going forward. We should be so, so proud. I know including the Yoorrook Justice Commission's official record as a resource to support the implementation of truth-telling in the curriculum will be so important for our students coming through the education system here in Victoria, and I am so keen to be doing what we can there as well.

I do want to put on record: I mentioned NAPLAN before, and we may have seen very important results, but we have also got to do more work among our First Nations students. But we should also celebrate what we are doing. When you look at year 5 numeracy from 2023 to 2025, we have seen the highest scores ever among First Nations students, exceeding the standards. The same story goes for



year 7 numeracy, as well as years 5 and 7 grammar. First Nations peoples were our first educators, and we are so proud of everything they have achieved for our wonderful state of Victoria.

Can I congratulate the Premier, the minister, Minister Williams and indeed former minister Gavin Jennings as well for their work that has led us on this path. It is such an important moment. Finally, I just want to speak and put on record my thanks and appreciation to Professor Mark Rose as well. I got inducted into the hall of fame at St Bernard's College, and Mark Rose is also a member of that hall of fame. To be at the State Library with him said it all about how proud I was to join him on that journey. If you want to look at the power of education, you only have to look at someone like Mark Rose, the son of a member of the stolen generation. Education was his passport to a bright future. Like so many of you here today, you are all giving back to future generations. We know our most important resource is our young people, and our Indigenous young people will ensure that we walk together on a path to treaty, but more than that, that we uplift everyone and do not make decisions for people without people. I commend this contribution.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (16:48): It is really important that I rise today to speak on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Some in this place know my deep connection to the local Aboriginal community, both through friends, organisations obviously and family. But out of respect for those family members, I am not going to speak on their behalf today, because we do not speak on behalf of them – that is the way that I was raised.

The member for Melbourne was talking about growing up in the north-west of Victoria and being really grateful for that. We were brought up with the stories of the Dreamtime and going out with Uncle Bobby Egan, looking for bardi grubs. We knew what land we were walking on, and we grew up with those stories as part of our everyday lives. This was from kindergarten. My kids also did this, through the Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative. They went through day care and preschool there. I think until I grew into adulthood I probably took it for granted a little bit. I did not realise that there were some Victorians who may never have met an Aboriginal person before. That just came as a complete shock to me. I did not realise that there were people who did not know what land they were walking on. That also came as a complete shock to me because we grew up side by side. I went to school with a member of the assembly. We played sport. I have got very, very close friends and family, as I say.

Let me say at the outset, as I always do, that I speak with deep respect for the traditional owners of the lands that I represent, the Ladjji Ladjji, the Tati Tati, the Barkindji peoples throughout the Mallee, and the thousands of First Nations Victorians who call our region home. Reconciliation is not a word that I take lightly. It is not a box to tick. It is about walking together, and in the Mallee we do that every day, like I just said. These are friends and family members right from school, through sporting clubs, our councils, our health services and community groups. And it is built on respect, not regulation or legislation. It is built on genuine relationships, not bureaucracy. This bill, we are told, is about taking the next step in that journey. As the Leader of the Nationals stated, we do not disagree with the destination and closing the gap and reconciliation but on the journey that we take, so there have to be two sides.

Someone said to me yesterday, or it might have even been this morning, that the best thing I can do when making a contribution to this debate is talk about how it affects my local electorate. In our local electorate there has been a growing divide, and I know that that word affects some people differently. I shut it down every single time it comes up, but the volume over the last 18 months in particular has become almost unmanageable, to the point that I am continually shutting down some of the misinformation that has got out there, whether it is about the land settlement agreements, the native title acts – things that some might just see a headline in the paper about and draw an opinion from that, and then that misinformation starts to spread. We need both sides to come together to close that gap, and this bill, as it is written, just does not do that. It is a process that risks widening that divide even more rather than healing it, particularly when we have some issues within local organisations at the moment that are caught up in the judicial system.

When I speak to people throughout my electorate, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, we do not want to be divided. We want positive outcomes. We want fairness. We want jobs, health care, decent housing, safe community and opportunities for everyone. I do not think there will ever be a time when everyone is of the same opinion, but we need to be able to debate this in a respectful way. I just do not think we can legislate reconciliation. We have to live it every day, and until this society gets to a point where all sides of the debate come together to close that gap, I do not think we will be living it.

In Mildura we see extraordinary examples of partnerships that are being done right each and every day. A couple of weeks ago I was at Chaffey College for their NAIDOC Week, after they had come back from school holidays. NAIDOC Week to them is not something that is celebrated over the week, it is a fabric of the school. Kehan does such a fantastic job, and the young leaders there are amazing as well. I have a fair bit to do with the Clontarf Foundation in Robinvale. Leon Johnson headed that up, and Leon is now the chair of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative. The outcomes of that organisation – zero per cent youth crime rate in Robinvale, the outcomes of year 12 and employment for these boys – were just amazing. These are things that we have seen can work.

We have seen an evolution in recent history of the way that in Robinvale – and I know Jacinta Chaplin did a huge amount of work within Swan Hill Rural City Council – Australia Day is celebrated in a really cohesive way and how citizenship ceremonies involve local mob. It is beautiful to see. But then when perhaps – and I have had conversations again with our local Indigenous leaders, who feel that information is perhaps not getting out in the way that it should – there is misinformation on both sides, and I do not want to see that move backwards. They are the sorts of things that change lives, not paperwork in Spring Street. We have heard from some of the contributions today that the government has not been completely transparent on the new structure and how it will improve lives, particularly the lives of those kids on the ground in electorates like Mildura. How will it intersect with the Commonwealth responsibilities as well? These are not small responsibilities, and all Victorians deserve straight answers.

I do want to acknowledge the intergenerational trauma – the history and the atrocities that have happened. As the member for Melbourne mentioned earlier, those stories that we heard of massacres on homesteads along the Murray River are abhorrent. But again, we learned about those in primary school. We were educated on that so that history does not repeat, so it was embedded that we are all one. Starting to tell these stories – well, not starting, because again, like I said, I grew up with these stories – and walking together is what will close the gap, not slogans on a press release.

In the Mallee we are practical, pragmatic people. We are not afraid of these hard conversations, but we do want them to lead somewhere. We want to see respect in action. So while I acknowledge that history – the pain, the need for healing – I, along with the Liberals and the Nationals, cannot support this bill in its current form, because real reconciliation does not come from Parliament, it comes from people, it comes from communities like Mildura, Robinvale, Sea Lake, Birchip, Donald, Charlton, where locals roll up their sleeves and work side by side. We care more about what unites us than divides us. That is the Australia that I believe in, and that is the Victoria that I want to build for my kids, for your kids, for future generations.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (16:58): I am proud to speak in support of treaty for Victoria. I just want to rebut a comment made by the member for Mildura. To the contrary, treaty is not about division; treaty is an invitation to walk together. But before I speak further on the bill, can I take the opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament sits, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders past and present and acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are joining us here today. My electorate of Macedon encompasses the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, the Taungurung and the Wurundjeri peoples. There cannot be treaty without a Voice, and I also want to acknowledge and pay my respects to the members and co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly. To Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, thank you so much for your extraordinary contributions on the floor of the house today and for all of your work leading the First

Peoples' Assembly. There cannot be treaty without truth. I acknowledge the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and I note that Commissioner Lovett is with us today as well.

I grew up on the lands of the Dhudhuroa people in the north-east of our state in the beautiful Mitta Valley. We did not know the language of the area's rivers, the creeks, the ridges and the plains, nor did we know of the culture, history and technology of the Dhudhuroa people. It is not a criticism, it is just a fact. Unlike the member for Mildura, I learned nothing of the First Peoples' history of the community which I called home, despite the fact that I lived in a community with towns and district names like Tangambalanga, Kiewa, Tallangatta and Mount Murrumbidgee. Despite all of this, the stories of the First Peoples who had called this area home for thousands of years were never told. It was the stories of the settlers that held precedence in our local published histories and in our classrooms. In essence, the First Peoples of the community I grew up in were erased from the history books and from the knowledge that was held in that community.

It is testimony to the strength and resilience of Victoria's First Peoples that we are here today. First Peoples have never given up in their fight for recognition, for truth and for justice and to ensure that Victoria, like countless other colonial states all around the world, enacts a treaty with its First Peoples. As Rueben Berg reminded us today, treaty is a gift. It is not something that seeks to take anything away from anyone, and people that seek to perpetuate this lie are doing a great disservice and are not acting as leaders. It is, as I have said, an invitation to walk together with equality and respect for a new and different future. Treaty will build a stronger and more united Victoria for everyone, where the heritage, the history and the culture of all of our peoples is acknowledged and celebrated.

The health gap that exists between First Peoples and every other Victorian is a shameful part of this state's history. It did not appear overnight, nor is it the fault of First Peoples. The First Peoples' Assembly told Yoorrook that before colonisation First Peoples were generally strong and healthy and enjoyed a lifestyle on their traditional lands that promoted good health. But it was the arrival of the settler colonialists with their diseases and viruses that ended this. That is a fact. And as we know and as has now been formally recorded, the gap is a result of policies, discrimination, racism and, frankly, indifference towards the fate and health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians. But Victoria's vibrant, unique network of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations came about because of this neglect, and now, more than 50 years strong, our ACCHOs have shown a new way for the delivery of health care and wellbeing to all Aboriginal Victorians. ACCHOs are supported by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), which is led by proud Gunitjmarra woman Jill Gallagher AO. It is my great privilege to be able to work very closely with Aunty Jill Gallagher, who also served as Victoria's treaty advancement commissioner, and we thank you, Aunty Jill, for that extraordinary work.

As I have said in this place many times, we all know that when Aboriginal health is in Aboriginal hands we get better outcomes for Aboriginal people. ACCHOs are testament to this. And this is what treaty is about – it is simple. It is a simple proposition. Agreement-making in this space is not new and it is not radical. I already co-chair the Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Forum with Mick Graham of VACCHO and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. The partnership forum is already delivering on the priorities that have been set by the Aboriginal community, including improving cultural safety in hospitals, addressing a long-term lack of investment in ACCHO infrastructure and transforming how we budget for Aboriginal health, ensuring that we put self-determination at the centre of budget decision-making. The establishment of Gellung Warl will further strengthen community representation. Independent oversight and accountability are to be welcomed, not to be feared. It will also ensure that the truth that we heard through Yoorrook is not lost.

Change starts from the top, and the Statewide Treaty document recognises the importance of the composition of boards and the fundamental skills needed to identify and eliminate institutional racism and discrimination. With more than 70 independent health services, each with their own board and management teams in Victoria, it is really important that we get this right. The number of First Peoples on health boards has increased six-fold since 2022, and I am proud to have recommended the

appointment of 10 more First Peoples to our health service boards this year alone. This demonstrates the change that we get when First Peoples set the priorities for their health and wellbeing and they tell us and work with us to deliver the change that needs to happen to ensure that First Peoples are determining their own future.

I want to just talk briefly about my electorate; as I have said, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri country. Since I was elected to this place in 2014 I have had the opportunity to learn so much from many respected elders in my community, including Aunty Di Kerr, Mandy Nicholson, Bill Nicholson, Rodney Carter and Shane Monk, amongst others. I have also said in this place that as a member of Parliament it has been a real privilege to work closely with and get to know so many Aboriginal people, a privilege that I wish could be shared by so many more in our community.

To those who say no to treaty, know this: you are saying no to the explicit requests of First Nations people in this state. You are saying no to a mechanism that has demonstrated outcomes in other jurisdictions and you are disrespecting an invitation that has been given to you to walk forward to a better future for all. We need to be clear that the experiences of First Nations people and the discrimination that they experience is fundamentally different to that that is experienced by other groups in our community, and we know this through the experience of Indigenous peoples all around the world who have experienced the impacts of colonisation. But treaty with First Peoples works. We only have to look again around the world to see examples of this – in New Zealand, in Canada and in states in the United States. Please stop spreading misinformation. Now is the time for leadership. It is the time to stand strong. It is the time to act with principle. It is time to imagine a future where the First Peoples of this state can determine their future. That is all that treaty asks of us. It takes nothing from us. I feel a great honour and privilege to be able to stand in this house on this day and know that I am making history and that I am standing with extraordinary leaders. I thank you for your leadership. I commend the bill to the house.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (17:07): I rise today to speak to the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. May I state from the outset that this is a sensitive and emotive bill. I thank all of the speakers from today and those who will speak to this bill tonight and tomorrow. I appreciate that here in our democracy we can have a measured and sensible debate about this in this place. I say this as the first Asian woman elected to this place, as someone that recognises that Victoria is a multicultural, multifaith society and as someone who was the first of my family born here in Australia.

I acknowledge that there is an enduring culture and people in Australia, and here on this side of the house no-one is debating that there are disparate health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in our state. No-one is debating that we should not close the gap; in fact we are debating that we should. No-one is debating that we should not strive to improve health and life outcomes for Indigenous Victorians. That is what we are here to do as legislators, and that is what we here on this side of the house stand for. I know that that is the truth for all parliamentarians.

We know that Aboriginal Victorians continue to face unacceptable outcomes in health, education, justice and child safety and that the government is failing on key nationally agreed Closing the Gap targets. This is why it matters. In Victoria the incarceration rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is 9.4 times the rate of other Australian young people. In 2023–24 it was 33.9 per 10,000 young people. Aboriginal adults were incarcerated at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous adults, at 2304 per 100,000 in 2024. Aboriginal Victorians are over three times more likely to die by suicide than non-Aboriginal Victorians, with a suicide rate of 30 per 100,000 in 2023. The Coroners Court of Victoria confirms that the worsening trend is there.

There is an eight-year gap that persists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy, and Aboriginal employment sits at 55 per cent, well below the 78 per cent rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians. Only 34.3 per cent of Aboriginal children starting school were developmentally on track in 2021. Just 58 per cent of Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 24 were fully engaged in employment, education or training, and only 68 per cent of Aboriginal students complete year 12, compared to

85 per cent of non-Aboriginal students. The data is clear. The statistics are compelling. The issues pertaining to those health outcomes and those life outcomes are very real and very present. That is why it is important that we speak to those matters here today in the house. But unfortunately this Statewide Treaty Bill does not address closing the gap in Victoria. If we really want to close the gap, if we are serious about looking at that, we need to be looking at the successful models that have succeeded in closing the gap, not just creating another layer of bureaucracy.

A report from Australia's peak body for Indigenous children, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, has found that the very groups getting the best results in cultural support, reunification with kin and connection to culture are receiving the least funding. I will say that again. A report from Australia's peak body for Indigenous children, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, found that the very groups getting the best results in cultural support, reunification with kin and connection to culture are the ones receiving the least funding. In 2024 the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care's *Family Matters Report* found that despite the overwhelming evidence that Aboriginal community controlled organisations deliver the most effective outcomes for children, they receive only 6 per cent of government child protection funding. That means that the organisations that are keeping Aboriginal children connected to kin, to culture and to community are simply not getting the resources that they need – at 6 per cent.

Meanwhile the number of Aboriginal children being removed from their families, unfortunately the statistics show, continues to rise. The report is clear that only 15 per cent of government child protection funding goes towards early intervention and family support. The rest is consumed by bureaucracy and crisis response. This is a system designed to react, not to prevent, and to separate, not to strengthen, and this is the system that we should be fixing. This is where reform, funding and urgency should be directed.

This is particularly meaningful for me as the new Shadow Minister for Children, where we have seen that this failure is tragic in our child protection system. Right now the level of Aboriginal children being removed from their families is appalling, and the treaty bill does not address this. It does not keep children safe. It does not help keep families together. According to the Productivity Commission, Victoria is removing more First Nations children from their families than any other state in Australia – almost twice the national rate. Nationally 57.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children per thousand are in out-of-home care. Here in Victoria that number is 102.9 per thousand. That is more than one in 10 children in out-of-home care. Three-quarters of Aboriginal young people in youth justice have already been through child protection, and some never make it out alive, like a 17-year-old Wemba Wemba girl who took her own life after being separated from her eight siblings and denied connection to her culture. These are the injustices crying out for action, not bureaucracy.

And so to my earlier point, we see that according to this report from the leading – the peak – body for Indigenous children that the groups that are getting the best results in cultural support and reunification with kin are the ones receiving the least funding. This is where the funding should be going. They should not be receiving 6 per cent of government funding. These are the proven and effective, community-controlled, Aboriginal-led organisations that have these outcomes for children yet they are receiving the least funding. This is where it is urgent. This Statewide Treaty Bill will cost \$207 million over the next four years. That is the figure only at the beginning. That money is going towards a body rather than towards these culturally led groups that are seeing meaningful change take place. That is why on this side of the house we oppose this bill and this legislation, because we believe there is a better way forward, that there is a better way and that there is a more strategic way to close the gap and to use funding to go directly towards these outcomes-focused Closing the Gap measures.

To the bill itself, the bill is troubling in that it does give this unelected body unprecedented power and autonomy in operating outside of ministerial control. There are many issues with this bill, and if I can borrow the words of the member for South-West Coast, who I think made a really important contribution in this place to this debate, if we give one group of Australians different voting rights to another, we are not building unity, we are sowing division. How do we explain to the people of

Victoria that some people can vote at 16 while others cannot, that voting in Indigenous elections might be optional while all Victorians are required to show up on election day. Democracy at its heart is fairness and equality under the law, yet this treaty bill seeks to create different rules for different people, which then therefore divides rather than unites.

On this side of the house that is why we oppose this bill, because it simply does not address the outcomes. It simply does not put the money in the right places where we will see the closure of the gap. It simply does not do these things. There are issues in this bill that are of concern on this side of the house that many have spoken to, but most of all it divides rather than unites Australians and Victorians. That is why on this side of the house we oppose the bill.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (17:17): I rise in proud support of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. It is easy to come up with all of the problems that we have that confront governments, whatever the policy area. It is another thing to come up with solutions. Everything that we have heard from those opposite thus far has been about describing what they think the problems are, but no solutions. The solutions are staring us in the face in this bill, because we have gone through this and we have heard loud and clear what the solutions are. If you really want to make a difference, if you really believe in fixing the problems that have been with us for too long, support this bill, because this is the solution. It is the way forward.

I do want to spend some time acknowledging all of the wonderful elders of the past and the present and all those traditional owners and First Peoples who are with us here today. I acknowledge them, I give my respect to them and all those who are watching this debate. I do want to also in particular acknowledge Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, who are the current co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. I thank them for their great leadership and their fortitude. This has been a long time coming, and a lot has been invested in being able to see the culmination of this bill coming forward to this Parliament. To Sheena Watt and Christine Couzens, each comes with their own dignity and story. I thank them because politics is lonely, but when you are Indigenous in politics, imagine how lonely that can be. I say today, you are not lonely today. Look at everyone here. Look at all of us here. We are with you, and we always will be with each one of you.

To Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart, former co-chairs; to Professor Eleanor Bourke, the chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission; and to others who have joined with her, Sue-Anne Hunter, Travis Lovett, Maggie Walter and Dr Wayne Atkinson, I say thank you very much. Why do I say thank you? Because you have had courage, generosity and trust. Why are those things important? It takes courage to do this, always, in the sense that perhaps it can go wrong and we just do not get there. It takes courage to say we are going to work this through. The generosity of inviting us to walk alongside of you – because we know this is the beginning, it is not the end. It cannot be the end, but this is a way forward to build on. And of course there was the trust that we were going to get to here and get it through the other place and have it endorsed by the Governor and in law in this state. Thank you for your courage, your generosity and your trust. I say to you that we will keep our word and see this through.

I do want to acknowledge the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins and her predecessors Gabrielle Williams and Gavin Jennings. I know that for the minister who is at the table this is her second time round in the portfolio, and this is business that was started quite some time ago. The stewardship and the grace and the commitment that have been shown to walk alongside of all traditional owners to reach this point – it has taken all of that goodwill to get here. I say to those people who have made some comments in this chamber that I am convinced that one day they will come to regret, when their children, who do not have to be convinced about this, and when their grandchildren say, 'What did you do during that period? Where did you stand?' that *Hansard* will tell the story and more. You were elected to be leaders, not dog whistlers. You asked for a better way. This is it. And if you do not take this opportunity now, that says so much about you and not where we are here today.

This bill represents one of the most significant steps our state has ever taken towards justice, truth and reconciliation. For generations of their 60,000 years First Peoples across Victoria have called for treaty, certainly since colonisation, a treaty that recognises their connections to land and water and sky, their culture, their languages and their right to self-determination. This bill answers that call. It establishes Gellung Warl, an enduring representative body for First Peoples in Victoria. It lays the foundation for a future where decisions that affect Aboriginal communities are made by them, not for them. We know families are better off when they have responsibility over their lives. Aboriginal families are no different, yet we have not done that. Treaty is about fairness. It is about partnership. It is about improving the lives of Aboriginal people in our communities, not taking away from anyone else. And you know what, generosity cannot be measured, because it is never-ending. We have got that ability now to be generous, because it is required of us and it is morally correct.

This Parliament first recognised the call for treaty in 2016. Our government passed the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act in 2018 and the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act in 2022. Each of those steps helped build the path to this moment. This bill enshrines several key structures that give effect to this new relationship. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria will continue as the elected decision-making chamber within Gellung Warl. It is a forum for First Peoples to advise the Parliament and engage with government, developing policy on matters directly affecting their communities. This bill creates Nginma Ngainga Wara, an accountability mechanism to hold the state to its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The bill also establishes Nyerna Yoorook Telkuna, an ongoing truth-telling and healing office that continues the vital work begun by the Yoorook Justice Commission. Treaty is not about guilt, it is about responsibility and it is about doing things better. It is about facing our shared history with honesty and moving forward together with respect, because if we can be grateful for those who came before us, we can also take responsibility for what has happened before us. It builds on years of consultation, negotiation and dialogue led by the First Peoples' Assembly, grounded in community and guided by cultural authority.

This is a moment of pride for Victoria. We will become the first state in the nation to legislate a treaty with First Peoples. It will make a significant difference to my community, deepening the community connection with the truth of our history. It is the history that I and many others in this chamber were not taught about at school. It was, as a previous speaker, my good friend the member for Macedon, said, erased from history that we learned. At the same time that I was born I was born with the right to vote, and many were not, and I reflect on that every time I speak in this chamber.

Truth-telling in schools is really critical to this, because we know younger people are hungry for the truth, because when we have the truth, we can take the right decisions for our future. We can shape the future in a way that reflects the truth in all of the good and, sadly, with the bad that the truth shows us. That is the only way that we can truly enable the gap to be closed.

There is much more that I wish I could say, I really do, but what I do want to say in finishing my comments is that today is a day of pride. It is a start. It is a proud start. It is a start that has been developed and built up with a lot of goodwill and a lot of sincerity and trust. We cannot forsake that, because I know that all of us as a community can only ever truly reach our best and be our best when we do close this gap. This is what treaty is about, so let us start with an open heart, an open mind and the goodwill that this deserves.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (17:27): I rise to make my contribution on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 as well, and I suppose it is about reflecting on how we got to this. A number of the previous speakers have talked about how when the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 and the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022 were before this chamber, they were passed unanimously. I was the shadow minister at that particular time, so whether that was a good decision or a bad decision, I will own that decision. I thank Aunty Geraldine and Marcus

Stewart for the discussions we had through that particular process and in more recent times Rueben and Ngarra for the discussions we have had.

One of the things that particularly Marcus and Aunty Geraldine convinced me of was to be part of the process, to come on the journey and work with them through this particular issue, because I think you will find that, even though we are disagreeing with this bill, there is absolutely heated agreement in this chamber that there is history that needs to be told. There is extreme disadvantage that is generational because of white man's settlement. As I have said in one of the other debates in this place, our family came here in pregoldrush days. I hope that my family was not part of that, but I honestly do not know. It is not history that I know. I suppose we, the coalition, supported both those pieces of legislation to go on the journey over that time, and I have had those discussions with Marcus and Aunty Geraldine and then with Rueben and Ngarra about how we had some concerns about how some of the other pieces of legislation were not working well enough, particularly some issues with the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 and the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and how there could be improvement and how those processes could work.

We talked about it numerous times. I constantly raised these issues, and I was continually told, 'Let's sort all this out as part of the treaty process.' It got to the point where through frustration I as the shadow minister and we as a coalition felt that those issues were not being taken seriously enough from our side. There was a drifting apart, I suppose, of support for going forward together. It would be fantastic if we could have got to today with everyone in the chamber in agreement. I think if you are going to have the change that people are aspiring to have, you need to build your house on very sound foundations, and those sound foundations, from a political point of view, are where there is not disagreement in how you are going to go forward. I think there was a willingness to go forward together that for whatever reasons drifted apart. It has become partisan in some ways. If I listen to the contributions from the other side of the house, they want to be partisan about criticising our side of the house for having a different way to solve the same issue really in some ways. Whether our way is right or whether the treaty way is right we will not know for 10, 20 or 30 years, because that is how long it is going to take.

I am sure the First Peoples' Assembly do not underestimate the challenge they have to solve disadvantage for the Aboriginal community. It is well documented. The history is there. Most people have spoken about the numbers in this house. I am not going to go through the numbers, they are very well known, but in my personal view it starts with education and housing. If people have a good education, they have a better opportunity to have a job and they have a better opportunity to have a better job that pays more. That gives them a better opportunity to own a house. If you have got a house, you get that generational change. You hear people that come into this house and talk about the fact that they were the first of their family that actually went to university; they were the first of their family that went further in education than any previous generation. I think the first thing that I would aspire to is to make sure that education becomes a core of whatever changes are going to be made, because unless you have got that education attainment you do not have the opportunity to have employment and you do not have the opportunity necessarily to own your own home. And there is very good research that says education and good employment actually increase people's quality of life and increase their life spans, because again, they are leading a better life because of the education attainment, the housing and then better health into the future.

We are all in heated agreement about achieving those things for the Indigenous community. I and most of the Nats have got significant First Peoples populations in our electorates. One of the biggest issues I get in my office in Echuca is the issue of housing for Indigenous people, particularly for young mums, single mums, who quite often tragically are leaving an abusive relationship and actually want to get a house. I know that is a challenge for Housing Victoria. It is a challenge for Njernda. It is a challenge for everyone to make sure there are enough houses there. I am sure the First Peoples' Assembly, as they through this process now have got treaty, do not underestimate the challenge there will be to make sure there is enough housing for the people that need housing.



As has been said – I think the member for Melbourne said it – this will go through the upper house unamended because the Greens are supporting it. It is going to happen. I wish all those involved well in actually achieving what you want to achieve for your people, but I would put a caution on that: do not disregard our side of politics just because we are not supporting this bill. It does not mean that we are anti First Peoples. It does not mean that – as some on the other side would try to paint us – we are racist. I do not believe there is a single racist amongst my colleagues on this side. We do have different views on how we achieve closing the gap and how we will change things, but I think we all come to this place to make life better for Victorians and for people that live in our electorates. In some ways we are always slightly parochial to our own electorates, but we do have the bigger picture in our mind, because if you do not have a prosperous Victoria, if you do not have a prosperous Australia, people do not achieve the aspirations they have for the future.

Yes, we were part of that journey. We have had a divergence of our ways. For whoever forms government after the next election, in the life of parliaments, in the life of Victorian history, the next election is only a blink away, and who knows what may happen with that particular election. I would urge those in the First Peoples' Assembly and in this whole process to make sure they continue to engage – in this case with Mel Bath at the moment as the shadow and more generally with the local members of Parliament for the various parts of the whole state. It is a collective view that happens – it is not just a shadow minister – so I look forward to you doing that.

I remember Uncle Wally from Wangaratta when he was alive. He had a great welcome to country where he said, 'Come, take my hand and let's walk across this country together.' I would hope that after today, tomorrow or whenever this debate is going to be finished – in a couple of weeks' time after the bill has been debated in the upper house and, as has been said, will be passed – everyone can again come together, hold hands and walk across the land together to make it better for your people, because I know that is what you aspire to. Do not underestimate the challenge of what it is going to be to do that. But it is just disappointing from my personal point of view that there was a divergence in the discussions and we could not actually work together more on achieving it. I do not think we had a difference in what we wanted to achieve; we had a difference in the way we were going to get there. As I have said, unfortunately, eventually politics becomes partisan and that is what has happened. But the government of the day is not always the government of the day, so there is always another day when you need to be sure that you have got your bets covered. I wish the First Peoples' Assembly well in actually achieving what they want to achieve for the people on the ground. We are all here. It is not actually about us. It is not actually about the First Peoples that are here today. It is about the people in our towns and our communities and what you are going to do to make sure their life is better but, more importantly, their kids' life is even better again into the future.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (17:37): I begin by acknowledging that we here meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders, past and present, and I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Respect is recognising that we share this land with Australia's First Peoples. Respect is recognising that we stand on country that holds the stories, songlines, lore, law and spirit of the world's oldest continuing culture. The world's oldest continuing culture: how absolutely extraordinary is that? Respect is recognising First Peoples' deep spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationships with their traditional lands and waters. Respect is recognising First Peoples' unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of Victoria. Respect too is recognising that historic wrongs and the ongoing injustice of colonisation have resulted in discrimination, disadvantage and intergenerational trauma for First Peoples in Victoria, and respect demands that every single one of us in this place should support this treaty bill. So I rise today in support of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, a historic and deeply significant moment for Victoria and for all Australians. This is more than legislation; it is a step towards justice, recognition and reconciliation.

To all the members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, in particular its co-chairs Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, and to all Aboriginal Victorians who have fought tirelessly for recognition, justice and treaty, many of whom are no longer with us, I say thank you. We do all stand on your shoulders, and it is because of your bravery, your courage and your resolve that we are able to take this step today. Your advocacy and determination have paved the way for this historic moment. May I also acknowledge the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples the Honourable Natalie Hutchins and the Premier of Victoria the Honourable Jacinta Allan. Their leadership and compassion have been instrumental in advancing this historic initiative.

The bill, as we know, creates a new governance body for First Peoples in Victoria, Gellung Warl. It includes a representative assembly, a permanent truth-telling body and an accountability commission. The terms of the treaty require government to consult this new body on legislation directed at Aboriginal people and to provide direct oversight of the government's performance on closing the gap, including the right to question ministers and conduct inquiries. It also empowers First Peoples representatives to make decisions on matters such as guidelines for sharing water rights, confirming Aboriginal identity, sanctioning the use of traditional names and Aboriginal appointments to government-funded boards. This is real power, real accountability and real recognition, not just words.

I have had the privilege of working with the Kimberley Land Council in Broome, and I carry with me the lessons I learned there – lessons about resilience, culture and the deep connection between people and country. I witnessed firsthand the importance of having a voice in decisions that affect communities and families and how empowering that voice can transform lives, strengthen culture and deliver justice. Those experiences have shaped my belief that legislation like that before the house today is not symbolic, it is transformative, and it is so absolutely necessary.

Treaties are not new. In Canada, modern treaties with First Nations communities have provided certainty, recognition and practical benefits while maintaining fairness for all citizens. In New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi has laid a foundation for reconciliation, cultural recognition and shared governance. These examples show that recognising First Peoples' rights does not harm or disadvantage others – it strengthens social cohesion, builds stronger economies and creates fairer societies for everyone. Victoria now has the chance to lead the nation. This bill sets a precedent for meaningful engagement, showing that governments can move beyond words and take concrete action where First Peoples can design and deliver what is needed and what works for them and their communities. This is the treaty era – the beginning of a new relationship between First Peoples and the state.

This is also a moment of hope for future generations. Our kids will grow up in a state that acknowledges its history, respects its First Peoples and works toward shared prosperity. That vision of a fairer, more inclusive Victoria – that is what this bill and that is what this treaty will help deliver. Supporting this treaty bill is about more than legal recognition; it is about affirming our values as a Parliament, as a state and as a society. It is about committing to a future where First Peoples are not only acknowledged but genuinely empowered, where their voices shape the decisions that affect their families and their futures.

A treaty does not divide us, it strengthens us. By creating clear, negotiated frameworks, treaty brings greater legal certainty and legitimacy to the way our institutions engage with First Peoples, and treaty is an embodiment of the rule of law that enduring disputes should be resolved not through conflict or denial but through dialogue and agreement. In this sense, treaty is not only about the past; it is about the future governance of our state built on respect, partnership and mutual recognition. I urge all members in this place to vote in support of treaty. Together, let us make history for every Victorian. Let us build a state grounded in respect, fairness and shared purpose – a Victoria that belongs to all of us. I commend the treaty bill to this Parliament.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (17:44): The first political speech I can recall being captivated by was delivered by Paul Keating in Redfern in 1992. I was 14 years old. For a speech that is 33 years old it

still holds contemporary truth, a truth that is as uncomfortable as it is profound. In that speech Keating spoke of the importance of recognition. He said:

Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.  
We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.  
We brought the diseases. The alcohol.  
We committed the murders.  
We took the children from their mothers.  
We practised discrimination and exclusion.  
It was our ignorance and our prejudice.  
And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.  
With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds.  
We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?  
As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.

Today the assembly co-chair Rueben Berg said:

We do this not to divide Victoria but to complete it, not to take anything from anyone but to make this place more whole for everyone.

What extraordinarily generous words, given the horrors that Keating so memorably captured. The 33-year journey between those two speeches has been perhaps met more with disappointment and failure than it has with joy and success. But whether it was the national apology, establishing the inquiry that resulted in the *Bringing Them Home* report or the introduction of the Closing the Gap standards, it has been Labor who has done the heavy lifting on our fraught national journey to reconciliation. It was Labor too that had the courage to put the Voice to a referendum and Labor that now makes history by bringing the Victorian treaty to life. For all of this Labor will always have my admiration as agents of change when addressing the profound wrongs contained within Victoria and Australia's history with First Nations people. I was proud to support this process when I was part of the Labor government, and I am just as proud to stand in support of it today. To the Labor government, despite our many disagreements, I want to say thank you for having the courage to see this through. To all the amazing people sitting in this gallery who have looked beyond significant personal trauma, dispossession and prejudice to gift Victorians this treaty, I say thank you. You are heroes.

For decades governments of all persuasions have committed to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, yet despite billions of dollars spent and countless programs trialed we have failed to achieve the outcomes that Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, expect and deserve. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still die around eight years earlier than other Australians. The unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians remains more than double the national average. In Victoria Aboriginal children are 12 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children – 12 times – and across the country Indigenous people make up only 3.8 per cent of the population yet account for over 30 per cent of the prison population. These are not just numbers; they represent lives cut short, communities in distress and opportunities lost. They are also a reflection of how our current systems and service delivery models have consistently failed.

That is why treaty matters not just as a symbolic gesture but as a practical reform to improve outcomes. Treaty is about making services more effective, more accountable and better tailored to the local communities they serve. It is about shifting from a top-down one-size-fits-all model that has demonstrably not worked to one where Aboriginal communities have a real say in how services are designed and in how they are delivered. This is not about ideology, it is about empowerment, accountability and results. For decades taxpayers have funded programs that have not delivered, and treaty offers us the chance to build partnerships that ensure money spent actually translates into improved health, education and employment outcomes. It is also about responsibility. Treaty

recognises that Aboriginal Victorians should have a seat at the table when decisions are made that affect them. That is a much, much better governance model than anything else we have got going on right now, and that is how we ensure accountability, how we improve trust in the system and how we drive better value for money.

I have heard some pretty extraordinary things said about this process by members to my right and others in the community today. If you are prepared to set the mental health impacts to one side, I encourage people to perhaps look at some of the comments in august publications like the *Australian* to see just how nasty some of the rhetoric can be around some of these issues. But what I would say to those in opposition is if you do not like this approach, you had better have a better idea. The state election is just 13 months away. If you do not want this plan, then show us yours in detail, because these problems are way too important to simply be deferred as, 'If we're in government, we'll kind of get around to it, maybe.' The injustice has been going way too long. The trauma, the lived experience of First Nations people in our state, has been excruciating for so many of those communities, and you simply cannot stand by any longer, not when there is a real option on the table – this treaty – a real option built by the very people who represent those communities that in so many cases are doing it so tough.

We talk about human-centred policy design in so much of the work that this government does and Parliament does and parliaments across the nation do – human-centred policy design in mental health, where we landed an entire royal commission, and much of the emphasis was on lived experience and having people with lived experience working in mental health. We have done it in family violence. We have done it in health services. I think we now accept that the best person to design a new emergency department is not the CEO or the chief finance officer of a health service, it is the triage nurse and the patient and the orderly. They are the people who understand what is going on at the front door. Why on earth would you not have a crack at that sort of model when it comes to some of the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria, communities that have experienced incredible hardships and prejudices and, sadly, even hatred?

Ultimately history is going to look very, very, very unkindly on those who were not even prepared to try, were not even prepared to listen, were not even prepared to have a go at doing something differently even if it was just this once. Just have a go – have some bravery and some courage and have a go at doing it a bit differently, because we know if we continue to do the same thing, we are just going to get the same results. This is too important an area, too important a cohort. The injustices and the prejudice have been so profound that we ought to be doing every single thing we can as a community, as a Parliament, and I thank the government for the work that they are doing in this. We should be doing every single thing we can to put it right with First Nations communities in our state, because it is just so important.

I have to say, I am not sure that Bob Menzies would recognise what is going on with this lot at the minute. I mean, this was the guy who put Indigenous Australians into the census. This was the guy who gave First Nations people recognition and gave them the right to vote. I am just not sure he would recognise this right-wing bunch of reactionaries over here. To stand in the way of this sensible and meaningful and just progress is to ultimately look in the face of these communities and say, 'We know better', and that takes unbelievable arrogance. It takes, frankly, a degree of moral culpability to say, 'Everything that's gone on with all these guys, everything that has happened in these communities, we can fix. We've got the answers. You don't know, we know. We've got it all sorted.' What a load of absolute trash. What a golden opportunity. Thank you to the generosity of these communities for saying, 'Despite everything that has been inflicted upon us, we are going to give the gift of treaty to Victorians. We are going to be generous and magnanimous and forward looking in the way in which we engage with this issue.' Good on them, and shame on the coalition.

This bill is not the end of the journey; it is the start of a more constructive, practical and outcomes-focused approach to closing the gap. For too long we have measured effort, not outcomes. Treaty is about delivering real change where it matters – healthier children, safer communities and stronger

local economies – and that is why I proudly support this bill and why I support government having the courage to try a new approach. Because ultimately it is not about the politics of left or right, it is simply about respect and doing what works.

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (17:54): I too, like many of my colleagues, would like to start by acknowledging the land on which we are gathered and pay my wholehearted respects to elders past, present and emerging, and particularly elders that are with us today. May we walk together in respect, reconciliation and understanding. I really want to be able to pay my respects to people from the First Peoples' Assembly, the members and co-chairs and all the past members and co-chairs and their elders who have done so much work to get us to where we are today. I would also like to acknowledge my friend who was just at the table, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, the former ministers for treaty Gab Williams and Gavin Jennings, the Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples Christine Couzens, of course the wonderful Sheena Watt and the Premier, who has led us on this journey.

I thought today I would talk a little bit differently, about more than the bill, to be able to tell some stories about why the people in Williamstown want to be on that journey, because there have been many hurtful words from those on the other side. I want to be able to say to people of the First Peoples' Assembly and First Nations people: you have people in the electorate of Williamstown that walk beside you and walk in friendship and hope that this treaty bill will bring lasting change.

Whilst we have heard those contributions, I want to give you some practical examples and tell you some stories about the voyage of truth-telling that we have been going on for quite a while. Williamstown is Boonwurrung country. It is where the First Peoples of the Yalukit Willam clan of the Boonwurrung people lived, governed and looked after the land. Koort Boork Boork was once the name of Williamstown, and on the foreshores of Hobsons Bay, near what we now call Nelson Place, was a she-oak tree, or a mighty casuarina, and that was known as the message tree. It was a meeting place, a place of ceremony and counsel for the Yalukit Willam. It held strong social and ceremonial connection and continues to hold that sentiment after thousands of years. Early colonialists used the tree as a community meeting place and information exchange, particularly prior to Williamstown's first local newspaper. The British and the Boonwurrung both gathered under the message tree during the first 15 years of colonial Williamstown. The message tree issue was the first ever heritage campaign in Williamstown council's history, and 50 residents fought against council's decision to remove the tree. In 1856 the 'save the tree' campaigners who valued the message tree as the ancient meeting place for the Boonwurrung people fought because they recognised it was a significant historical record. In 1857, unfortunately though, the message tree was removed, but its memory was never removed. Over the last decade we have gone down that voyage of trying to resurrect those stories and to document them. As a result of the important work that was done through a grant by Hobsons Bay City Council, I would like to read a couple of the stories that were found and that were actually recorded and get them documented in *Hansard*. Firstly:

You are standing at a significant site for the Yalukit Willam Clan of the Boonwurrung language group, the First Peoples of Hobson's Bay.

An old She-oak Tree stood here long before British colonisation and was removed in 1857. Around this tree early colonists saw the Yalukit Willam, led by N'Arweet Boollutt (also called "King Benbow"), as they conducted ceremonies and counsels here. This makes this a special place for Boonwurrung people still today.

She-oak are sacred trees to the Boonwurrung. They are associated with the power of Boonwurrung men and it is remembered that when early colonists cut down She-oak Trees Boonwurrung men would feel unhealthy.

The ancient name for this area is Koort Boork Boork, meaning 'clumps of many she-oaks'. A name indicating the importance of She-oak Trees to Boonwurrung here.

In 1837 this place was re-named William's Town by British colonist to honour their King. British invasion of the Boonwurrung Estate was a catastrophic event that caused the rapid decline of Boonwurrung people. West of the Maribyrnong River Boonwurrung women farmed a small sweet potato called *Murnong* on the grassy basalt plains, a very important staple food. Colonists landed thousands of sheep only metres from here

and herded them west onto the Boonwurrung's Murnong fields. The sheep soon ate the Murnong crop and quickly sent the Boonwurrung toward starvation, malnutrition and disease.

Stealthily spearing British sheep or taking rice, flour or oats from colonists to replace disappearing Murnong wild game, inevitably led to violent conflicts and the death of Boonwurrung people across their Estates.

Clashes with other First Peoples, facing similar pressures from colonisation, also led to Boonwurrung deaths. Nearly all our First Peoples died under British rule. Here only one resilient family survived to represent the Boonwurrung language group, share the history and continue cultural practices today.

I wanted to document that in *Hansard*. The second thing I wanted to document too, is recently a Championing Change Through Allyship event was held. Welcomed by Aunty Fay Stewart-Muir, more than 125 people gathered to support treaty. I want to recognise Professor Peter Radoll's contribution. His reflection was:

I want you to imagine standing here in Williamstown – not today, but 200 years ago. No cars. No bitumen roads. No sound of espresso machines in the background. Just open sky ... the smell of saltwater drifting in from the bay ... and the wind moving gently through the long needles of a single she-oak tree.

That tree, known as the Message Tree, stood on the corner of Thompson Street and Nelson Place. To some, it was just part of the landscape. But to others, it was the centre of their world.

...

Then came the ships.

And with them, the settlers. They didn't know the old stories of this land, but they too came to see the tree as a gathering place.

...

In its branches and shade, two very different worlds overlapped.

These are the stories that have been found and have been documented, and this truth-telling is so intrinsically part of the treaty process. This legislation gives me hope that these very worlds can coexist and we can walk together and close the gap, because this site signifies so much to our community. There are many people who should be recognised, and please forgive me for not mentioning them all. We had Senior Sergeant Chris Allen and his team at Victoria Police Williamstown; there was Jenny Mitchell; there was Rosa McKenna; there was Yalukit Marnang director and Yalukit Willam clanswoman Caroline Martin; project facilitator Greg Thorpe; local historian Brian Haynes; Pam Kadow from Williamstown Library; Peter Dewar, freelance journalist; former mayor and councillor Jonathon Marsden; Mark Brophy, the CEO of the Williamstown Community and Education Centre; and Anthony Hockey, principal of St Mary's primary school. And today in the gallery, as we spoke about the treaty bill, we had three allies from my local ALP branch in Williamstown: Dave McKenna and Ian and Teresa Wren.

What I would like to say briefly is that what we have seen from the other side is nothing but the most appalling form of paternalism. For those on the other side who came and stood in the smoking and the welcome ceremony this morning to then get up and speak those hateful words is nothing short of a disgrace. A proud Gamilaroi man that I know – I grew up on Gamilaroi country – speaks of the welcome to country as a template. He does this great skit where he takes your phone – he has taken my phone twice – just to be able to demonstrate that, basically, if you just say the words and you do not have the meaning, it means nothing, and that is what we saw today; we saw tokenism and we saw nothing but shallow words.

It is important that we do this today. One thing I would like to put on the record is that my dad was the member for Paterson in the federal Parliament when Paul Keating introduced the Mabo bill, and I stand here proudly today to be able to introduce this treaty bill and to be able to be part of a government that will see a new chapter and a new opportunity for First Nations people, for us to close the gap, so thank you.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (18:04): I also rise to address the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. At the very outset I wish to convey the framework through which I intend to address this bill. I want

to address this bill today in this place, the Victorian Parliament, the people's house, with a tone and with an air and with a purpose of respect. Our First Nations people deserve nothing less. Our First Nations people in Victoria and around this country deserve nothing less. I do not believe that every contributor to this debate has engaged in such a way. I have been sitting here at the table now for over an hour, and I have been concerned by some of the categorisations of and the aspersions cast upon me and my colleagues by members of the government. I think some of those assertions are unfair. I think every member of this place puts their hand up to be a representative of their community because fundamentally they want to make their community a better place. I think fundamentally that is at the heart and the shared value, if you like, of every member of Parliament. That is who we are and that is what we do at our very best. I admit that members of Parliament do not always perform at their very best, but I also think that the vocation of public service calls us to reflect deeply upon our obligation to make our communities and our state a better place.

I think there is broad agreement in this Parliament that the circumstance of First Nations people in Victoria and perhaps more broadly around our country is frankly disgraceful. I think there is broad agreement that the status quo, the business-as-usual approach, is unacceptable. I deeply believe that whatever has happened in the past has not worked and something needs to change. The Minister for Energy and Resources, in her contribution, invited members of the opposition to reflect on the position that we have come to, insinuating perhaps that some of us at some point in the future may feel some form of shame for the position we have taken. She invited members of the opposition to reflect upon the impression that our children may have of us when they read the Hansard transcripts of this debate in years to come. Well, I look at my beautiful children, I look at my five-year-old and I look at my eight-year-old, and I hope they get to see a father who has contributed to this debate with some respect and regard, with some depth, and I hope they get to see a dad who, as part of their work as a local member of Parliament, contacts our local kinders and says to them during particular weeks of the year, 'Would you like me to visit? Would you like me to give you not just an Australian flag, not just a Victorian flag, but an Aboriginal and a Torres Strait Islander flag?' I sit on the floor of these kindergartens and I, with some hesitation but with some pride, talk to the children about the colours and the symbols and what they mean and do my part as a community representative to pass on from one generation to the next the truth of our history and the truth of our story as a country, some of which we should be very proud of and other parts of which cause us great shame and we should be deeply concerned about and learn from. But again, I think fundamentally every person in this place wants to do good, and I think that is at the heart of the vocation of public service.

Some of those Closing the Gap targets, which have been referenced earlier in debate, are frankly disgraceful. In 2023–24 Aboriginal children were placed in out-of-home care at a rate 20 times that of non-Aboriginal children. The suicide rate amongst Aboriginal people was 30 per 100,000 in 2023. An eight-year gap persists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy. The Aboriginal employment rate sits at 55 per cent, well below the 78 per cent rate for non-Aboriginal Victorians. Just 58 per cent of Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 24 were considered fully engaged in employment, education or training. Only 68 per cent of Aboriginal students completed year 12, compared to 85 per cent of non-Aboriginal students. There is over-representation in the justice system: the adult incarceration rate for Aboriginal people was 2304 per 100,000 in 2024. Aboriginal adults are incarcerated at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous adults. It is a disgrace. The business-as-usual approach is completely and utterly unacceptable, and something must change.

*Members interjecting.*

**Brad ROWSWELL:** I have been sitting here for an hour, and I have not uttered a word of interjection against any government member who has contributed.

I will say this: we do need a new approach. I take from the member for Murray Plains's contribution and I echo his sentiments at this point: we agree that there is a problem, but because we disagree on what the solution looks like to the problem that we all agree on does not make this side of politics any less interested or any less concerned than any other member of this place. It is okay in Victoria and in

this country to identify a problem, articulate what that is and have a differing point of view on what the vehicle for the solution should be. What we are proposing is something different to what the government is proposing. The member for Murray Plains, a former shadow minister for Indigenous affairs and Leader of the Nationals, spoke about and deeply understands perhaps more than a lot of members in this place the work that needs to be done.

Earlier today the Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition Mr Battin announced that under a government that we lead we will establish First Nations Victoria, a standalone department, to add transparency and accountability and deliver measurable progress as we work to achieve Closing the Gap targets. This dedicated department will work alongside Indigenous Victorians to implement a community-led, coordinated and transparent approach to policy funding and service delivery. One minister – not multiple but one – will be ultimately responsible for First Nations Victorians, providing true accountability to ensure funding and services reach the people who need them.

I reflect in the time that I have remaining on the lived experience of some of my colleagues. The member for Mildura, a good friend and colleague, has raised with me the circumstances of the Mallee District Aboriginal Services, who for some time have been requesting a dedicated dental service. I ask myself: does the bill before the house deliver that community this dental service? It does not. The member for Eildon has been asking for a dedicated paediatrician to treat First Nations children in her community. Does this legislation before us deliver that? It does not. Again, we agree with the problems, we just have a different vehicle and pathway for the solutions, and that should also be respected.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (18:14): I want to take a few moments to add to this debate. It is an important occasion, and I want to make sure I add my voice to the parliamentary record on this really significant piece of legislation that has come to the Parliament today. Firstly, I want to thank Uncle Andrew Gardiner and the Wurundjeri people for welcoming us this morning on the front steps along with many other First Peoples, who I acknowledge as traditional owners of the land we are on today. I want to acknowledge all of the First Peoples' Assembly, the people who have been assembly members, the people who have worked in that process, the people who participated in the consultation and all of the work that has been gone through to bring us to this point today. I also want to acknowledge the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, in particular those many First Peoples who have given evidence and testimony, often drawing up a lot of pain and difficulty in sharing stories that would have been difficult for them to share in a formal process like that. But that is so important in terms of us understanding the truth of our past.

As someone who grew up – I was thinking back and reflecting about this – in most of my childhood and youth not knowing any Aboriginal people, I have had the great privilege through elected office of working with many Aboriginal Victorians through the different roles that I have had. It has been a privilege to work with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities and to get a much better understanding, by listening to Aboriginal people, about how they want to move forward, which is effectively what the treaty process is all about – some great inspirational stories. In my ministerial capacity I recently attended the Industry Capability Network's Aboriginal business forum, which was a fantastic exposition of great Aboriginal businesses providing employment and opportunities for young Aboriginals and really growing that sector. In the creative portfolios area, I know that the minister at the table, the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, had a lot to do with First Peoples Directions Circle, which guides our creative and artistic direction in arts and creative areas, and the wonderful inaugural Victorian First Peoples Art and Design Fair showcase that was held at the Melbourne Art Fair last year. There are lots of positives to celebrate just in those two portfolios that I hold.

But of course there are many challenges as well, and they have been ventilated in the debate today. I had the role of Minister for Child Protection and Family Services for a few months some time ago,



and can I say the Aboriginal Children's Forum, which I had the privilege of attending twice – there were two forums held while I was minister – was dealing with some of the most difficult problems. I met some of the most inspiring Aboriginal people who were working to address the issues that have been raised today about reducing the incidence of Aboriginal children coming into contact with the child protection system, people like Muriel Bamblett and others who are looking for ways to improve that service delivery. The lesson out of that for me was about empowering or giving control for Aboriginal organisations to work with Aboriginal families to have those better outcomes for Aboriginal children – self-determination. The systems that we have in place largely now are government systems that impose what we think is the right thing for Aboriginal families to do, and it is clearly not working. There is no disagreement in the chamber on that. The treaty process gives us the architecture to deal with those issues. It puts self-determination at the heart of these issues, and there is real accountability for government in resourcing these areas properly. I want to acknowledge the Aboriginal community controlled organisations, the housing organisations, the non-Aboriginal community service organisations who are so committed to these processes as well, and the many great people in government who work so hard in these areas. I think these things will make an absolute difference and chart a course for a much better way forward for Aboriginal Victorians.

Many, many years ago William Barak, leader of the Wurundjeri people at the time – he lived from 1823 to 1903 – saw his people moved around and then to a mission at Coranderrk. He led a number of delegations to this very place, to the front vestibule of this Parliament, with his people seeking improvements to conditions at Coranderrk or to continue being able to stay at Coranderrk when people were trying to force the people off that land. On at least one of those occasions, shamefully, he was turned away from this Parliament by members of Parliament. There were people who worked with William to deliver the outcomes that he was seeking, but I cannot help but reflect on the way he was turned away and the approach that has happened today here in this Parliament.

I just want to reflect on some comments from those opposite. I was not going to reflect on debate from those opposite today, but there seems to be some sensitivity about members on this side calling out the behaviour of those opposite. In doing so I want to reflect on the fact that if people have a different policy position, that is one thing. To have a democratically elected First Peoples' Assembly undertake years of work and consultation to come into this place and offer us that gift of treaty – something that should have happened a long, long time ago – and to turn our backs on those requests I think is shameful. Respectfully, I think that is shameful. But even if you took the most generous interpretation of that and said, 'Well, maybe that's because there's a genuine policy belief behind that' – we saw the opposition shamefully brief out last night that they would knock off this treaty within their first 100 days if they were to win office. I will not cop those opposite saying that it is unfair for those on this side of the house to raise those issues, because if you are out there briefing the press the night before that you are going to knock this off in 100 days then you are not genuinely raising these issues in debate. It is either political cowardice or political opportunism at play on the other side of the house.

All through this process the leadership of the Aboriginal community has been dignified and respectful and in my estimation has shown the most exemplary leadership to bring us to this point. We are fortunate to be standing in this place today and to have this opportunity. It is a great privilege for me as one member of Parliament, one member of this government, to have the opportunity today to support this in this debate and, when it comes to the vote, to vote for this Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, and I wish it a speedy passage through the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (18:22): I rise today to talk on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Having listened to everybody that has spoken on both sides, there are obviously differences in the way that we get to the same goal. I do thank the First Peoples' Assembly for listening to both sides of the chamber. Please do take on board and do know that we know what the end goal is. We just have, as a few members have said, a different way of getting there.

I am from the seat of Morwell down in the Latrobe Valley, and I have an Indigenous community, as you all know, down there throughout the Latrobe Valley and into Gippsland. My role as an MP is to

support everyone in my community. My engagement with our local Indigenous community goes back a long way. In my former life I was a plumber and a tradie, so I spent a lot of time working in and around Morwell, Traralgon, Moe and further east, working in our Indigenous community's houses, working in schools and getting to see firsthand the disadvantage that was there and unfortunately still is there today. So it sits with me that we need change. I think everybody in the chamber knows that we need change. And as I said before, it is just some of the parts that are in this legislation that is coming through – it is hard to tick everything off from my personal spot standing on this side of the chamber. That is why we are not supporting treaty as such – not because of where we want to get to but because of the bill that is in front of us. As I said, I need to make sure that I am representing my community, which includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, because we know that we need to close the gap.

At the end of the day we need to make sure that the gap that currently exists – we can see that it is through everything; it is through health, it is through education. I know from those working in the schools the rates of keeping not only Indigenous youngsters but children right across the board engaged in school, and I think our Minister for Education said we need to be able to educate our way out of this particular area and open up opportunities. I know from my former role before I became an MP that there was a divide that needed to be closed, and still does. I am conscious that I do not want you to leave this chamber thinking that I do not want to get to an end result where I am trying to make things better. It is just that I cannot actually tick off on what is being put forward for the treaty bill. In saying that, you have only got to walk down the streets of the Latrobe Valley, you have only got to walk down the streets of Morwell, to see concerning issues, and I do as a local MP. We have a high rate of Indigenous people drinking on the streets. We need do whatever we can to make sure that we can be proactive as their local members to make sure that we are doing the right thing.

Criminal justice is another one that weighs heavily, especially in this day and age, with our youth. We do have a huge problem with youth crime right across the board. It does not matter what area of the state you come to, whether you are in inner-city Melbourne or whether you are out in the regions. Our youth crime rate touches everybody. We all know somebody, we all know a family, that has been affected by having a child that is in that system and committing these crimes or by having those crimes committed against them.

On youth engagement, I heard a story the other week. In Morwell we have a meeting place in Commercial Road, and it sits nearly directly across the road from the upper house minister down there in the other place. This is a significant part of the Indigenous community, not only for Morwell but for greater Gippsland. If we have Indigenous people come to our area, because Morwell now is being set up as a service centre, we have a lot of government operations there for housing and domestic violence and all that type of stuff. We have a lot of people that come from other communities, and if they are Indigenous they come to that meeting place because then they get to know exactly where they need to go. If they are looking for someone, they get to find that out. Being the local member and having lived in the Latrobe Valley my entire life, it was only probably 3½ years ago that I actually found out from sitting down with the Indigenous community the significance of this meeting place for everybody to come to. The education on my behalf from meeting with different cultures right across the board, but also our Indigenous community – you get to learn and respect the wants and needs of the community.

I have people in the community, obviously, that think treaty should go through. I have people in my community that think treaty should not go through. It is divided right down through there, and this is one of the things that I do not want to see. I do not want to see a division in the community, both ways. So we need to make sure that we do get to our end goal. I was listening to the member for Murray Plains explain his journey in Parliament, being a shadow minister and being on boards with our First Nations people. To hear the experience of that journey that he has had to make, we are always learning and we are always educating ourselves.

Even though, as I said, we all want to get to the same goal at the end, the coalition – the Liberals and the Nationals – are not choosing the path of treaty that has come through here today. The Leader of

the Nationals stood up and explained earlier in proceedings the pathway that we are choosing. As the member for Murray Plains said, this bill will go through. It will get passed in the lower house, and it will go to the upper house and get passed. This bill will go through. As he said, we hope that it works for our First Nations people. I do hope that all other people that get up to speak can be well heard. I do thank the opposition for respecting me getting up and talking on this today.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (18:32): I would like to start my contribution today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people, and paying my respects to their elders past and present. I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people also as the traditional owners of the land of my electorate of Ivanhoe on the banks of the Birrarung in the City of Banyule. I know the honourable member for Bundoora touched on the story of the Coranderrk mission, which sits writ large in the storytelling in our community.

In 2010, when I came to this place, there was no welcome to country at the start of each day. There was no Aboriginal flag flying on the Parliament, so change has come in its way. But today marks an important milestone in our state where the Allan government is committed to continuing to improve and strengthen our relationship with Aboriginal people, along with all Victorians, a relationship that remains committed to truth telling, equality and self-determination, and treaty of course is a powerful step towards that commitment.

Throughout my time in this place and in politics more broadly I have been engaged in a number of significant policy initiatives that have sought to improve opportunities to work with First Nations people, with the evolving understanding of self-determination at the core of that work. As the family and community services minister, I sought a partnership between our government, the Victorian Aboriginal community and the children and family services sector. *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir* was about strong families. It was about an agreement with Aboriginal communities, with our government and with community service organisations with a goal to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by building their connection to culture, country and community. We supported kinship care also as a key priority around culture and identity and nurtured by kith and kin, at a time when things go wrong, so very wrong, for young people, to provide those opportunities for them. The Aboriginal Children's Forum continues to play a key role. As Muriel Bamblett, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency, has said, the ACF continues to have the difficult conversations necessary to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children. I want to thank Aboriginal community controlled organisations for the work that they do.

It is not either/or with treaty. Like the ACF and the Aboriginal Justice Forum, attended by justice ministers, it is about renewing, with the work that co-chair Chris Harrison does. It is about renewing those forums and the drive for change, for accountability, for self-determination and for accountability of governments and their agencies to work more closely with and be led by First Nations people.

Early in 2016, as Parliamentary Secretary for Water, I worked with the honourable former member for Bellarine Minister Neville on *Water for Victoria*, recognition of cultural water rights, the importance of traditional water rights for Aboriginal people and also economic development. Much earlier, in the Bracks–Brumby governments I was working with the then member for Melbourne Minister Pike, who was education minister. We worked on the Wannik strategy back in 2008. Its success will be judged in large part on the perception of Koori parents that their children were valued equally alongside other children within the classroom, that they as parents were welcomed and respected in the school community and that they were confident their children were getting the very best education possible. The measures of success were always going to be about those individual outcomes for those individual students, who have now gone on to make contributions in their community more broadly.

Growing up in West Preston in the 1980s, at Bell Primary School First Nations families and students were a big part of the community. Gary Foley was a much younger activist in those days in that area.

The school was a bit of a zoo for all of us. West Preston was a very different place back then, and I often wonder how many of my fellow students are going today and what contributions they have been able to make. As a young person you do not always recognise the disadvantage or the inequality of those you are surrounded by – everyone seems much the same. In some ways it was a great community to grow up in, but you reflect on these things when you get the opportunity to have your hands on a few levers later in life in these jobs.

I had the privilege of appearing before the Yoorrook Justice Commission on 31 March 2023, and I was able to contribute to the completing of the shared history of Aboriginal people, Victoria Police and the state of Victoria. It is an experience I will not forget, and I would like to think – it will be for others to judge – that I am better at my job for having a far deeper engagement, understanding and communication about how the justice system affects Aboriginal people and the ongoing work that we need to do. I reflect on my statement at that time, where I said that at its core Victoria Police reflects the community that it serves, and sadly structural racism and injustice persist within our society. Institutions like Victoria Police are not immune to this. The criminal justice system is an imperfect system, and too often we see our most marginalised and vulnerable people coming into contact with a system that is ill equipped to respond to their needs.

I acknowledge that recent Victorian parliamentary inquiries into the criminal justice system found that over-policing of Aboriginal people remains an issue and that evidence suggests that policing in Victoria disproportionately targets Aboriginal communities, particularly young people. I do welcome initiatives that we have introduced at Victoria Police, including increased use of cautioning through the expanded Aboriginal youth cautioning programs, but there is still more work to do. I am gravely concerned by the instances of police mistreatment that Aboriginal people have shared with the Commission. With the Chief Commissioner of Police we commit to working towards a system whereby such incidences are historical, not a contemporary injustice. To improve Aboriginal people's trust in Victoria Police we have to ensure that when Aboriginal people need police assistance, they seek that assistance.

I accept that over-representation and limited police accountability foster continued trauma, anger and mistrust of law enforcement within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people need independent oversight of police. I have always supported that. It does not sit directly in my remit, but I continue to lobby for that to be energised within our government and delivered far sooner than it has been to date. I am also pleased to work with my friend in the other place Minister Erdogan to deliver our commitment to develop an Aboriginal victims of crime strategy. It is critically important that that strategy is delivered, and its dedicated project group includes the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. It is about better meeting the legal, financial and other supports that Aboriginal victims of crime need – and there are far too many of them.

I am truly excited by the opportunities that treaty presents – not to throw away what has gone before, some of which I have sought to outline, but for the great leadership, collaboration and self-determination to drive a better future for First Nations people. I want to thank the parliamentary secretary Chris Couzens for her leadership and her work. For 25 years we have known each other, particularly as we were both working for Ian Trezise in his electorate office a very long time ago. We followed each other to this place, and I am very pleased to stand in this place with her in relation to these matters and so many others that she has fought for in her community.

In the electorate of Jagajaga Ivanhoe sits, and Jagajaga of course is familiar when we talk about treaties, as 55 per cent voted yes for the Voice referendum. I live in a community that has a great expectation about reconciliation and about empowering Aboriginal people, and a deep understanding and trust. I also would make the point that treaty is different. It is about structural reform at a statewide level to support traditional owner groups and to negotiate treaties that reflect the needs and priorities of their people.

As Minister Brooks touched on, conservatism is about no change. It is about leaving things the same, an aversion to change or innovation and traditional values, whatever they might be. I think we have seen what history has delivered, and history needs to change. Often those on the other side of politics exist purely to keep the Labor Party away from government and keep its hands away from the levers for delivering change in communities – not much of an existence, if you ask me. It is why I choose to sit on this side of the house, with the grateful support of the Victorian community.

Whether it is the Voice and people who choose to use that as a driver or whether it is treaty, Victorian people both in an Australian election and a Victorian election, I am sure, will see the value of a fair go for all and fairness and equity for all, not just for all Australians and Victorians but those who were here a hell of a long time before.

We have heard a lot about closing the gap from people who I have never heard talk about closing the gap ever in this place, hiding behind those sorts of slogans. It is weak. It is pretty disgraceful, but it is pretty typical. We will get on with supporting treaty. Victorians will support it. Victorians do support it. I know that when others want to use the first hundred days to be energised to deliver more quickly than anything else bringing this down, Victorians will back it and the government backs it. I commend this bill, the treaty, to the house.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (18:42): I would like to start by acknowledging the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, whose land we stand on today, whose meeting place was built over by this colonising institution, whose land I have the privilege of living and working on every day. I offer my respects to Wurundjeri elders and ancestors and to elders from all nations, their families and ancestors, to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here with us today and to all those whose efforts have brought us to this moment.

Today a historic bill comes before us, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 – a long-awaited, hard-fought step towards justice, truth and self-determination for First Peoples of Victoria. This is the first treaty bill in Australia's history. It is the product of generations of leadership, resistance and advocacy by First Nations people who have never, never stopped fighting for their sovereignty to be recognised and for the power to make decisions about their own lives. It is their tireless work that brings us to this moment.

For 250 years too long, our governments have denied the sovereignty, law and leadership of First Peoples of this land. Colonisation brought massacres, stolen land, stolen wages and stolen children. It attempted to erase the rich cultures, languages and knowledge systems that have thrived here for tens of thousands of years. These truths cannot be denied, and they cannot be undone. But we can and we must act now to build a new relationship, one that acknowledges these truths and builds justice through treaty.

I am so honoured to be part of this moment and that the Greens will support this bill without amendment. We do so because we believe in self-determination and the deep process and intense negotiation that has taken place over many, many years. When it comes to Aboriginal communities and cultures and country, we all know the experts are Aboriginal people themselves, and yet countless reports, royal commissions and advisory bodies have demonstrated that our governments have failed to honour that principle. Now this bill enshrines that principle in law. It makes the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria permanent, an independent, democratic body representing traditional owners and all First Peoples in Australia, democratically elected as part of a new First Nations umbrella body called Gellung Warl, meaning 'the tip of the spear' in the Gunaikurnai language.

Gellung Warl will be a vehicle for truth-telling, accountability and practical change. It will have the power to question ministers directly and hold governments to account. It will advise on laws and policies that affect First Nations people, and it will be able to shape the way services are designed and delivered. The bill will also establish two new arms of Gellung Warl. The first is Nginma Ngainga Wara, meaning 'you will do' in Wadi Wadi language, an accountability body that will monitor and

evaluate the government's actions on commitments like Closing the Gap and the implementation of the recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The second is Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, 'to listen to truth and to heal' in Wamba Wamba. This will carry forward the vital work that was begun by Yoorrook, continuing Victoria's process of truth-telling and creating a forum for healing for intergenerational and ongoing trauma.

The bill also requires every future government to engage regularly with the assembly, ensuring that First Nations voices are embedded in the decisions that shape this state. This is what self-determination looks like – decisions made by those who know best, using their own knowledge and experience to create practical solutions for their communities, whether it is in health, in education, in housing or caring for country.

It is important to note that this treaty is the result of nearly a decade of careful negotiation between the First Peoples' Assembly and the state and decades of hard work and advocacy before that, from calls for treaty at the 1979 National Aboriginal Conference to the hard work of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission led by Aunty Dr Jill Gallagher and the ongoing truth-telling of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

The First Peoples' Assembly has shown extraordinary leadership in building the foundations of this bill – negotiating the treaty framework, the self-determination fund, the treaty authority and now this first treaty itself. They have shown us what real democracy and collective decision-making can look like. I thank the co-chairs, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, for their powerful speeches in the chamber earlier today and for everything that they have done to lay the groundwork and bring so many people along on the journey.

The Greens are deeply grateful to the assembly, to Yoorrook and to all First Nations people and organisations who have led this work. We also acknowledge the Blak Greens, First Nations members of our own party who have voiced their support for treaty, saying:

The history of colonisation and the loss of our homelands, the massacres and frontier wars, and stolen generations are well known in First Nations communities here in so-called Victoria, a Treaty will be the recognition of our sovereignty. The Treaty being signed between the Traditional custodians of this place and the coloniser parliament will go a long way towards seeing that some of the wrongs of the past that have been perpetrated against our people, are recognised and work done on reparations. Nothing can erase the generations of pain, suffering, and injustice our people have carried. Yet this moment is not about forgetting or diminishing that truth. It is about taking a step forward and choosing a path towards change.

Those words remind us that treaty is not a panacea. It does not erase history, but it is a foundation – the first of many treaties to come – and it marks a fundamental shift in how this state engages with First Peoples.

While some in this chamber have sought to create division around this bill, we know that this bill is about unity. Treaty does not take away anything from anyone. It asks us all to reckon honestly with our shared history and to walk together towards a more just and equal future. For nearly 250 years this continent has been illegitimately governed without a treaty, and by taking this step we are showing the rest of the country our commitment to listen to First Peoples, to share power and to build something better together.

This moment belongs to the First Peoples of this land, these waters and this sky. It belongs to every elder that held the line, every activist that marched, every young person carrying culture and truth forward. The Greens and I are so proud to walk alongside you. We support this bill wholeheartedly in the spirit of truth, justice and a hope for a future that is built on respect, First Nations sovereignty and self-determination.

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:50): In beginning, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament stands, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation. I also

acknowledge the Gunung Willam Balluk clan, whose lands include my electorate. I pay respects to elders past and present and all First People of Victoria. It is a great privilege to be a member of this Parliament, which has gathered here for nearly 170 years, but it is important to remember that long before this Parliament ever existed, for more than 65,000 years, the First Peoples of this land cared for country, practised their laws and languages and built the oldest living culture on earth. We stand here today in a place rich with history, not just parliamentary tradition but tens of thousands of years of human connection to this land. I acknowledge and thank the generations of advocacy by First Peoples which has led to this bill.

The Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 marks a historic step for Victoria, for reconciliation, for justice and for better outcomes for Aboriginal people and all Victorians. Today we are not just debating a piece of legislation, we are witnessing the next chapter in Victoria's shared story, one grounded in truth, respect and partnership. This bill represents the first negotiated agreement between the Victorian government and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. It is the foundation that will allow us to enter into the first treaty with Victoria's First Peoples, and at its heart it is simple. Treaty is about Aboriginal people having a greater say in how their services are run. Families are better off when they have responsibility over their lives; Aboriginal families are no different.

It is disappointing that there is not bipartisan support for this bill. I would like to outline what treaty is and what treaty is not. A treaty, at its core, is an agreement – an agreement between the state and Aboriginal Victorians to make changes that improve lives. It is not about taking anything away from anyone. It does not change our constitution, it does not create a third chamber of Parliament and it does not take private property away from our farmers or affect people's access to land and parks. This bill does not impact the government's ability to govern for all Victorians. What this bill does is recognise that the best way to close the gap is by listening in a genuine way to Aboriginal communities about how programs and policies that affect them should be designed and delivered. We know that the way things are currently done is not working as well as it should. Governments at every level have invested more and more in programs aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples, but the gap remains too wide. In Victoria today only 35.8 per cent of Aboriginal children are developmentally on track, compared with 54.2 per cent of non-Indigenous children. Aboriginal children are 20 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. Aboriginal people in Victoria are three times more likely to face food insecurity than their neighbours. Aboriginal people are less likely to be employed and more likely to face chronic health issues. These statistics are not just numbers on a page; they represent lives, families and futures. That is why we must do things differently, and that is what treaty is about.

Treaty will deliver benefits not only for Aboriginal Victorians but for all of us, because when we listen to people about what works for them, when we design services with – not for – communities, outcomes improve for everyone. Treaty is about building stronger, healthier communities, and that is something every Victorian should get behind. It is about better outcomes in education and health, it is about keeping kids out of care and out of the justice system, it is about supporting self-determination and dignity and it is about doing our part as a state to lead the way on reconciliation, not through words alone but through actions.

Following the passage of this bill Victoria will be in a position to sign its first treaty with the First Peoples of this land. That will be a moment of pride and a moment of truth for our entire state. This first treaty sets the framework for change over time. It will guide how future treaties are negotiated, including local treaties with traditional owner groups, which can focus on the specific needs and aspirations of local families. Through this process we are creating not just one agreement but a new way of working together, a new partnership built on respect, equality and shared purpose.

The bill puts into law a number of important and practical changes that have been negotiated between the government and the First Peoples' Assembly. The bill will establish Gellung Warl, a new, ongoing democratic and independent body for First Peoples. The Gellung Warl will be made up of three parts: firstly, the First Peoples' Assembly itself; secondly, a body to monitor how well government is closing the gap; and thirdly, a body to collect and preserve the archive of truth-telling. Together these

institutions will give Aboriginal people a stronger, more independent voice in shaping the policies and services that affect them.

Gellung Warl will have specific, defined responsibilities. It will be able to make representations to Parliament and government about matters that affect Aboriginal people, including asking questions of ministers and departments; make rules about certain cultural and community matters, such as confirming Aboriginality; make guidelines on how existing water entitlements are shared; make statutory appointments to roles that are reserved for First Peoples; run Aboriginal events, such as NAIDOC Week, that are currently delivered by government; and manage the community facilities fund currently operated by the department. The bill will also require all government departments and agencies to establish clear guidelines on how they will consult with Gellung Warl when developing laws or policies that relate to First Peoples. These are not radical changes. They are practical, measured reforms that will help ensure Aboriginal people have a seat at the table in decisions that affect their lives, and that is what good government looks like.

This bill also transitions the current First Peoples' Assembly into a new structure under Gellung Warl. For five years the assembly has been a powerful and democratic voice for First Peoples in this state. It has held two statewide elections and has worked tirelessly with government to establish the foundation for treaty negotiations. The new assembly will continue that important work. It will be the main decision-making arm of Gellung Warl and will advise Parliament and government on matters that affect First Peoples, including through an annual address to a joint sitting of Parliament. There will be a moment each year for all of us as legislators to hear directly from Aboriginal leaders about progress, priorities and challenges, and that is something that we should all welcome.

This bill honours the spirit of those who have walked this land for more than 65,000 years. It recognises that Victoria's story did not begin in 1851, and it acknowledges that the work of reconciliation must be ongoing. It is not about guilt or blame, it is about partnerships and progress. It is about recognising that the best solutions come from those who live the experience and that when Aboriginal people have a real say the outcomes are better for everyone, because treaty unites, not divides.

I thank everyone who has been involved in this process over the past 10 years. In particular I thank First Peoples' Assembly co-chairs Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray for presenting to us today and all the assembly members who joined us in the chamber. I want to acknowledge the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples for her work in this matter and the parliamentary secretary, who has done an absolutely outstanding job.

This is a really important day. This is an historic day. I am really proud to be a part of it. As I said earlier, I am very disappointed that this bill does not have bipartisan support, because that would really show our First Peoples that we are united in supporting this pathway forward, a pathway that they have chosen, a pathway that they have led and a pathway that has been and will continue to be supported by this government.

I just want to reflect on a place near my home. It is no longer in my electorate since the redistribution, but the Weeroona cemetery is a very special Indigenous cemetery in Greenvale. When you go there, it is absolutely beautiful. It is in Woodlands park. It is surrounded by a beautiful landscape, and it is home to many kangaroos that use it as beds. It is a beautiful place where people go and feel safe. Under treaty I believe that there would be better management of the cemetery because the First Peoples would be able to do the work that is needed there to keep that such a special place. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**



**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (19:00): I move:

That the sitting be continued.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** I think this is an opportune time for the house to break for dinner.

**Sitting suspended 7:00 pm until 8:01 pm.**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (20:01): I want to begin by acknowledging that the issues touched by this bill today are deeply sensitive for many people – our First Nations people and others who have worked in good faith to shape what we see before us today. Thank you to the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly for their speeches today. I also acknowledge that what I am about to say will be disappointing to some people, but I intend today to outline why I cannot support this bill despite my genuine commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, who continue to face disadvantage across the state. I also want to thank the residents of Kew who have reached out to me on both sides of the debate. I have read every email, reflected on every point, and I respect the passion that so many have brought to this discussion.

The bill before us today is a vastly different proposition to the Voice to Parliament that Australians voted on two years ago. It is vastly different in both scope and scale. I want to acknowledge the importance of truth-telling in our shared national story. Understanding and confronting the injustices of the past is a vital step towards genuine reconciliation. There is great importance in hearing the stories of our First Nations peoples on their history, culture and ongoing connection to country and ensuring these truths are properly recorded and understood. But truth-telling must sit within a framework that unites. It must deepen our shared understanding without creating new structures that operate outside our established democratic and constitutional processes – processes that must govern for all Victorians. I believe that reconciliation cannot be achieved through the creation of overlapping institutions but through honesty, partnership and practical action that improves lives.

The bill establishes Gellung Warl, meaning tip of the spear. Gellung Warl is an independent statutory body that comprises the First Peoples' Assembly, a permanent truth-telling body and an accountability and oversight body to monitor government performance. The bill explicitly provides that Gellung Warl is generative and will continue to evolve as it takes on further powers, functions and responsibilities in relation to First Peoples through the ongoing Statewide Treaty making process. This means Gellung Warl is not a fixed institution. It is expressly designed to expand its authority over time, with an extremely broad remit to do all things necessary or convenient to perform its functions. It is expressly expected to add more powers and evolve its authority over time, beyond what is contained in the bill before us today.

The open-ended and deliberately iterative nature of this bill should concern all who value the rule of law and the separation of powers that underpin our democracy – any Victorian who values the foundational democratic principles upon which our system of government and our society are built. Our system depends on clear lines of accountability between the executive, the legislature and the independent statutory bodies. When Parliament delegates open-ended power to an entity that is intended to evolve and acquire powers outside of parliamentary scrutiny, we risk eroding those boundaries. Legislation should define power, not hand it away. It should specify what is to be done, by whom and within what limits. The bill instead invites future reform without specifying what that reform will be. No parliament should legislate uncertainty.

I am also concerned by the provisions granting Gellung Warl the power to make representations, provide advice and seek information from government agencies and government-funded service providers. The proposed representation meetings between the First Peoples' Assembly and the cabinet, held twice yearly, would grant a level of institutional access to cabinet deliberations that no other body or organisation enjoys. It would be unprecedented access to the executive function of our government.

This is not symbolic consultation. It is a structural change to how executive government operates in this state. It risks blurring the lines between representative democracy and parallel governance.

There are several further aspects that are highly irregular in this bill. The bill establishes a number of mechanisms for Gellung Warl to make representations, provide that advice and ask questions and seek information. These mechanisms are unprecedented and appear to bypass and undermine existing democratic processes. First, any inquiries conducted by the accountability and oversight body are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act 1982. Second, if the Ombudsman investigates a member of the First Peoples' Assembly, they must give the assembly chair the opportunity to comment before making an adverse report. And the bill legislates its own funding: over \$70 million in its first year, increasing by 2.5 per cent annually in perpetuity, taken directly from consolidated revenue. Legislating a funding stream in perpetuity for a statutory authority without annual budgetary oversight is highly unusual. It reduces the Parliament's future capacity to scrutinise spending and undermines the principle that public expenditure must remain accountable to the people through their elected representatives.

The issues I have raised so far are significant, but the greatest disappointment is, despite its stated intent, the bill contains no meaningful measures that go directly to closing the gap. It does not fund First Nations education programs to improve attendance or literacy in our schools. It does not invest in First Nations health or preventative care. It does not support diversionary programs to keep First Nations youth out of the justice system, and it does not create job readiness programs to lift economic participation. I would love to see the government bring forward legislation addressing these issues, and I know my coalition colleagues would join me in supporting such initiatives. That is why the coalition has announced an alternative approach: First Nations Victoria, an autonomous department dedicated to delivering measurable progress on Closing the Gap targets in health, education, justice, housing and child and family wellbeing, focused on practical outcomes in each one of these important areas. This department will work in genuine partnership with First Nations Victorians to deliver community-led, transparent policy and service delivery. One minister will be responsible for its performance, ensuring real oversight and providing true accountability to Parliament and to all Victorians. Quarterly updates and annual reports will be tabled publicly, so progress is measurable, transparent and focused on results. That is our commitment. That is what we are focused on: practical outcomes that deliver real results.

The Liberals and Nationals remain deeply committed to closing the gap and to supporting practical measures that deliver lasting outcomes, but we cannot support legislation that undermines the clarity and accountability of our democratic system while not being clear how it will deliver measurable improvements to First Nations people's lives. Such a critical part of our democracy in this state and in this country is the ability to have respectful debate and to have differing views, particularly in this place. True reconciliation must rest on partnership, accountability and results, not on creating new institutions that sit outside the normal checks and balances of responsible government that must govern for all Victorians. For those reasons I cannot support this bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** Before we continue this debate, I expect everyone in this chamber to give respect to people that are on their feet. You are going to have different views – I understand this is a contentious debate – but please give respect to those who are on their feet, on both sides of the chamber.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (20:11):** I would like to begin by thanking traditional owners and all Aboriginal Victorians for their generosity and their leadership in walking with us. Given what they have been through, what they are doing is such an extraordinary act of generosity and courage. If I had gone through anywhere near what they have been through and generationally for 230 years, I would want to wreck the place. I would not want to walk with the government and the people to reconciliation. I want to thank them for their courage. This is a community that has been

burnt by governments for 230 years, yet they are still willing to walk with the government and the people.

I want to thank specifically Aunty Jill Gallagher. I want to thank the inaugural chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly and the current co-chairs who spoke so powerfully here, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg. I have had the pleasure of meeting them in my work. I thank all members of the First Peoples' Assembly; the Yoorrook Justice Commission; the traditional owner corporations, who I have had the enormous pleasure of meeting in the environment portfolio; and the incredible Aboriginal staff in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and in the Department of Premier and Cabinet that I have had the pleasure of working with, who have carried a burden and yet have advised us so well as public servants. And I want to thank and acknowledge every single Aboriginal Victorian from today back to pre white settlement. All the people who have suffered intergenerational trauma, the travesty of what has been done to them, the dispossession of entire peoples, the absolute loss of language and culture amongst these people whose names we will never know, the quiet indignities they faced individually and privately for years – I want to acknowledge all of them. Many of them are not with us anymore, because they have passed away, but this is for them. I want to finally acknowledge the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples; the Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples, who I adore and who is an incredible human being; and the Premier of Victoria Jacinta Allan. Because this has been a long journey in this Parliament, I also want to acknowledge Minister Williams, Minister Jennings and Dan Andrews, the former Premier who started this journey, and we owe him a debt of gratitude.

I say to the people of Victoria, we on this side of the house all say to the people of Victoria, we have had our First Peoples' Assembly for six years. I walked outside earlier. The sky was still in its place. It had not fallen. When, as others have said, families and communities can make decisions that govern their own lives, the outcomes are better. Aboriginal communities deserve the same. There will be no veto power by that body over the Parliament of Victoria. It does not take anything from anyone. This is right. This is just. We should have done this years ago. We know the life outcomes of Aboriginal Victorians are worse, and nothing we have done has changed that – not the back-to-the-future rubbish that comes from that side, not setting up Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. It has existed, and it has not changed a thing. The problem for that side of politics is that they have no answers. They have no answers for this problem, and I will come back to that in a minute. But I do not want to portray that it is always a deficit lens; it is not a deficit lens. I have learned so much from Aboriginal Victorians. I have learned so much from the incredible aquaculture 30,000 years ago at Budj Bim. When the rest of the world was not doing much, Aboriginal Victorians were trapping, smoking and trading eels – 30,000 years ago.

Rock art was right through Victoria and the country, and there was respect for the land. It has become fashionable in environmental circles and in lay circles to talk about the environment – how we rely on the environment, how we are one with it, how we know that we are done without the environment – and about the repercussions of climate change. Aboriginal Victorians and traditional owners have been talking about it. Ngarra Murray stood there today on the floor of the Parliament and said, 'We and the earth are one.' We learn so much from these cultures. We think we have invented everything. We certainly have not; they have invented many, many things.

Rueben Berg reminded us today of all the places that have gone through treaty. He mentioned so many, but I talk about New Zealand, Canada and the United States. While not perfect, those jurisdictions have formed treaties years before us, and that has led to better outcomes – not perfect, but better outcomes. How is it that 250 years after white people came to this country we still cannot get a treaty up – when these people have lived here for 65,000 years? New Zealand – we talk down to New Zealand as if we are some golden country. They have had treaty for 185 years with Māori. Let that sink in – 185 years. But these people on that side of the Parliament are going to make us think it is controversial. Controversial? It is 185 years old. Give me a break. Let that sink in.

I have got to say it was terrible to listen to some of the contributions from that side – terrible. If I was an Aboriginal Victorian listening, I would be so furious with the lack of generosity, courage and wisdom, the absolute talking down. Some of the members on that side were talking about their personal relationships with Aboriginal Victorians: ‘I grew up with them,’ ‘I went to school with them.’ But it was all a cloak to hide what is a lack of courage, a lack of heart and, in some cases, a deep-seated racism. That is what it was. It was a cloak. Just because you are friends with someone or you went to school with someone, you say, ‘I couldn’t possibly be considered racist.’ Mate, you are considered racist – some of you. Some of them on that side – I am not mentioning names.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** Minister, just refrain from using ‘you’. It is a reflection on the Chair.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** Okay, Acting Speaker. I would say to the opposition: you cannot fix today’s problems with yesterday’s solutions. You cannot do that. You cannot have your head in the sand and fix entrenched disadvantage with the tools that existed yesterday. There is no perfect solution. You can pick it apart all you like, but if you do not offer an alternative that is viable, you are absolutely reprehensible. So when you oppose this bill, as the Minister for Energy and Resources said, know that you are on the wrong side of history. What will you tell your children and your grandchildren? This is political. I am going to be really frank. I am not ashamed about talking politics in the Parliament of Victoria. This is political. When history comes calling, the Liberal and National parties do not answer the door. Not only do they not answer the door, they go away to the farthest part of the house, go under some furniture, block their ears and hide their eyes. That is what they do. When the history of this country is written and the proud, courageous fight of Aboriginal Victorians and Aboriginal Australians is written about in the future, the Liberal and National parties will not even be a footnote.

I cannot tell you how angry I would be if I were listening to this debate from that side and I were an Aboriginal Victorian. Where is the generosity? Where is the spirit? Where is the heart? The Labor Party – let me say that again: the Labor Party – is the party that brought this bill to the Victorian Parliament. We are the party that brought the bill. We are the party that accepted the hand of friendship that Aboriginal Victorians so generously provided to us. If I were them, I would walk away from the whole show. It was so generously provided to us, and we are walking down the path with them. The Liberal and National party MPs are members of Parliament. They are not dog whistlers. They are not having a conversation with a friend over a coffee on a Saturday morning – this kind of pontification over here. You are here to make a decision. Make it, and make it count.

I am proud of this government – the Andrews and Allan Labor legacy. I am proud of traditional owners for trusting us, for walking on the path of reconciliation with us. We have got your back, and I reckon by the end of this Victoria will have your back. I could not be prouder to be part of this government at this time in 2025 passing, finally, a treaty bill in the Victorian Parliament.

**Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (20:20):** Firstly, I want to give an acknowledgement of the deep history, culture and continuing connection of First Peoples to land and waters, particularly the Bunurong and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin nation on the Mornington Peninsula, where my electorate of Mornington is, whose connection to sea, country and more runs deeper than any title deed or government map. This conversation today is not just about law; it is about people, history and healing. No-one can honestly speak about our history without firstly recognising the truth, the violence, the dispossession, the stolen generations, the loss of culture and language, and the heartbreak that has echoed through families for many generations. Many of us have walked on ground where these stories unfolded, and too few of us have stopped to listen.

I have seen this reality firsthand. I have worked alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. For example, I once worked at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra leading a research project which covered the Northern Territory and Queensland, working with Indigenous communities across those areas. I also worked in the past doing legal work for an anthropologist on the Port Curtis Coral Coast native title claim, and I

once worked at the department of agriculture in First Nations policy and assisted in co-writing their reconciliation action plan and setting up a cross-departmental working group for First Peoples. I indeed respect those who support treaty in good faith and particularly those who were in our chamber earlier today and who with heartfelt words addressed the chamber as well. I respect the good faith of people on all sides of this debate, whether a supporter of the treaty or not. I have spoken to many good people, both First Peoples and not, who have been both for and against the treaty for various reasons but who all want to see outcomes improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria and indeed across Australia.

While Victoria ultimately rejected the Voice referendum and much of Australia did as well, I also acknowledge that, while in the minority, many voted yes. I hear that. Our community wants dignity, practical process and unity. Fundamentally we all want the same things – good schools, safe streets, decent health care and the chance to work and provide for our families for absolutely everybody – and we want equality of opportunity for all, whether for First Nations people or Victorians generally. I want to be clear: the Liberals and Nationals opposing this bill does not mean that we are opposing recognition or opposing partnership or opposing respect. It means we believe that unity, equality before the law and practical process and progress, not bureaucracy or separation, are the surest ways to honour the past and secure our future.

Let us go into what this bill does at a glance. It creates Gellung Warl, a statewide corporate body for First Peoples with three arms: representative, oversight and truth-telling continuation. It creates a parliamentary pipeline. The Clerk must notify the assembly of every bill introduced, and ministers must prepare a statement of treaty compatibility for each bill. It enables an annual joint address opportunity to Parliament and regular cabinet meetings as well. This body is not subject to ministerial direction or the Public Administration Act 2004. It can acquire property, form companies and make grants. On democratic balance and representation, the assembly is elected only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians aged 16-plus who have lived in Victoria for three of the past five years. That is a separate representative channel with statutory reach across the lawmaking process. All Victorians will fund and be affected by the assembly's consultative and institutional reach, yet not all can vote for it. That creates a representation asymmetry which we must examine carefully.

The bill does not literally grant a second parliamentary vote. The concern is about a parallel representational path built into legislative and executive processes. This is not about heritage or ancestry, it is about fairness and balance. In a democracy all citizens should have an equal say, and that is the view of the Liberals and Nationals.

On the scope and reach of this bill, it affects 'matters that affect First Peoples', and that is undefined, yet that is the trigger for many obligations, such as representation to Parliament; consultation; access to public authorities; engagement in hearings with secretaries, the Chief Commissioner of Police and others; and more. Without a clear definition, the assembly can assert relevance over virtually any policy area, potentially inviting conflict, delay or forum shopping. That is not partnership, that is open-ended power without clear accountability. Even supporters of treaty should want a process that is defined, transparent and legally sound, because vague laws can mean distrust.

On transparency and governance, Gellung Warl will be exempt from the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and the Public Administration Act 2004. It can declare documents culturally sensitive and keep them from public view, including cabinet briefings and records of meetings with ministers. That level of secrecy would not be tolerated for ministers, councils or others. True reconciliation is built on openness and honesty, not a system that asks Victorians to trust decisions they are not allowed to see.

On funding and costs, the bill also locks in standing funding, starting at \$3 million next year and rising to over \$70 million annually by 2028, indexed automatically every year thereafter outside the normal budget process. Over the next decade this equates to roughly \$2.7 billion in taxpayer funding, with the ability to request even more. At a time when families are struggling with mortgages, groceries and energy bills, that kind of permanent blank cheque demands real scrutiny. Every dollar should be

driving measurable progress in health, education and housing for First Nations Victorians and indeed all Victorians, not simply growing another bureaucracy.

On closing the gap, this government is currently failing to close the gap for our First Nations people on life expectancy, education, employment, incarceration and more, and this bill does not fix that. It sets no binding targets, no accountability for outcomes and no requirement that any of this funding translates to tangible improvement. Symbolism is not a substitute for service delivery. People need schools that work, clinics that heal and opportunities that last.

On unity and social cohesion, finally, Australia works best when we bring people together around shared institutions and equal laws, and that was reflected in the Voice vote. If public decision-making starts to differ depending on ancestry or other factors, resentment grows – not because people are hostile but because they feel unheard and excluded. Our challenge is not to entrench separate systems but to make our shared system work better for everyone, including First Nations people. I believe Victorians want to walk this path together, not on parallel tracks.

Twenty-five years ago more than a quarter of a million Australians walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the name of reconciliation. They were not led by political elites. They were led by ordinary people walking together beneath a number of banners: ‘Sorry’, ‘Unity’ and ‘Reconciliation’. What made this moment powerful was not the size of the crowd but the simplicity of the message: that our future must be shared. The way to heal a nation is not by building new walls and separation between its people but by crossing the old ones together. My fear is that this bill builds a wall where a bridge should instead stand. I want our children, First Nations or not, to walk the same road, not parallel ones. Ultimately I along with the Liberals and Nationals cannot support legislation that hardwires permanent power without accountability and risks dividing Victorians by heritage and indeed creating a permanent division between Victorians. If our task is to unite this state, we are failing in this regard, so I and we cannot support this treaty.

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (20:29): Before I begin my contribution I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that we are here on today and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

Today is a historic moment for our state, for our people and for everybody in this place. I do want to take a moment to commend the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for his passionate contribution earlier. It really did reflect his sentiments and what this really is about today. This is a historic moment for our state because under our government we are delivering the nation’s first treaty with our First Peoples. Let me repeat that: we are delivering the nation’s first treaty with its First Peoples.

This legislation is real and it is about our First Nations people. For far too long our First Nations communities have not really had a seat at the table. They have not been able to really make decisions that affect them, their families and their communities. But today changes that for the better. It is about uniting and bringing people together. We know that the treaty builds that path of delivering better services, better outcomes, better connections and a better quality of life for our people. More importantly, it will make sure that our communities have a real say in the system, their services and what best suits their lives. That is really important.

Treaty is an important principle of listening to the community. Over many years, this is what our government has done, first with the Andrews government and now with the Allan government. We made a commitment, and we have not backed away from that commitment of working together. As our Premier has indicated, treaty does not take anything away from anyone. It is about improving people’s lives and giving everyone a better future.

Self-determination is absolutely critical. That extends to creating bigger and better economic opportunities for our First Nations businesses, workers and communities. As the Minister for Small

Business, I know how our First Nations businesses are leading our nation. Not only are they creating jobs, building confidence and shaping the next generation of community leaders but I am also thrilled to inform the house that in coming weeks Melbourne will be hosting the World Indigenous Business Forum right here in Victoria. This is a global event and we will see community leaders and business leaders across the globe attend this forum. I think it is really important that global leaders and business leaders want to connect. There really is plenty of opportunity to share culture and knowledge, build trade connections and showcase the achievements of our First Nations businesses right here in Victoria. There is plenty of talent, there is innovation and determination and there is also opportunity for businesses to connect and grow. I think that is really important.

These are some of the principles that sit at the heart of the Allan Labor government's strategy – a shared plan between government and First Nations communities to generate greater individual and collective wealth. We know that with the work that we are doing in investing and building economic partnerships and cooperation, the strategy, just like the treaty, was built hand in hand with our Aboriginal Victorians. We know that self-determination in practice and treaty will strengthen those strong foundations, the foundations that will work with First Nations communities and build upon that. That is really, really critical.

We know that the work is not just about supporting communities right now. We need to be able to invest for a better future – a better future for First Nations but in particular, as the Minister for Youth, for young First Nations Victorians. We know the work that we are doing in having spaces that support, mature and grow those young voices is so integral in these local communities, particularly at a point in our state's history where we are seeing and making sure that young First Nations leaders are part of those conversations, part of that opportunity and part of a future where they are making those decisions.

That is why our government is proud to be backing in the great work of the Koorie Youth Council. I want to thank the Koorie Youth Council for all the work that they do to not only support but also empower young Aboriginal Victorians through programs like the Aboriginal youth mentoring program. This is really critical and important work that they do, and their work has never been more important than right now. I want to acknowledge again their contribution at this historic moment for our state.

I also want to acknowledge my good friend the member for Geelong for her strong advocacy and the work that she has done, whether it has been assisting in the employment programs out in her region or assisting the voices and really advocating for more opportunities and more support when it comes to our First Nations. I recall when I was first elected into this place and I met the member for Geelong, this was certainly something that resonated through committee work and the work that the member for Geelong did continuously. So I thank the member for Geelong for all of her work.

In closing, through the treaty we know that through partnerships, as I have spoken about with the Koorie Youth Council and other organisations, we continue to build a fairer and more prosperous Victoria for all, and we know that Aboriginal Victorians will have the opportunity to shape their own futures. That is the fundamental right of every Victorian – to shape their own future – and treaty gives us that pathway to make that real. It is how we change what is not working and things that have been challenging. We do that in partnership so that we can build a better tomorrow together, united as one. Treaty is the new beginning, grounded in partnership and built on respect. At its core, it is driven by the belief in a fairer Victoria, one where Aboriginal Victorians have a say and are part of the decisions that affect them and their communities. I commend this bill to the house.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (20:37): I rise in support of this bill; I rise in support of treaty. I acknowledge the lands and waterways of the Wurundjeri, on whose land this place stands and on whose land my family, my ancestors, have lived for nearly 200 years and have had the fortune of a better life than the one they left behind overseas. I recognise the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, the Eastern Maar, the

Gunaikurnai and the Wadawurrung peoples, on whose land my ancestors were also born and have lived. I recognise the opportunity my ancestors have been given on traditional lands, a privilege that has often not been afforded to the First Peoples of these lands.

We are a bit of a historical anomaly in our country, the only Commonwealth country without a treaty with First Peoples. In part we have seen this because of the mistaken, or malevolent, belief that Australia was terra nullius – that is, a claim that this land was unoccupied and uninhabited. We know this to be untrue and to be wrong. Last year I had the luck to visit Budj Bim, a World Heritage site here in Victoria which is home to an aquaculture system that is one of the oldest in the world. The Gunditjmara people worked with the landscape, turning lava eruptions into a sophisticated aquaculture system, essentially farming the landscape without harming the landscape. Budj Bim is also significant to Gunditjmara dreaming, the ancestral creation of Budj Bim, which has the mountain as the forehead and the stones as the teeth. The Budj Bim aquaculture systems are around 6000 to 7000 years old. There are over 200 ancient stone houses recorded in Budj Bim. George Augustus Robinson, who had the role of Chief Protector of Aborigines, in an 1841 expedition described the Budj Bim eel traps as:

... an immense piece of ground trenched and banked, resembling the work of civilized man but which on inspection I found to be the work of Aboriginal natives, purposely constructed for catching eels.

Despite the observations by Robinson, the sophisticated and harmonious use of the environment by the Gunditjmara was largely ignored – conveniently, as it allowed the myth of terra nullius to persist.

It allowed the deliberate ignorance of stolen land and waterways to be maintained. Despite channels of at least 3 kilometres and around 2.5 kilometres wide being built, a dam wall built and the largest used fish traps in the world, that idea of terra nullius persisted, and Robinson's observations were an inconvenient truth. I have eel traps in my own community, along the Yarra. Very few are left along the Birrarung, the Yarra River and the Maribyrnong River. Over time, aquacultural infrastructure across our state was dismantled, taken away from sites, used to build houses, fords, fences and roads by settlers. I am very grateful that this area in my community is not only respected, but a number of years ago the Wurundjeri were supported by a Labor government to restore the traps.

Physical markers of presence, of history, of culture are important. They help the stories continue to be told, and this is the importance of the Yoorrook Justice Commission and truth-telling. I thank the commissioners for their important work and the hundreds upon hundreds of stories they now carry, so many stories of pain, of dispossession, of isolation, of anger and grief and of resilience and survival. I thank all who have participated in the First Peoples' Assembly, including inaugural chairs Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Uncle Marcus Stewart, and current co-chairs Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray. I thank all ministers involved, Parliamentary Secretary Christine Couzens – an amazing human – departmental staff and community members. This has been hard work but worthy and important work. This is an important process that plays such a significant role in establishing a historical and official record of the experiences of First Peoples in Victoria, including injustices. This helps us find the path towards healing and reconciliation. It has informed the treaty process for self-determination and systemic reform.

A treaty in Victoria represents a necessary and overdue step towards establishing a strong, unbreakable, honest and respectful relationship between Victoria and Victoria's First Peoples. It acknowledges the deep and ongoing connection of First Peoples' communities to land, culture, lore and law – foundations that predate colonial arrival by tens of thousands of years. Treaty is about practical recognition. It is about creating a framework where First Peoples have a real say in the decisions that affect their lives. It is also about truth-telling, confronting the historical and structural injustices that have helped shape Victoria's past and present. Ultimately, treaty offers a path forward that is grounded in yarning, responsibility and a shared commitment to a future steeped in equality and opportunity. It means self-determination and it means respect.

I have learned a lot from First Peoples in Victoria in my roles as Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Employment. I thank these many organisations and communities for their



time with me, their yarning and the knowledge they shared. Through listening, through seeing, I really began to see the unsafe world so many First People continue to live in. Going before Yoorrook gave me even more insight, and I am so grateful for that experience and learning. Acting Speaker Farnham, with your indulgence, I will borrow a quote from the First Peoples' Assembly:

We know that when it comes to Aboriginal communities ... the experts are Aboriginal people ...

And who are we to say that we know better? I support this bill wholeheartedly. Ngoon godgin.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (20:43): I rise to support the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Before I begin, I acknowledge that we meet on Wurundjeri country here at Parliament, and I pay my respects to elders past and present. I also acknowledge the Bunurong people of the south-eastern Kulin, traditional owners of the lands that I represent in my electorate of Bentleigh, and I thank them for their enduring custodianship and culture.

This bill is, at its core, about moving from words to work. It builds the structures to ensure that when decisions are made about Aboriginal lives, they are made with Aboriginal people. As Minister for Local Government and Minister for Consumer Affairs my responsibility is to the entirety of our state, and I want to speak to what this means for communities right across our state, from the Mallee to Gippsland, from the High Country to the bayside and south-east that I serve as the member for Bentleigh.

The Bunurong people of the Kulin nation have experienced a history of violence, dispossession, abduction, displacement and attempted eradication since colonisation began on their country in 1835. The Aboriginal protectorate was established in 1838, and four assistant protectors were appointed throughout the Port Phillip district, later to become the colony of Victoria. Protectorates had the authority to control all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives, including where they lived, where they could travel, their personal relationships and their contact with family and community. These and other restrictive laws were reviewed and renamed for generations, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were subject to different and unequal treatment under the law, with impacts that echo to this day.

The protectorate was abolished in 1849 and replaced by a system of guardians, although the controlling laws remained. William Thomas was appointed guardian for the counties of Bourke, Mornington and Evelyn from 1850, covering all of the area now known as Kingston in my electorate and much more. In 1852, 832 acres of land around the mouth of the Mordialloc Creek stretching inland were designated as an Aboriginal reserve. It was intended to be a place where Bunurong people could continue to live with access to resources, as the surrounding land was sold or given away to European settlers, farmers and businesses, but the reserve was never gazetted. It had no protection in law, and encroachments began almost immediately. Traditional food sources were destroyed, access to water was restricted and sacred sites were desecrated. Introduced diseases such as smallpox and influenza further devastated the Bunurong population, leading to a dramatic loss of life and disruption of cultural practices. Roads locally that we now know and use every day, for example Boundary Road, are reminders of racial segregation and land theft – lines drawn to mark where Aboriginal people were no longer allowed to cross.

In 1863 Coranderrk station was established at Healesville, and government policy shifted towards centralising Aboriginal people on larger managed stations away from settled townships. Thomas oversaw the relocation of many Aboriginal clans, including the Bunurong, from small reserves like Mordialloc and Arthurs Seat to Coranderrk. He recorded that only four Bunurong people remained under his charge at the Mordialloc reserve by 1863 – only four. In 1877 the last two Bunurong people living at the reserve, Jimmy, whose birth name was possibly Yammerbook, and Nancy Dunbar, died within six days of each other. The press widely and inaccurately reported these as the deaths of the last of the Mordialloc tribe. Soon after his death at the Alfred hospital, Jimmy Dunbar's skull was sold to the University of Melbourne, almost certainly without his consent, for craniology study.

That is part of the truth of the south-east. It is not distant history. It is stitched through the places we live – through our creeks and reserves and our streets and schools. The work before us is to honour Bunurong sovereignty and knowledge in how we govern locally today – in the names we use, the stories we tell, the services we design and the protections we enforce. This is why the government embarked on the Yoorrook Justice Commission and a statewide truth-telling process to create an independent, official record of the injustices First Peoples have endured, to centre Aboriginal voices in describing harm and its ongoing effects and to ground reform in evidence, not sentiment. Yoorrook's work is already charting the truth, and its recommendations are guiding practical change. This bill builds on that foundation by establishing ongoing, place-based truth-telling so communities can tell their own histories and have them directly shape policy, funding and service design across councils, services and consumer protections.

Truth-telling is not about rehearsing guilt; it is about changing systems so that justice is finally done. Local government is closest to community. It is where early years, maternal and child health, libraries, sport and recreation, planning and place making all happen. This bill gives councils a clearer statewide framework to partner with traditional owners on practical truth-telling and co-design. Across Victoria and locally on Bunurong country in the south-east this means councils working side by side with traditional owners on dual naming so that parks, waterways and landmarks carry and teach the real history of country; interpreting country through signage, public art and library programming to tell local stories, including the Mordialloc reserve and Coranderrk relocations; co-designing culturally safe services, especially in early years and youth, so families meet services that recognise culture and community, not treat it as an afterthought; building procurement pathways for Aboriginal-owned businesses; creating seats for Aboriginal leadership on advisory committees and boards; and most importantly, facilitating opportunities for reconciliation and truth-telling at a local level.

The local government sector is already leaning in. As the peak body representing all 79 local councils, the Municipal Association of Victoria has taken a leadership role to collaborate, support and inform councils about treaty, grounded in the Local Government Act 2020's deliberative engagement provisions and reinforced by ministerial guidance on engaging with Aboriginal Victorians. MAV has partnered with the First Peoples' Assembly, the Treaty Authority and Reconciliation Victoria to make sure councils understand both the Statewide Treaty process and the path to traditional owner treaties and to counter misinformation with clear, factual material for communities. I acknowledge the MAV for this sector leadership, co-designing tools and sessions with traditional owners, and I thank Local Government Victoria, my entire department and council leaders across the state who are preparing through briefings and forums to deliver this work on the ground.

Across Victoria, as we embark on this treaty process, success will look like this: culturally safe support available early through organisations people trust, schools and communities using truth-telling resources so children learn the real history of this state, public places that teach country through names and stories and the state being held to its promises through independent, transparent accountability. Unfortunately, some will claim this creates special rights or hands over veto power, but it does neither of those things. It keeps parliamentary sovereignty in this place. It ensures government designs with people, not for people.

I would like to finish where I began, on Bunurong country. Our community in the south-east is proud of our schools and kinders, our footy clubs and festivals, our small businesses and shopping strips, our beaches and wetlands. But the deepest pride we can share is in the culture that has survived here the longest. The knowledge that shaped this coast and fed families from these waters for millennia still lives in language and ceremony, in stories and song, in caring for country and caring for kids. Treaty is how we respect that knowledge and put it to work as a community. It is how we move from acknowledgements at the start of a meeting to decisions made with the people we acknowledge. It is how we make councils better partners, services more effective and consumer systems fairer. It is how we shift power, not just rhetoric. We owe the Bunurong people and the First Peoples more than kind words; we owe them structures that share power, services that are culturally safe and economic

systems that are fair, and that is what this bill helps deliver. I commend the bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (20:53): To begin, I too would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Wurundjeri country. I pay my respects to elders past and present and any other First Nations people with us – the world's longest lasting culture deserves nothing less. I want to thank the current and former First Peoples' Assembly for the work that they have done to get us to this point. I want to thank the co-chairs Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg for their advocacy and the eloquent speeches they delivered in this place earlier today. I also want to acknowledge the former co-chairs Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart.

This has been a long journey. I want to acknowledge my good friend the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, who has worked tirelessly in this space. I also want to acknowledge my good friend the member for Geelong. The member for Geelong and I were elected at the same time. We sat next to each other for a stint in the first term. I have got to say, old friend, I think if you could see yourself now where you were back then – I just think what you have achieved and accomplished has been extraordinary. I also want to extend that to Ms Watt from the other place for her work, because, again, so much work has gone into this process to get us to this point, and so much of the work that the member for Geelong and Ms Watt in the other place have done has been extraordinary.

I also want to acknowledge Rachael Davies, who is an adviser to Natalie Hutchins, the Minister for Treaty, and who is in the advisers box. Rach is a proud Palawa woman. I had the great privilege of Rach being in my electorate office in my first term, and Rachael is one of the most extraordinary advisers I have come across. Her ability to embrace an issue and find a way forward is nothing short of extraordinary, so you should be very proud, Rach.

Robert Caro is a great novelist on LBJ, and he has a theory that power reveals. When Daniel Andrews was elected to this place, he could have chosen an easier path. He could have turned around and said, 'Look, there are not many votes in this; we won't worry about it.' But Daniel always had that sense of destiny and history, and he stuck to his guns and he started this journey. Daniel gets so much of the credit for us being in this position now, but I also want to acknowledge the role of the Premier, who has carried on the baton and made sure that we are in this position right here, right now, to be able to do this.

This bill, fundamentally, is about respect. You have the chance to act in these roles sometimes, and you can choose to take it or not take it. I remember when I was the Minister for Creative Industries, there were some works of Uncle William Barak that were coming up for auction in New York, and there was an opportunity for us to bid for those works. The then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs had a little bit of money, and I had a few hundred thousand dollars that I had identified. My chief of staff then, Naomi Nugraweni, who is an extraordinary person, said to me, 'Well, what do you want to do? You've got a chance to do this. You can do it or not do it, it's up to you, but you've got to make a call on this.' I just knew that if we missed that opportunity, it would be to the loss of the state. And you know what, what happened was that with the money that we managed to get out of creative industries and the money that we got out of treaty we managed to basically scare off any private collector who wanted to get them, and any other state-based jurisdictions. We had a clear run, and we got them. I remember talking with Uncle Bill Nicholson afterwards, and he said, 'Look, fundamentally, at the end of the day, we just want you to respect our culture as much as we respect it.' It did not seem to me to be a radical proposition at all.

Another interesting thing through that period of time was that I got to meet Kimberley Moulton, a senior curator at Museums Victoria, who told me about the story of Sophie La Trobe. Sophie La Trobe was the first wife of Governor La Trobe. She managed to acquire an extraordinary amount of Wurundjeri artefacts that are now sitting in a locked facility in Switzerland. She took them back to

Switzerland, where she was from, and they are locked up. I hope one day we can be in a position where these artefacts can be returned to where they belong – right here.

I would encourage anyone, if you have the chance, to read *The Biggest Estate on Earth* by Bill Gammage, because you start to get an appreciation of the way in which this country was cared for by First Nations people for tens of thousands of years. Governments come and go, but big reforms can transform a state and a nation. We are on the precipice of a golden age, because we have the chance to show the nation that this can be done. I remember seeing footage of Whitlam at Daguragu, which was Wattie Creek, on 16 August 1975, when he poured sand through the hands of Vincent Lingiari – when he first started that process. To date, all the work on land rights reforms has been at the federal level. We can make that change now. We can lead this nation, we can give this nation hope and confidence and we can show that there is nothing to fear here.

When this bill first came before the Parliament in the first term, when people were against it, I said, ‘If not now, when?’ Our time is now. This is the right thing to do. It is the fair thing to do. We can lead the nation, and we can do so with courage. This is our moment. Let us seize it. I commend the bill.

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (20:59): I proudly stand alongside my Labor parliamentary colleagues in supporting the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 in this place today on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. I pay my respects to their elders past and present, and I extend that to all First Nations people across Victoria who have been in the Parliament today.

It is very important for me to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land. I have the great honour of representing in this Parliament the Wadawurrung people. Wadawurrung country stretches from the great divide to the coast. It is located between the Werribee River in the east and Aireys Inlet in the west, including my home of Ballarat, as well as Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. I wish to acknowledge Uncle Bryon Powell. Uncle Bryon is the reserved seat holder representing the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation on the First Peoples’ Assembly. I thank him for his leadership, being in the Parliament today and being a voice of Wadawurrung people in this process.

I also, importantly, want to recognise the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative and the Ballarat Aboriginal community, many of whom were forcibly moved from their country during the stolen generations and brought to Ballarat. They chose to stay and make Ballarat their home, and together they have created a thriving community organisation to benefit all Aboriginal people living in and around Ballarat. I want to thank CEO Karen Heap, COO Shu Brown and BADAC for the outstanding role it plays in providing culturally safe health, social welfare and community development services to Aboriginal people in my region.

The very foundations of our state and our nation are based on the injustice and the falsehood of terra nullius. Translated from Latin, meaning ‘land belonging to no-one’, it was this doctrine that was used to claim sovereignty over Victoria without treaties or compensation to traditional owners of the land who had lived and cared for country for tens of thousands of years. Dr Martin Luther King Jr wrote, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’ Today is a historic day for Victoria where we address injustice in our state. The Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 is not just legislation, it is a commitment – a commitment to truth, to justice and to healing. I strongly believe that treaty is not just for First Peoples; it is for all Victorians. It is an opportunity to acknowledge our past, confront our truths and walk forward together.

I am deeply disappointed that the Liberal and National MPs are opposing this bill. They will be remembered for being on the wrong side of history. Treaty is a path forward. It is not about division, it is about unity, justice and reconciliation and the power of truth-telling. As my friend Nikki Foy, a proud Gunditjmara woman who lives in my community, reminded me, treaty does not take anything away from non-Aboriginal people; rather, it is a mutual agreement that respects the rights and interests of all.

I want to acknowledge the work of Aunty Jill Gallagher, Ngarra Murray, Rueben Berg, Marcus Stewart, Geraldine Atkinson and the members of the First Peoples' Assembly and community. I want to recognise the Premier, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and former ministers Jennings and Williams, as well as the member for Geelong and Sheena Watt for their unwavering commitment to treaty. This journey has not been easy. It has taken decades of advocacy, of protest, of resilience and of course of hope, but also disillusionment and disappointment. Today we stand together to honour that journey. We honour those who walked before us, and we commit to walking alongside First Peoples into a future that is fairer, stronger and more just.

When my children ask me what I did at Parliament this week, I am going to proudly share with them that I supported the historic Statewide Treaty Bill – the first in our nation. In the future when my grandchildren ask me what I did when I was an MP I will tell them that I supported self-determination, truth-telling and improved outcomes for Victoria's First People. I proudly support the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 as someone who believes in the power of truth, justice and reconciliation. I commend the bill to the house.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (21:04): I rise to make a contribution on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. I do not think there would be a member of this chamber who does not wish to have improved outcomes for our Aboriginal community. In stating this, I refer to some of the Closing the Gap initiatives, and these relate to areas including better health and wellbeing outcomes; improved early childhood and educational outcomes; learning and youth engagement; employment and economic participation outcomes; justice, youth justice and child protection outcomes; culture and language outcomes; and family and community outcomes. I do not think anyone in either chamber of this place or from any side of politics would disagree that as a society these are areas where we need to continue to work and get better outcomes.

My family's association with our local Indigenous community goes back to the 1800s when my great-grandfather's ship was wrecked at Lake Tyers. He took refuge there for a number of weeks while they made an effort; back in those days they had no train service and no way to get to a location like that. But he lived there at Lake Tyers for a couple of weeks, and then they undertook the salvage operation there with a couple of lives lost.

Having coached footy in East Gippsland for 26 years, I have got a very strong connection to a lot of our local Indigenous community, and that is why those outcomes are very important for everybody in this chamber. What we have here is a difference of opinion on the structure that we have proposed in this bill. The bill calls for the notification of every bill and the mandating of statements of compatibility for each bill to be provided to the new entity. It also gives power to advise on matters that affect First Peoples. When the member for Gippsland South first spoke he spoke about there being no definition of 'matters impacting First Peoples'. That could – technically, by the letter of the law – relate to every bill that passes through this chamber, because every bill relates to the wellbeing of Victorians more generally.

What I want to make clear – and I do not think anyone has mentioned this before – is that when a bill comes into this chamber we consult with interest groups. The government does that. The opposition does that. Depending on which side of the chamber you are sitting on, it does not matter. For instance, in my shadow ministries I have got disability, I have got carers and I have got veterans. I know when a bill comes in in relation to any of those portfolios, we consult with stakeholders. We consult with the disability sector, we consult with carers and we consult with the veterans community. As I said, both the government and the opposition do that.

Our Westminster system operates under clear and very longstanding protocols. These were outlined by the member for Gippsland South in his opening address. No outside entity currently has the power to summon agency heads or ministers for questioning, but this bill does provide these powers. The FOI exemptions are quite broad in relation to providing those protections. I have not read the lot to date, but as I read it, it includes the exclusion of culturally sensitive information. I get that, I understand

that and I support that. My question would be why that cannot be redacted from FOI requests, as is the practice at the present time.

When the treaty was first raised in this chamber, I spoke on that bill and expressed that I was treating this with an open mind, as many stated at that time – an open mind and an intention to have the discussion. Back in 2018 when that bill came in, we did not oppose the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Bill 2018. We were open-minded about the process. But at that stage that bill was setting up the framework. I made the point that we did not yet know what treaty would look like, and I think members on both sides of the chamber spoke about that, and there was a need to get everyone in unison as we moved forward. I would say that that probably has not occurred. I have got emails in my inbox from local Indigenous elders who are not supportive of the process. I have some that are, by all means, but they are certainly not all in unison in relation to that.

I will conclude by saying the bill proposes powers that, I think as the member for Kew pointed out, are not in line with the protocols of the Westminster system and the way we operate in this Parliament. As I said, respecting all the views of everyone who has spoken on this bill, we on this side hold the view that it is just simply not the best way forward. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (21:09): I must say, when the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 first landed recently in Parliament I felt really emotional. It was a positive emotionality, but I was really, really moved by it. Today with the smoking ceremony out the front and Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung elder, doing the welcome to country – and I too will acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past and present – there was something really sacred about it, in and of itself. But there is more, and I will speak to that in a moment. Even just having a smoking ceremony on the front steps of Parliament and thinking of the rather ugly history that we have in itself also feels really special.

But getting down to the heart of the bill, I believe why I was feeling so emotional – and this bill is not about me and my emotions, but I just wanted to start from that premise – is because we are hitting on a fundamental truth. I am not actually speaking about truth-telling, although that has been absolutely imperative, and we know that there is no way we could get to this point of having a treaty bill were it not for absolutely and fundamentally acknowledging the gross injustices of the past, which has been facilitated through the incredible work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, because you cannot change what you do not acknowledge. That has been a very fundamental tenet of being able to move forward together on this historic day but also this historic moment in time. But of course we cannot move forward unless we do surmount the prevailing inequalities, and treaty is enabling us to do just that together.

I was almost hopeful because I heard some members of the opposition say there are prevailing inequalities in health, in education and in employment outcomes. I thought, ‘Right, I think maybe they actually understand why we need to do things differently.’ But then we must remember that they have said that within the first 100 days of government, if elected, they would rescind treaty. We know that, in spite of the many investments to date and the targets in terms of being able to close the gap, that gap is still far too wide – there should not be any gap of course; we should all be at an equal status – and we just are not there. Simply sitting on one’s hands and hoping that things will get better seems to be the central tenet, respectfully, of the speeches of those opposite today. I heard a lot of swirling around. I heard a lot of statistics and a desire, a hope, an aspiration to close the gap. But at no point in any of the speeches of the Liberal–National opposition did I hear any solutions. I actually think it is quite insulting to the incredible and generous work of First Peoples over the last decade to just say, ‘Oh, well, we don’t know what the answer is. There’s a solution out there somewhere.’ It is in front of us right here – 10 years of incredible work, incredible generosity, incredible resilience and collaborative operating between the government and the First Peoples’ Assembly.

I feel incredibly grateful that they have been so generous and so supportive of the process, in spite of the fact that their very trust in government was brutally destroyed and has not been truly surmounted

to date. However, we have the opportunity right now in front of us to do just that. I know that there was a point made by the member for Kew that whatever the proposition is – and I do not really understand what they are suggesting would be a viable alternative – should be community led. Is this not community led? If this is not community led, I do not know what is. I think it is just trying to skirt around and make the commitment to move forward and to surmount what has been a dreadful history. It is one that we, certainly on the government side of the house, are very eager to overcome, to walk together hand in hand. That is exactly what we are here doing today. That is what treaty is about. It is about backing in our First Nations people and making sure that they have a true say in the services that impact them and their lives. So let us do it now. Let us walk forward together, and let us respect the process.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (21:15): Can I start my contribution on our Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 by also acknowledging the traditional owners of the land. I pay my respects to elders past and present, the people of the Kulin nation as well as any First Nations people who might be here or listening. That is how I started my inaugural speech seven years ago and was very proud on that day to be elected, quite surprisingly, as a member of a government that was actively working towards treaty and was the first state to do so. I did not expect at that time that I would be lucky enough or privileged enough to still be in this place today, when I get to debate the actual treaty, and later this week get to vote for it.

I am not about to tell this house or Victoria what treaty means for Victorian Indigenous people, because I am not qualified; I am obviously not Indigenous. Our co-chairs of our First Peoples' Assembly, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, did an excellent job of that today, and I do not need to add more words to theirs on the importance of this for them and Indigenous Victorians. I would also like to give a shout-out and thanks to the former co-chairs Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart for their work leading us to today.

This is not simple. I understand members on the other side are not supporting this bill. I do not judge them harshly on their character for that. I do not agree with most of their criticisms. This is a house of debate; that is fine. This is hard. This is hard work. It is why it takes 10 years to get to this point, but here we are. We could, as I think the minister at the table said earlier, do the easy thing and do nothing, but the Victorian Labor government since 2014 has walked this step to give Victorian Indigenous people their say on their future, and this is it.

I have in possession at home a set of books that I inherited from my grandfather. He was given them by someone who he cared for; that person was given them by someone they cared for, a man by the name of R Brough Smyth. In 1878 the Victorian government, through the Board for the Protection of Aborigines – I am not quite sure how the protection went – commissioned a series of book to be made to chronicle, called *The Aborigines of Victoria*, and they document language, they document culture and they have illustrations. We as a Parliament of that day – what is it, 150 years ago – sent Mr Smyth out with whatever funding and resources to catalogue Victoria's Indigenous population to protect them, or in the purpose of protecting them, but as Yoorrook has told us, we did not do a very good job of protecting them as a state. And we do not have to feel guilty about that today; this is not about guilt. This is about a way forward and this is about tomorrow, and the beauty of today is that we can understand the truth of the past. I think we can save room to regret the mistakes that were made. Whether they be ill intentioned or good intentioned does not matter; what we can do today and when we vote on this bill is we can say that the future of the Victorian Indigenous community is in the hands of the Victorian Indigenous community, and that is a change that many sources, many stakeholders – the Productivity Commission and others – say we should do.

If we keep doing the same thing over and over again, we are going to get the same results. We have had these debates in this house. This has been policy for over 10 years. It is in front of us now. The public knows that we are going to do this. I cannot look forward more than to vote for this. Rueben Berg is a constituent of mine, and I will be the proudest man when I am able to say that I voted for the treaty for the Victorian Indigenous people. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (21:20): I acknowledge we are on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and thank Uncle Andrew Gardiner for his words of welcome and smoking ceremony on the steps this morning.

Each day, before the bells at Wonthaggi Primary School, you hear an acknowledgement of country come through the loudspeakers. Each class across each grade creates their own acknowledgement in their words, in their world, in their surrounds, with heart, intent and purpose. This is from grade 4C on Bunurong / Boonwurrung country in the district of Bass:

We would like to acknowledge the Boonwurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and learn.

The Boonwurrung people have cared for this land, the animals, and each other, for many, many years and they continue to do so today.

They teach us the importance of looking after our environment, and making sure the animals and plants are safe. We share this land with animals like the Mook Mook (owl), the Wareeny (wombat) and the Goo-yeeb (kangaroo).

Today, we continue to learn from the Boonwurrung people about how to care for the land, just like they have always done. We are all part of this beautiful land and we each have a responsibility to protect it.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and we thank them for their wisdom and kindness.

We would also like to thank Aunty Fay Stewart Muir for gifting us the Boonwurrung words we have used this morning.

We are truly fortunate to be on this beautiful ancient land and have the opportunity to walk together with open hearts, learning, sharing, listening, truth-telling and healing. Students, friends, families and community members across my electorate have gifted us and this place the following heartfelt words about treaty and today.

Clyde Secondary College First Nations students Mitch Wilkins, Paige Gibbons and Tyler McDonald-Thomas said:

As a group, we feel that Treaty is something we're still learning about.

Many of us aren't completely sure what it means yet, which shows that more education about Treaty should be included in schools so we can better understand it and talk about it confidently.

The School Gathering Place means a lot to us because it represents our culture and helps us feel connected to our mob and the land.

It's special to see our culture recognised and celebrated through this space, as well as other things like the NAIDOC Assembly, 4Cs performances, opening ceremonies, and excursions.

These experiences make us feel proud, confident, and included. We also appreciate that our culture is being noticed and valued.

From this gathering space led to another opportunity, which was having Elders from different mobs and communities meet with us, which was meaningful, and we love using the Gathering Place for yarning circles and hopefully outdoor learning in the future to share our culture further to our school community.

It's a space where we can share our stories, beliefs, and practices with others and feel a strong sense of belonging at our school.

My beautiful stepson Rudi Taylor Bragge, Dulai Yowenjerri Boonwurrung Kulin, said:

Growing up, I've seen the paths in which I've had to walk converge closer and closer, often due to the tireless, hard work and sacrifices by Black advocates.

It's a stark contrast to the paths that were miles apart during the life of my grandfather, given the life of trauma he endured, and consequently passed on to us.

I sincerely hope that this process, the process of treaty, shifts this for my children. That the cycles that I have elected to break, are met on the other side, and are broken too.



That the changes we have made, for us, for the better, are no longer hindered by this colonial experiment but, instead, are liberated by the joviality shared in our eclectic identities while grounded in autochthonous strength.

Our truths told, a space for healing provided, a stronger social, national and economic sense of wellbeing ahead; a brighter Yirramboi [tomorrow] for all of us, and the generations to come. Ngun godjin [thank you].

Shaz Green, who is a Labor branch member:

My family arrived in Australia in the 1860s.

Over the past 160 years, we have not lost sight of the fact that we live on never ceded lands, and that the benefits and life we enjoy have come at the cost of indigenous Australians.

I am overjoyed that a Victorian Treaty will finally formally recognise this debt, and allow our First Nations people autonomy, and more of a say in how their country should be managed.

It truly feels like the start of the healing process of a very old wound that has impacted all of us.

Local artist Safina Stewart from Mabuig Island and Wuthathi country:

**How do we describe our jubilation?**

We only wish that Treaty had been established at first contact – instead of the lie of Terra Nullius.

This Treaty is not just an agreement. It is a hard-won and sacred act of reconciliation.

The journey has ignited the strength of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – who stood firm under fire, united in resistance, in hope, and in truth.

Now, we can shout with joy.

Now, we can dance.

Our tears free with relief and gladness.

We celebrate the breakthrough and the legacy carved by our ancestors, our remarkable Elders, and the fierce, tireless leadership of our community.

This is not just a moment for us – it is a gift for all Victorians.

**This is our day of jubilee.**

The Bass Coast South Gippsland Reconciliation Group are honoured to work with the First Nations community in commemorating historical events, championing Gippsland First Nations artists, marking Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week and celebrating NAIDOC Week:

We have advocated, networked, and participated with Community towards their realising their right to self-determination.

We congratulate the First Peoples Assembly on their remarkable achievement in crafting a Statewide Treaty, and we trust in Parliament's foresight in delivering justice and Treaty's pathway to cultural, social, economic and spiritual control over their own lives.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (21:27): It is a great privilege to rise today and speak in support of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, and can I from the very outset thank from the very bottom of my heart the amazing people of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. What incredible, groundbreaking, nation-leading work, and I am so proud that it is happening here today in this place. It is work that is over 200 years in the making and a pathway which I know we are all indeed very proud to have trodden, and we are here today in this place debating this extremely important step in our history, not just as Victorians but as Australians.

I thank of course the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples at the table for her work and former ministers who have played a significant role in this. To everyone involved in this legislation and in this process, to the Premier, to the former Premier and of course to everyone that I might not have mentioned, either by name or by group or otherwise, I want to say thank you very much. Of course this bill is about negotiating the first Statewide Treaty. It is to establish Gellung Warl as an ongoing representative body for the First Peoples in Victoria, and it will give effect to the first Statewide Treaty and ensure ongoing Statewide Treaty making and negotiations on further functions and powers for Gellung Warl.

I want to reflect on a few contributions by Rueben Berg, one of the co-chairs who spoke so poignantly and was absolutely inspirational in every single word he spoke. It was one of those moments in time where I just thought, ‘This is one of those moments that I will remember where I was when they addressed this Parliament, when Rueben and Ms Murray addressed the Parliament.’ It was absolutely incredible. Rueben said:

This is not a favour asked, but a right recognised. Not a louder plea, but a clearer purpose. Not charity, but justice.

Such wonderful words – a moment waiting for over 200 years. With clarity and purpose and generosity, First People are telling us a pathway forward, and we need to not just listen but act. Rueben went on to also say:

Good intentions have too often outlived good outcomes ...

It is fair to say everyone in this place has good intentions, but it is these words we need to remember here in this privileged place. We must listen. We must not simply tell, we must hear, and we must persevere. He also went on to say:

To the Parliament: I remind you that treaty lives beyond the page; it must live beyond these walls.

This bill, this treaty, this is a moment in time, a moment we will all remember, and we must remember that history and future generations are absolutely watching. What happens in here is often seen as adversarial. It can often be seen as abnormal. But we should never forget the impact of these conversations – moments like these, debates like these, decisions like these – and the real impact these will have on people not just for today but for generations to come. This is real, and this is the start of something different, something generously asked for, despite our stark history, and something that has been worked on for years. Rueben then went on to say:

Treaty has moved from a far-off aspiration to a soon-to-be-realised reality, and it will become something which future generations will see as the standard way of doing business.

And of this I have no doubt. Today is one of those times that we will reflect on in life – as I said earlier in my contribution, those moments that you remember where you were when that happened. We have had some of those in this place in recent times and over history and of course in other Parliaments around this nation. Women were given the right to vote in Victoria in 1908 and were able to stand as candidates from 1923 onwards. It was argued by some that voting would negatively impact women’s roles as wives and mothers and that women lacked the necessary education or temperament for political engagement. Well, I think it is safe to say that views like that simply do not exist in this day and age, and rightfully so. In 2017 Australia legalised same-sex marriage, despite some horrible elements claiming it as a slippery slope. Equality changed forever; polls now show support at over 80 per cent, and it ain’t going down. In the 1967 referendum to count First Nations people as part of population, over 90 per cent of people voted yes, despite all that had come before it. I feel like in many ways we have come a long way since and in many ways we have failed.

And here in 2025 we have the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Make no mistake, this bill and this moment in time will be looked at in the very same regard, in that we could not recognise a Victoria or Australia without it. And without it, it would not be us; it would not be who we are and part of what defines us as a society. We are better for this bill and better for this process. This is the right thing to do. Sadly, we have seen commitments made by those opposite about not just supporting the treaty, a process now over 200 years in the making, and not just rescinding it, but doing so within its first 100 days. For me, and I know for many others, I articulate how deeply disappointing this is – hurtful and so much more. The first 100 days is usually framed in US politics and almost always in relation to positive generational reform – think FDR’s New Deal, think JFK’s promise to get the country moving again, think LBJ’s war on poverty, think Obama’s economic and healthcare reform or think Biden’s Build Back Better plan.

Unless something changes, if the opposition were elected into government, history would remember Battin and the coalition abandoning treaty. I say this not to be partisan but in the hope of subsequent reflection for all of us here after we leave this place on this debate. I do not believe I have superhuman powers of persuasion, but one can only try and point out that this is just wrong. I hope those opposite reflect in a sincere way and in doing so talk to our friends at the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

The stark reality is that Indigenous people live fewer years on this earth than non-Indigenous people, that not enough measures of the Closing the Gap report have been met. And this is a story that has continued. Governments of all persuasions have put a lot of money, with good intentions, into these issues, and not enough has changed. Something has got to give, and this is one of those moments. I will finish with some words that Rueben so eloquently used:

Let us walk forward together – walk with truth in our hearts and fairness in our stride.

I commend this bill to the house.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (21:34): It is a pleasure to rise and speak to the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. In my inaugural speech in this place as the member for Bellarine, I began not with me but with those who came long before me. I acknowledged the First Nations people of this state, in particular the Wadawurrung people, traditional custodians of the Bellarine region, and I do so again today. I thank them sincerely for their enduring care of our land, skies and waterways and pay my deep respects to their culture, elders, past and present and generations to come.

The Bellarine Peninsula, known as Bella Wiyn in Wadawurrung language, means to recline on an elbow by the fire – a resting place of gathering and safety. And what a magnificent resting place it is. But a resting place is only truly worthy of that name when we all who live upon it are treated with dignity and justice. In that same inaugural speech I said it was a profound honour to stand here and commit myself to supporting First Nations people on their rightful journey to self-determination and treaty. And today, through this bill, I have the privilege of fulfilling that commitment not only in words but in action, speaking here on behalf of the people of Bella Wiyn.

I used to be a primary school teacher, and I think I will always be a teacher at heart. Teachers know and believe in listening, learning and, most importantly, doing better once you know better. I was not taught full stories of Aboriginal history when I was at school, and later, when becoming a teacher, I would come to learn what we were asked to deliver was not the whole truth. It was partial, it was sanitised and it was convenient. As a result of that, we have a nation that has far too long looked away from the painful truths that lie at its foundation – policies that removed children; laws that denied language, land and liberties; and systems that excluded First Nations people from decision-making while making decisions about them. Generations have suffered the consequences of those choices, and those inequalities are not relics of the past. They still live with us today in health outcomes, incarceration rates and life expectancies.

But today, through the treaty process, we choose a different path, a path long called for, patiently and courageously, by First Nations people across decades. Their request has been pretty clear: not privilege, not special treatment but partnership, a genuine say in the decisions that affect their lives. This is not a radical demand. It is the very essence of fairness. Treaty is not about division. It is not about blame. It is about responsibility. It is about healing. Treaties have been signed in nations like New Zealand and Canada, and they stand as proof that truth does not weaken a country, it strengthens it. Victoria is leading this nation. We have been walking a truth and treaty path for nearly a decade, slowly, carefully and respectfully, and now we are ready to take that next step.

So what does treaty do? It ensures that policies are developed with First Nations people, not without them. It gives them a voice in shaping solutions around housing, education, health, land, culture and language. It does not take away anyone's rights; it ensures that every Victorian has the same access to opportunity, dignity and respect. Treaty is not just for our First Nations people, it is for all of us. It

invites all Victorians to know our shared history, not just its victories but its wounds, so that we can heal together.

Often – as is the case with legislation of great significance – constituents will write to me with their concerns or thoughts, and I welcome that. Democracy is at its best when people are engaged. But I say gently to those who have been misled by misinformation: do not let fear be your compass. Reach out, ask questions. Seek truth, not rumours. This place, this Parliament, must be a house of truth. We may disagree, but we should never deceive.

Earlier this year I took part in the remarkable Walk for Truth, raising awareness of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. As asked, I walked alongside First Nations people – not in front, not behind, but alongside. Yoorrook commissioner Travis Lovett reminded us that this is what reconciliation looks like and how it begins, shoulder to shoulder.

Recently, a Bellarine constituent named Sophie wrote to me. She said:

Let's be proud of the rich, deeply connected cultures of our First Nations people. Let's step forward in this Treaty Process together, knowing this is going to make us a better, more honest, respectful and just society.

And that is exactly what we are doing here today. We are standing for our neighbours, our teachers, our artists, our leaders and our storytellers, for people who have cared for this land for thousands upon thousands of years. We already, rightly, celebrate those who have come across the sea in search of a better life. And today we honour those who never left, those ancestors who stood on this land before maps were drawn and names were given, those who have endured with grace, strength and resilience despite everything being taken. Let us not admire that resilience, let us honour it – with respect, with recognition, with treaty.

I am going to conclude pretty plainly. I am going to say this in my last remarks. I am not just voting on a bill. I am voting for truth, I am voting for healing, I am voting for justice, and I am voting for the kind of future my children and all our children can look back on with pride. Let this be a moment we move beyond symbolism into substance, and let us say that Victoria did not hesitate when history called. Let us together build a future worthy of Bella Wiyn, a resting place where all can find belonging. I commend this bill to the house.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (21:40): It is a real privilege and honour to rise today to speak in favour of the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025. Can I first acknowledge that we are meeting here on the lands of the Wurundjeri people and acknowledge that the land of the Box Hill electorate also sits on Wurundjeri land between the Koonung Creek and the Kooyongkoot Creek in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Can I also put on the record my acknowledgement of the First Peoples' Assembly and particularly the co-chairs who came into Parliament and gave a very powerful address this morning, Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray. They were really such important words to set the scene for what is a really important historic day.

I have heard some commentary today in the various contributions about almost taking too long and 'all we have is this'. But we have to think about it as not just a 10-year process. As some of us have said, this is a 200-year process, a 250-year process. This is a process that members of the Aboriginal community have been calling for since the very first European colonisation, and that does take time. I see the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples at the table, and I want to acknowledge her efforts and the ministers who have come before her. It has been a long, drawn-out process that has involved a lot of consultation and negotiation with the people that matter most in this debate, and that is the Aboriginal community themselves.

I want to reflect a little bit on my journey. I have been listening to some of the contributions and reflecting on the fact that while growing up and in my education I had next to no understanding of Aboriginal history. I do not remember learning it at all at school. I did not have interaction with Aboriginal communities. My first, probably, exposure to Aboriginal issues – for want of a broad term – was when the Wik judgement was actually handed down. I still remember distinctly John Howard

getting on the television shortly after the decision was made and, I would say, engaging in fearmongering in the Australian community, saying that because of the decision of the court, a lot of people's land was suddenly under threat and was going to be taken by Aboriginal communities. It did make me read a lot more into Aboriginal history and then particularly the history of Aboriginal land rights and the battle that had gone on for years and years and years as various members of the community pushed to be recognised – legally recognised – in Australia and then legally recognised as having some sort of ownership of the land, which of course was recognised in the Mabo decision. I think that whole period of time really opened my eyes. I was 18 at the time that the Wik decision was handed down. Some years later I was involved in a Jewish community group that was able to dedicate a plaque at the community centre recognising the traditional owners of that land. That was, I think, from memory, back in 2001.

In some ways it was quite an early stage in the development of that. We thought it was a significant achievement at the time, but obviously a generation on we need to do a lot more. We have talked a lot about closing the gap and the life expectancy and incarceration rates, and something does need to change, and this is what we need to make that change. I do not accept the opposition's proposition that this is not the methodology, this is not the approach that we should be adopting. This is the approach that is being called for by the vast majority of the Aboriginal community to make that change and to try and break that longstanding disadvantage. We do need to do something, and if those in the Aboriginal community are pressing and pushing for treaty, I think it is only right that we listen to those voices and introduce a treaty. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (21:46): I acknowledge the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to all First Peoples in Victoria. I acknowledge the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly, the wonderful Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, and all members, including Uncle Andrew Gardiner and Gnerick Gnerick Gary Murray, both of whom I have worked with for many years on the Ballerit Mooroop project. I acknowledge past members and co-chairs, my good friends Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geraldine Atkinson.

What a historic day. I feel so proud and privileged to be standing in this place, walking together with our First Nations people in this next step towards equity, fairness and justice for First Nations people. I also feel so proud to share this country we all love with the oldest continuous culture on earth. It was very, very special to hear those ancient languages spoken in the Parliament earlier, passed on through generations.

I distinctly remember first learning about First Nations people in the prep portables at Corpus Christi in Glenroy. I was fascinated and a little bit jealous too, if I am honest, of the communal culture, the sharing of resources, the way of living in harmony with the land and its animals, the lore, the stories and the intergenerational connectedness. Maybe this was because my happiest two weeks every year were spent camping down at Indented Head every Easter, surrounded by cousins, friends and family. The aunts would spend the afternoon sitting on the beach together, yarning and peeling hundreds of potatoes into big buckets, while most of us kids would be off with our dads, granddads and uncles, catching whiting, flathead and sometimes toadies off the marker of what we now call 'the old spot'. There would be a big cook-up every night and somehow there was always enough food, no matter how many joined us.

First Nations people have a deep love and enduring respect for our land and waterways and for each other. I have long admired their strong community bonds, the respect for family and kin, especially for their elders, which I think we could all learn from. To me, First Nations culture is the opposite of the consumerism, entitlement and individualism that sadly shapes much of our modern world. With a culture based on sustainability and respect, it is no surprise they have survived over 60,000 years.

But I also remember a feeling of profound sadness because I knew their way of life and culture had been harmed. It was later that I learned more about our true history and understood the full extent of

the dispossession, the disease and the decimation of a people, the forced removal of children, the subjugation, the genocide, the oppression, the systemic racism and the forbidding of language. Every effort was made to break their spirit, yet they survived. But we all know only too well the pain and harm that this caused and passed on through the generations. Still there is too much sadness, too much pain and too much loss for our First Nations community and far too many young people taken too soon. It is so important that our uncomfortable but true history is learned in schools to assist with healing, to restore justice and to help ensure this never happens again. Gellung Warl will help with age-appropriate resources to do this.

Treaty will also ensure First Nations voices have the opportunity to meet with government to have frank and honest discussions about what is not working, what barriers there are to improving outcomes and how we can change that. Gellung Warl will not have coercive powers or powers to veto policy or legislation, and it will be subject to oversight by all integrity agencies, including the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, IBAC and the Ombudsman. So many other nations, such as Canada, New Zealand and the United States, have treaty with their Indigenous peoples, and I want to thank the many constituents who took the time to contact me about treaty, with over 85 per cent in support, including Marika Wong, Natalie James, Remy Bravery, Rebecca Dominguez, Sharn Edwards, Jessica Comtesse, Heather Warne, Maddy Butler, Leanne Scicluna, Brigit Murikumthara, Rebecca Hetherington, Alicia Olive, Daniel Cohen, Donna Lewis and Niki Lovell, who eloquently spoke about how important it is for everyone's voice to be heard and respected, especially those who have suffered marginalisation.

I could not agree more, and that is a fundamental reason I stood for election – to ensure the voices of local people and the voices of those not often heard were spoken in the Victorian Parliament. Wherever I can, I help people to find their own voice and teach them how to advocate for themselves and their community. That is what I love most about treaty. It is not us talking on their behalf, as has been done for decades, and we know it has not worked. It is empowering our First Nations people to have a voice, to be heard and to have input into the programs and decisions that shape their lives. As our co-chair said, 'Nothing about us without us.' I ultimately want a world where people like me do not need to be somebody else's voice, because we have empowered theirs and they have a seat at the table. We constantly underestimate the potency of empowerment, how this in itself improves health outcomes because one feels valued, seen and heard, and that is what treaty does. That is why I am so proud to be part of this Labor government, a partner in delivering this historic treaty.

I call on those opposite and all who have hardened their hearts to this humble request from our First People to actually ask yourself: is somebody having their voice heard taking anything away from you? The answer is: it is not. I ask them to think forward to a time when they might have to explain their vote to their grandchildren, and I ask them to open their hearts and join us on this historic journey. Ngoon godgin to all who have got us to this historic day, including our minister, the parliamentary secretary and the many who are no longer with us from the First Nations community.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (21:52): I would like to start by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered here in this Parliament House, and I pay respect to the traditional owners, their culture, their elders past, present and emerging and most importantly acknowledge their strength, resilience and continued connection to their country. I acknowledge the Bunurong people, the traditional owners of the land in which my electorate Clarinda sits.

I remember hearing from the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation some time ago now on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular self-determination, on how Indigenous people have the right to participate in decision-making on matters which would affect their rights through representation chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedure, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions. This just makes sense. It makes sense and it is fair and it is right.

For someone who came to this country across the sea for a better life, for freedom, at the age of 16, I did not know much about the history of the country apart from hearing through my uncle that they may have a lot of kangaroos and a few other things. Only at language school did I learn a little bit more about the history of the country – introductions. It was at law school that we heard about the Mabo case. It was only when I got to understand a bit more about the struggles as part of the Legal and Social Issues Committee hearings on forced adoptions that I started to understand more the history, the cultures and also the struggles that our First Nations people faced in the past. I am very proud to stand here today to support this bill and to support it through reconciliation, truth-telling and treaty with First People. We have heard this can only occur by empowering and supporting Aboriginal people through self-determination. The Allan Labor government knows that true reconciliation begins with understanding our past and acknowledging First Peoples' continued custodianship of this country. Self-determination and treaty put this into action.

That is why we are bringing forward this bill today to enact the commitment made by the state of Victoria to Australia's first negotiated treaty with First Peoples. This is a historic moment for all Victorians. Throughout our history First Peoples have been excluded from social and economic opportunities. I had the honour and privilege to hear firsthand about forced adoption as a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. Without significant change, this exclusion will continue, and that is unacceptable.

I believe that equity, fairness and diversity are some of our greatest strengths and also some of our greatest values in Victoria. They are a driving force in my community. They are at the heart of our community. That is what this bill is all about: making this a better, fairer state for every Victorian. We do not want to see anyone excluded from social and economic opportunity or for some reason suffer from social inequality. I would just like to conclude where I started: as a migrant who came across the sea wanting a better life and freedom, self-determination is what matters for me and for my electorate and my family. This bill is all about making this a better and fairer state for every Victorian, and I am very proud to support it today.

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (21:56): In the time I have available this evening I would like to acknowledge that this place and my electorate are on Wurundjeri and Bunurong country and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I would like to make my contribution solely about a resident of 73 Southampton Street, Footscray, Mr William Cooper. William Cooper was born in 1861 on the banks of the Murray River. He lived through the oppression of his people, the denial of their rights and the brutality of colonisation. But he did not give up. He became a proud activist of his people, and from Southampton Street in Footscray, from his humble home, he founded and led the Australian Aborigines' League, one of the first Aboriginal advocacy organisations in Australia. More than a political group, it was a voice for communities that had been silenced and a space for organising protests, petitions and public awareness.

William Cooper is a hero in Footscray. He wrote countless letters to politicians, government departments and newspapers advocating for Aboriginal rights, citizenship, land and justice, and his home in Footscray became the unofficial headquarters for the fight against government neglect and systematic racism. In fact in many ways it was the home of advocacy for treaty. One of his most significant acts from Footscray was a petition to King George in the 1930s demanding direct representation in Parliament and land for Aboriginal people. It was a bold and visionary move. It was well ahead of its time. Although the petition was never delivered by the Australian government, the message was clear: First Nations people were not giving up their rights or their sovereignty or their dignity. How proud I feel as the member for Footscray to be standing here this evening speaking about his advocacy and his extraordinary commitment on behalf of his people for truth and justice and treaty. He was many things in terms of his advocacy for his people, but he was also an advocate on behalf of other people who were marginalised. He led a protest march from Footscray to the German consulate in South Melbourne condemning the Nazi government's treatment of Jews during Kristallnacht.

He was an extraordinary person. It was one of the very few public protests against Nazi persecution anywhere in the world at that time. William Cooper was an extraordinary person, and he led this advocacy from his house in Footscray. Today we see his legacy honoured at Footscray station, where the bridge across the rail line is named after him. I hope that people remember when we talk about treaty that this is not something new and that this is something that people from our community in Footscray fought for and that William Cooper, a hero of our community and of our First Nations community, fought for. He was a remarkable Yorta Yorta elder, activist and visionary. I absolutely commend this bill to the house in our last moments here at 10 o'clock on this sitting day.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (22:01): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow.**

### **Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025**

#### *Council's agreement*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (22:01): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration tomorrow.**

#### *Business of the house*

##### **Postponement**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (22:02): I move:

That remaining business be postponed.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (22:02): (1330) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The action I seek is for her to urgently review the burdensome and unfair Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund levy that is affecting constituents in my electorate. This levy was the Allan Labor government's 60th new or increased tax since Dan Andrews promised in 2014 that there would be no new taxes under Labor. Earlier this year, before Labor rammed this tax through Parliament at 2 o'clock in the morning, I stood on the steps of this Parliament, standing alongside thousands of farmers, CFA and SES volunteers, small business owners and ordinary ratepayers, pleading with the government to scrap this tax. The government ignored every single one of them.

Now the bills have started landing. Families are opening their mailboxes and finding a brand new tax, with often hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars slapped on next to their council rates because the state government did not want to collect the tax themselves. One resident in my electorate received a \$1500 bill – nearly two-thirds of his council rates. Others have been slugged even more. Some businesses in my electorate have seen an extra \$2100 added to their notices overnight. In a cost-of-living crisis when power bills are up, rent is up and insurance is up, this government decided the one thing Victorians needed was yet another tax. It is no surprise that Victorian businesses are closing in



record numbers as they are taxed out of existence by a government that keeps squeezing harder and harder to recover its record debt.

Labor says their \$3 billion tax is for emergency services, but get this: emergency services units themselves are being charged the levy as well. Recently staff at the Portland SES were charged a levy on their rates notice for their SES buildings, and when they asked for an exemption they were told no. So now emergency services have to take money out of their own budget to pay for a tax that claims to fund emergency services. Make that make sense – only in Victoria. The government cannot call something a volunteers fund while sending volunteers the bill.

Victorians reject this unfair tax, which is why over 43,000 Victorians have signed a petition to scrap this tax. It is not just people who want this tax gone, it is local government. All 79 Victorian councils have united together against this levy, signing a letter to call on the government to not force them to collect a tax that they do not support and act as the government's debt collectors, yet the Premier has not even replied and refuses to even meet with them. A future Battin coalition government will scrap this tax. We will fix Labor's budget mess without raiding the pockets of the very people who serve this state. We stand with every Victorian landowner, every farmer, every small business and every volunteer, and we will end this cruel tax.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (22:05): (1331) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action I seek is for the minister to detail the anticipated travel time, savings and opportunities of this visionary project and how this will deliver support for my constituents in the Mordialloc district. It comes at a really important time, the Suburban Rail Loop, because remember that time a decade ago when those opposite described the Metro rail tunnel as a hoax, a project that would divide the city like the Berlin Wall. There were some ridiculous statements around a visionary infrastructure project for our state and our future. But then again it was that same crew over there that put stickers on the ground at Southern Cross station directing people to the airport. Remember that? We had a conga line of tourists coming to Southern Cross station when then Premier Napthine for the Liberals put that forward as their major infrastructure policy. We have had nearly 400 major infrastructure programs, policies and developments in Victoria. Those opposite had eight programs – that is it, eight – and one of them was a sticker replacement policy when they had to buff it all off over at Southern Cross.

The Suburban Rail Loop is that visionary policy, a Metro Tunnel for the suburbs. It will connect education precincts. It will create thousands of jobs. It will build the houses and support the houses for the future, and rather than constituents in my area being priced out based on housing, City of Kingston residents and their kids will be priced in. They will have options around education, transport, employment. It will create such vibrant communities into the future. The Metro Tunnel being opened up in early December is just a proof of the projects that you start on behalf of constituents and then you might not get to open but you plan for the vision of tomorrow.

Those opposite used to have that. Remember under the Bolte government – a few might remember on that side – when they took debt to gross state product up over the 60 per cent range? You do not hear some of the Bolte legacy through here of where they put debt to GSP. It was up in the 60 per cent range at that time. When we see state debt ratio at the moment at 24.9 per cent over the forward estimates, we know that we have to create that visionary generational investment that will support communities in Victoria in the future. That is what the Metro Tunnel is all about, and that is what the Suburban Rail Loop is all about. Those opposite, including the newly minted Shadow Treasurer, have had 50,000 different policy ideas on this, including the member for Bulleen and the member for Kew. The member for Kew said today, 'We're back to shelving it.' The member for Bulleen said, 'If it gets through the gates enough, we'll have to deliver it.' They are back to shelving it, pausing it, reviewing it, doing nothing on it, just like those opposite did on Metro Tunnel. It is Labor governments that

deliver projects for the future. It is Labor governments that create jobs and the economic activity that drives our state, and this is what the Suburban Rail Loop will do.

### Public transport

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (22:08): (1332) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Recently the government announced that it was going to provide free weekend public transport, and that could be hugely problematic. The action I am seeking is for the government to ensure we have the rolling stock to support this policy. I have had a number of photos sent to me over recent months of trains leaving Bairnsdale, three-car sets where passengers are sitting in the aisles or sitting down near the doors. Now we have this announcement that we are going to have free weekend travel over summer, which sounds fantastic, a great vote-grabber, but unless we have got additional rolling stock in place, our trains simply will not be able to cater for this increased patronage. You cannot make this announcement and then not have the rolling stock to support it. I do not know if it exists or there are trains sitting somewhere, but the action I am seeking is for the government to ensure it has the rolling stock on our railways to support this new policy.

### Wantirna dog park and playground

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (22:09): (1333) My adjournment matter tonight is for the member – sorry, for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the minister join me to officially open the new Wantirna dog park and playground.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** It has been a while since I have done an adjournment, actually, which is kind of why I fumbled at the 50-yard line there. However, it is absolutely exciting. Works are nearly wrapped up. I was just taking the member for Mordialloc through all the work at the Wantirna dog park and new playground. It is on for young and old. I tell you what, it will be on for the pooches as well. They cannot wait. I have got my Penny, the cavoodle. She has not been in campaign material for a while. Unfortunately, she has also been shelved. There will not be any more campaign material for poor Penny – 2022, was it? It got a few extra votes, apparently, through the door. But she now has a dog park to look forward to, which is very exciting, down in Wantirna. I am looking forward to having the minister out there. This is something that I was very proud to advocate for and put forward when I was on local council, when I was the councillor for Collier ward. I got a master plan up and running, and now I am here in state government delivering the project. And hopefully if Steve – the minister – takes up my request, he will come out and help me open it.

### Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (22:11): (1334) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is an exemption for all volunteer emergency services units from the emergency services and volunteers tax. The Allan Labor government has once again shown its disregard for the backbone of our regional communities: our amazing, selfless volunteers. It is even taxing the stations they operate out of. Volunteers give their time, energy and expertise to respond to emergencies, often in the most dangerous and demanding conditions. The Portland SES unit received a tax notice recently, including \$311.77 in charges for the new tax. This tax, imposed by the Allan Labor government, targets not-for-profit organisations like the SES, penalising them for simply existing and serving the public. The finance officer for the unit, Wendy McFarlane, wrote to me and said:

I was extremely disappointed, not surprised, to receive the Portland SES Unit's rates notice and find the ESVF tax was applied ...

But more disappointed after investigation to find we are not exempt.

Our volunteers can apply on their own properties but the unit itself, as a not-for-profit organisation, cannot on its own headquarters!

The Portland SES unit, like so many across Victoria, operates solely to protect and serve the community. So let us get this straight. The government are taxing volunteer organisations with the new tax, taking money from volunteer organisations that had to fundraise to get it, just to give it back to them to operate. How did no-one in the room see the absurdity of this? It is not just disappointing, it is a glaring example of just how out of touch our Labor government has become.

Our SES volunteers are not paid. They are farmers, small business owners, tradespeople and parents who drop everything, often in the middle of the night, to respond to emergencies. Whether it is a flood, fire, storm or road trauma, they show up without hesitation, asking for nothing in return. It is a slap in the face to every volunteer who has ever missed a harvest, closed down their shop or left their children at home to serve their communities. This tax sends a chilling message that even our most selfless acts are subject to government revenue. And now, instead of supporting them, Labor is taxing them.

### **Mickleham Road upgrade**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (22:13): (1335) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with me to discuss Mickleham Road and the impact of smart traffic signal technology. Better transport infrastructure that meets the needs of Greenvale's growing communities and the rapidly growing population along the Mickleham Road corridor is one of my central priorities. It is why I have been able to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for upgrades to Mickleham Road in recent years, as well as funding for improved public transport options like the extended route 543 bus service, which commenced last week. And it is why I will continue to advocate on behalf of my community for more road investment and enhancements and extensions to bus routes.

Congestion at the southern end of Mickleham Road during peak periods is a pressing issue for residents who rely on this arterial route to reach jobs, schools, appointments, hospitals and of course, Melbourne Airport, and I thank each of my constituents who has raised this with me. Ensuring that improvements are made to road capacity wherever possible is critical to ensuring that both local amenity and the productive capacity of our economy are sustained. It is why I welcome the rollout of smart traffic signal technology on the Mickleham Road corridor under the signal network optimisation program. These works allow signals to prioritise traffic at different times of the day to improve traffic flow and to make more efficient use of existing infrastructure. This technology is particularly important in that southern section of Mickleham Road between Greenvale and Gladstone Park, where there is limited capacity to expand the existing dual carriageway, and this technology allows traffic engineers to instead optimise the use of that existing capacity.

I look forward to meeting with the minister to discuss how the Victorian government is expanding the use of smart technologies across the road network to improve traffic flow and safety for road users and how this will help to deliver less congested journeys on central arterials like Mickleham Road.

### **Housing**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (22:15): (1336) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to publish the 2025 housing statement progress update so that Victorians can see whether the government is delivering on its promise to build 80,000 new homes each year. The government's own 2024 progress update, published in September 2024 – over a year ago – acknowledged that Victoria was falling short of this target. It is now October 2025 and no new progress update has been released. Victorians deserve transparency. According to ABS data, from August 2024 to August 2025 Victoria averaged around 4400 housing approvals per month. That is roughly 53,500 for the year – more than 26,000 short of the annual target. And importantly, housing approvals are not completions. A planning permit does not put a roof over anyone's head. Families cannot live in paperwork. What matters is the number of homes actually being completed, and on that front, progress is totally unclear.

If the government is serious about addressing Victoria's housing shortage, it must be honest about where things stand. That means publishing timely, accurate data and clearly distinguishing between homes approved, under construction and completed. Victorians need to see the 2025 progress update, and I wonder simply what the government has to hide. Victorians have a right to know whether the state is building homes or just issuing permits.

### **Illegal Dumping Taskforce**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (22:17): (1337) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I request is for the minister to provide an update on how the recently announced \$21.5 million boost to the Illegal Dumping Taskforce will benefit the Bellarine electorate. I understand this funding will be able to provide some additional financial support to local councils and public land managers. We have got a couple of those across the Bellarine who manage areas along our coastline, and this will enable some more effective clean-up of illegal dumping and toxic waste in public spaces.

The investment comes at a really important time for the Bellarine. We have recently announced an expansion of Ramsar site boundaries, with Edwards Point, Swan Bay Wildlife Reserve and Coastal Reserve being recognised and nominated to be extended as a Ramsar site, and the federal Minister for Environment will assess that now. But it certainly highlights the international significance of our wetlands across the Bellarine, and we need to protect those. We have a community that deeply cares about our environment, our parks and our wetlands. We have many volunteers who put many hours into protecting and enhancing our local environment. While I wish that we did not have illegal dumping, it is reassuring to see that we are taking some action on this.

I also want to take the time to give a shout-out to a local hero – I will call him Jason – who volunteers and cleans up along Leopold. Each morning he heads out, rain, hail or shine, and collects rubbish around our Leopold community. He creates a real positive change and is very much supported by the local Leopold community as well. We really want to thank him for his efforts and his volunteering. I look forward to hearing an update on how this funding will support the Bellarine and to sharing that information with my electorate.

### **Local government rates**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (22:19): (1338) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently review the impact of rising regional rates and the stagnant pensioner rebates. As the cost of living continues to escalate, the growing financial burden of skyrocketing council rates in regional Victoria and government taxes and cost-shifting onto local councils, and onto residents and small businesses across my electorate and I am sure across the member for Gippsland East's electorate and right across regional Victoria, means that residents and small businesses are having to increase rents on both residential and commercial properties. That means less housing, less properties available and more financial stress that households can ill afford during a cost-of-living crisis.

In Sunraysia and the Mallee we are already paying more for everything just because of the tyranny of distance and geography. We pay more for groceries, for petrol and for power, and now we are being slugged with the emergency services tax, which adds to that rates notice. It is also taxing the volunteers who run towards the danger when they are needed. In Mildura Rural City Council's 2025–26 draft budget the average rate increase was around 3 per cent. It was more for businesses, though. Then you add the state-imposed emergency services tax, and then you take into account that the pensioner rebate has not increased and does not even increase with CPI year after year. This adds up to hundreds of dollars more for pensioners in Merbein, Red Cliffs, Hopetoun or wherever it might be while they are on a fixed income. How is that fair? How is that regional equity? Local governments and councils in regional Victoria are not asking for much. We are asking for equity, and we are asking for the Minister for Local Government to review regional rates and the stagnant pensioner rebates.

### Metro Tunnel

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (22:21): (1339) The matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and concerns the Metro Tunnel. The action that I seek is that the minister provides an update on how the Metro Tunnel's opening will benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I recently had the pleasure of taking a group of community members on a tour of the new Arden station. It was a fantastic opportunity to show them around and discuss how the Metro Tunnel will impact the daily lives of those of us living in the south-east. The new continuous rail line will link my constituents on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines all the way through to Sunbury in the west, while travelling through five new state-of-the-art underground stations in and around the CBD. All five stations are now complete, and the tunnel will open in early December. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my community for their patience while crews have been building the most complex rail infrastructure project in our state's history. The Metro Tunnel really is a game changer, one which will transform our public transport system and the way we move around from the outer suburbs to the inner city. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### Responses

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (22:22): The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action the member seeks is for information on the volunteers fund levy. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to outline the timing of the Suburban Rail Loop project and the benefits to his electorate. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is for information to be provided on the free weekend travel over summer and also rolling stock availability.

The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member in his electorate to open the Wantirna dog park. Hopefully Penny will be attending the opening of the dog park as well. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action the member seeks is a review of the exemptions for emergency services units for the emergency services levy and other information in relation to this issue. The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to meet with the member at his electorate to discuss Mickleham Road and the progress of other works along this particular road. The member for Ringwood raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action the member seeks is the 2025 housing statement progress update.

The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action the member seeks is an update on the recent announcement made by the minister in relation to the funding boost for the illegal dumping taskforce and how it will affect and benefit the Bellarine region. The member for Mildura raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government, and the action the member seeks is a review of regional government rebates and rates in her electorate. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on information on the Metro Tunnel and how the project will benefit his electorate and also Melbourne. I will refer the matters raised to the relevant ministers.

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

**House adjourned 10:26 pm.**